



# The Crane

Volume 59 Number 3 Jan–Feb 2018

## January and February Field Trips

*The Annual Schedule of 2017/2018 Alachua Audubon Field Trips is on the AAS web site (AlachuaAudubon.org under Activities > Field Trips > Field Trip Schedule). Printed copies may be obtained at Wild Birds Unlimited.*

**Saturday and Sunday, January 6-7, 8:00 a.m.**

**St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge:** Meet John Hintermister at the St. Marks visitor center on Saturday at 8 a.m. for a trip to one of Florida's premier winter birding spots. Expect a large number and wide variety of birds. Bring a lunch. Sunday's meeting time and location will be decided on Saturday. Call Wild Birds Unlimited (352-381-1997) to register. Limit 20 people. Difficulty: 3.

**Saturday, January 13, 8:00 a.m.**

**Prairie Creek Lodge:** Meet Chris Burney and Ivor Kincaid at Powers Park on Hawthorne Road to carpool to the 500-acre Prairie Creek Preserve. The Preserve encompasses a variety of uplands and lowlands, and we'll sample several of them on this trip. Wear rubber boots or old shoes that can get wet, as the trail can be soggy or even flooded. Difficulty: 2.

**Saturday, January 20, 8:00 a.m.**

**Sweetwater Wetlands Park:** Join trip leaders Darrell and Sue Hartman for a birding stroll around Gainesville's newest birding hotspot, a site that has already logged over 200 bird species! We'll search for ducks, American Bitterns, and other winter wetland birds. From the intersection of US-441 and Williston Road, go east on Williston Road roughly  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile. The entrance will be on the right. Bring sunscreen and water. Entry fee \$5.00 per vehicle. Difficulty: 3.

**Saturday, January 27, 8:00 a.m.**

**La Chua Trail:** Meet trip leader Felicia Lee at the head of La Chua Trail on Camp Ranch Road. La Chua is one of the area's best birding hot-spots and it supports a tremendous bird population including wading birds, waterfowl, raptors, warblers, sparrows, and others. Entry fee \$4 per vehicle. Difficulty: 3.

**Saturday, February 3, 6:30 a.m.**

**Northeast Florida Coast:** Meet trip leader John Hintermister at the Tag Agency on NW 34th Street just south of US-441 to carpool to the east coast. We'll start at Fernandina Beach and work our way south. Possible Purple Sandpipers and scoters at Fort Clinch State Park (entry fee \$6 per vehicle). Then to Amelia Island for Red-throated Loon, scoters, Horned Grebes, and gulls. We'll finish at Jacksonville's Huguenot Park (\$5 per vehicle) for shorebirds and other winter birds. Expect a full day of birding and some walking at various coastal sites. Bring a lunch and warm clothes. Difficulty: 3.

**Saturday, February 17, 7:30 a.m.**

**Alligator Lake Recreation Area:** Meet trip leader Bob Carroll at the Tag Agency (5801 NW 34th Boulevard) to carpool to Alligator Lake Recreation Area in Lake City. We'll walk the wooded berm around this marshy 338-acre lake looking for waterfowl, wading birds, and woodland species. This site has often produced unusual birds. Difficulty: 3

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**Trip Difficulty 1:** Trip within easy access to the vehicle and/or level terrain one; mile or less. **2:** May involve uneven terrain; one to two miles. **3:** May involve elevation change, uneven terrain, and/or greater than two miles.

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Submissions to *The Crane* are welcomed. Deadline for the March–April issue: Feb. 15<sup>th</sup>



In the previous issue of *The Crane* I pointed to the relatively new Newnans Lake State Forest East Trail as being a great new location for fall migrants. Now in turn, the West Trail of the State Forest is proving to be an amazing place for wintering sparrows. Perhaps it has always

been so, a gem waiting to be discovered, or maybe sparrows have only temporarily relocated there due to the flooding of Payne's Prairie basin. Either way, it has become for the time being our number one sparrow hot-spot. Several parties that visited this winter came away with upwards of nine sparrow species; collectively twelve species have been recorded, with best to date being Fox, Lincoln's, and Clay-colored. The sparrows are located in a large (150 acre) field covered in a thick mosaic of hairy indigo, goldenrod, broom sedge and other seeding plants interspersed with open fallow areas and just enough scattered small trees and woody shrubs for the birds to perch upon. The trail-head is located on State Road 26 just north of North Florida Evaluation and Treatment Center. Not to be left out of the sparrow picture, Chapman's Pond produced a couple of good sightings: a Clay-colored November 5<sup>th</sup> and a Lincoln's Sparrow December 9<sup>th</sup>. Both birds were discovered by Adam Zions.

Payne's Prairie basin remained flooded through December, leaving much of La Chua Trail, Bolen Bluff Dike, and Cone's Dike Trail inaccessible to birders. The first portion of Sparrow Alley was still passable. John Hintermister had a Lincoln's Sparrow there October 15<sup>th</sup> and a Least Flycatcher was present through the end of October. Terra firma could also be found along the first and last stretches of Cone's Dike Trail. Two more Least Flycatchers were noted there, one at the far end October 28<sup>th</sup> by Adam Zions and the other less than a mile from the Visitor's Center December 2<sup>nd</sup> by Frank and Irina Goodwin.

With temperatures often tipping the 80 degree mark through early December, a number of migrant warblers lingered in our area. Northern Parulas and American Redstarts seemed unusually common during the month. Adam Zions had a Nashville Warbler October 25<sup>th</sup> on Cone's Dike and a second Nashville was found by David Alvarez November 12<sup>th</sup> at Sweetwater Wetlands. David's bird was still being seen into December. Andy Kratter noted a Wilson's Warbler December 14<sup>th</sup> on the university campus. John Hintermister, Howard Adams and I scouted the one-mile stretch at the far end of Cone's Dike December 6<sup>th</sup> and tallied thirteen warbler species...a number that would be more expected in fall migration than in winter.

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## 2017 Gainesville Christmas Bird Count Summary

On December 17<sup>th</sup> 2017, the Gainesville Christmas Bird count celebrated the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its humble beginnings back in 1957. Aside from skipping 1958, the count has been held every year since, and it has blossomed into the birding and social event of the year for many bird lovers in Alachua County. The current format, run for the past several decades, has the 15-mile diameter count circle broken into eleven sectors, each with a team captain to organize the troops of birders. Over the years, the number of participants has steadily increased, and we now have over 100 birders scattered across the landscape, participating by chumming gulls from a boat on Newnan's Lake, skimming across the flooded prairies in airboats, tromping through prickly fields to flush up sparrows, patiently watching backyard birdfeeders, or endlessly playing screech owl tapes to lure in wintering passerines in the woods. With increased participation, the number of species recorded has steadily grown, with last year's count in Gainesville topping all counts in Florida, with an all-time high of 166 countable species. In 2016, the army of observers also helped Gainesville set high counts in the U.S. for nine species. The day's birding ends with a festive compilation, where we have some cold drinks, enjoy hot pizza, and methodically tally the results.

Owlers woke up to a cool moonless morning (mid-40s). Clouds hung around most of the morning, but by noon the skies had cleared and temperatures rose into the 70s. Winds were light the whole day. Despite these ideal birding conditions, most participants felt that the birding was a bit slow, with very few rarities to dazzle the crowds. Our tentative overall species total was 156 species, ten fewer than 2016. Two additions seem likely: A Brown Creeper, photographed the day after, may have been seen on count day, and White-winged Dove was added by feeder watchers. The lower diversity this year may have stemmed, in part, from the high water levels limiting access to many traditionally rich birding areas, especially on Paynes Prairie. These inundated areas also may not have been attractive to some waterbirds, because they have not been flooded long enough to build up food resources to sustain waterbird populations. In the coming months, this food base will build, but the waters will likely recede, and concentrate prey, resulting in a waterbird bonanza. Wait until next year!

The main highlight of most counts is rattling off the rarities encountered at the compilation. We did not get any new species added to our all-time list, but we managed a good contingent of rare birds. Many of these have been recorded in recent years and may represent regular small populations in this part of Florida. Topping the rarities this year was Western Tanager at a private home in the northwest for the second straight winter, and four Vaux's Swift on the UF campus (third straight winter). A Summer Tanager and a Ruby-throated Hummingbird were in the suburban northwest. Sweetwater Wetlands hosted Purple Gallinules, Least Bitterns, and a Roseate Spoonbill. A Red-breasted Merganser graced Depot Park. A Yellow-Crowned Night Heron was found on Payne's Prairie. A vocal Ash-throated Flycatcher was a standout on Persimmon Point. The ponds and woods of west Gainesville had Long-billed Dowitchers and Indigo Buntings.

On a sadder note are expected species that were missed entirely on the 2017 count. Some, like Fox Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, and Vermilion Flycatcher, are just not very common winter birds in north-central Florida. Open water birds were scarce this year and we missed Redhead, Common Goldeneye, and Horned Grebe. Formerly much more common, the Common Ground-Dove and Rusty Blackbird have been declining on regional or national scales.

The biggest highlight of the 2017 Gainesville count was not the overall species count or the rarities spotted, but the high counts for many individual species. We set or tied all time high counts for no fewer than 18 species! Many of these are common woodland and edge birds (Pileated Woodpecker, Eastern Phoebe, Blue-headed Vireo, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, House Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Black-and-White Warbler).

*(Continued on page 11)*

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## Alachua County Celebrates its Newest Preserve

On Saturday, November 18<sup>th</sup>, the Alachua Conservation Trust (ACT) celebrated its grand opening of the Santa Fe River Preserve. Located on the far north side of the county on SR 121, the collection of parcels, now a total of 900 acres, is situated on both sides of the Santa Fe River. The most recent acquisition was slated for 99 homes but went into foreclosure when the housing market declined. Thanks to many donors, including the Alachua County Forever program, private donors, and The Conservation Fund (a national acquisition organization), ACT was able to acquire these special parcels.

Two new hiking trails have also opened – a 0.75-mile north loop (the Blue Trail) and a 1.5-mile south loop (the Gracy Trail) – complete with a kiosk, trail markers, and benches. These two hiking trails are located on the east side of SR 121 and about 0.5 miles and 1.0 miles south of the Santa Fe River. The larger 900 acres is also open for hiking, biking, and eventually for horseback riding, and can also be accessed from either the Blue Trail or Gracy Trail. The future Alachua to Lake Butler Rail Trail is slated to cross through the Santa Fe River Preserve. According to Tom Kay, Executive Director of ACT, the spring azaleas put on a spectacular show along this stretch of the Santa Fe River. Mark this as another birding location in Alachua County!

ACT is a non-profit land trust that works with landowners to protect our special places. Since 1988, ACT has directly acquired more than 18,000 acres in north central Florida for public parks and nature preserves and has helped private landowners achieve their conservation goals on thousands of additional acres.

By Debbie Segal

### Wednesday Morning Bird Walks at Sweetwater Wetlands Park

Meet AAS volunteers at 8:30 am every Wednesday from September – May to search for wetland birds such as Least Bittern, Limpkin, and Purple Gallinule at Sweetwater Wetlands Park. The park is teeming with plants and wildlife and improves water quality while providing one of the best birding spots in Alachua County. It is located on the south side of Gainesville, 3/4 of a mile east of the intersection of SW 13th Street/US-441 and Williston Road. Look for the sign on the south side of the road. We'll meet at the covered shelter by the restrooms.

Guided walks are free, but park admission is \$5/car. Bring binoculars, a hat, sunscreen and water. Please visit [SweetwaterWetlands.org](http://SweetwaterWetlands.org) to learn more about the park.



### Family Birding at Paynes Prairie

Alachua Audubon collaborates with Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park to offer family birding walks on the first Saturday of the month. This is an ideal time to introduce a child, youth or neighbor to birding. All walks are on the La Chua trail and last approximately 2 hours (although you may leave whenever you wish). Loaner binoculars are available. So far, we have had excellent turnouts for these events.

Register for walks at [Friends of Paynes Prairie](http://Friends of Paynes Prairie) ([prairiefriends.org](http://prairiefriends.org)). Meet at the La Chua trailhead parking lot at 9 AM.

Contact Emily Schwartz at 352-372-0754 if you have questions.



Created by Marilyn Jasinski  
from Noun Project

## Field Trips

(Continued from Page 1)

**Saturday, March 3, 8:00 a.m.**

**Morningside Nature Center (CLEP\*):** Meet Geoff Parks for a visit to one of Gainesville's premier nature parks featuring over six miles of trails through sandhills, flatwoods, cypress domes, and beautifully-restored native longleaf pines and wiregrass habitat. Morningside also features a working 19th-century farm, a bird blind, and a diverse array of wildlife that thrives in this unique environment. Difficulty: 2.

**Saturday, March 17, 8:00 a.m.**

**La Chua Trail:** Meet trip leader Howard Adams at the trailhead of La Chua Trail on Camp Ranch Rd. La Chua is one of the area's best birding hotspots and it supports a tremendous bird population including wading birds, waterfowl, raptors, warblers, and others. Resident species should be in the midst of nesting activities, and we may see a few migrants passing through. Entry fee \$4 per vehicle. Difficulty: 3.

**Saturday, March 24, 7:30 a.m.**

**Mill Creek Preserve:** In 2002, the Alachua County Forever program made its first conservation land purchase, the Mill Creek Preserve, 1190 acres of deep hardwood forest containing the southernmost stand of beech trees in North America. Meet trip leader Deena Mickelson at the parking lot of Hitchcock's Grocery Store on US-441 in Alachua and carpool to the Preserve. Difficulty: 3.

## Third Thursday Bird Walks

Alachua Audubon sponsors mid-week bird walks on the third Thursday of most months for retirees and anyone else who would like to attend. There is also an optional lunch for those who would enjoy some extra socializing. We make up the schedule as we go along so if you are interested in attending, please contact Bob Carroll for details: [gatorbob23@yahoo.com](mailto:gatorbob23@yahoo.com)

## Birding Class Offered

Would you like to learn to identify winter birds and ducks? The Santa Fe College Community Education Program, in collaboration with Alachua Audubon Society, offers a 4-week field course in Bird Watching. Classes are on Saturday mornings beginning January 27<sup>th</sup> and last two hours. Each class is led by a local birding expert. Bring binoculars if you have them but loaners are available. Cameras are welcome.

The course costs \$49 and generates revenue for AAS. Students must be at least 18 years old. For more information and registration, visit the Santa Fe College Community Education website, email [comm-ed@sfcollge.edu](mailto:comm-ed@sfcollge.edu) or call 352-395-5193. **Registration begins January 8<sup>th</sup>.** Class is limited to 12 students, so register early.

By Charlene Leonard, Class Coordinator

## Monthly Birds and Brews

The AAS Birds and Brews event continues to be a popular event for both new and experienced birders. Meet the first Sunday of the month at **First Magnitude Brewery**, 1220 SE Veitch Street. Arrive early as parking can be scarce. On **January 7<sup>th</sup>** we will meet up at **4:15 for a 4:30 departure** to Depot Park to bird around the ponds. A table will be set up with information about Alachua Audubon and loaner binoculars will be on hand. After an hour of leisurely birding, return to First Magnitude for a cold brew and good conversation. All birding skill levels are welcome.

Note: please check the AAS website for the **February 4<sup>th</sup>** departure time. As the days grow longer, we will begin later in the afternoon.

**Next event: Sunday, January 7<sup>th</sup> at 4:15 pm**



## SPEAKER'S CORNER

All programs are held at the Millhopper Library, 3145 NW 43rd Street, Gainesville.

**Southwest Alaska – An Uncruise Adventure**, Thursday, January 11, 2018. Social time at 6:30 p.m. Program at 7:00 p.m. Join Audubon traveler Erika Simons as she shares her adventures on a small ship cruise of the Southwest Alaska Inside Passage. The small ship not only allowed her to make new friends with her fellow travelers but also made daily off-boat activities possible. Passengers were offered kayaking, paddle boarding, beach meanders, bushwhacking, and photography. Wildlife viewing was often enhanced during these activities. Erika will share her photography of this adventure.

**Backyard Birding with Ron Robinson**, Wednesday, February 7, 2018. Social time at 6:30 p.m. Program at 7:00 p.m. Would you like to outwit squirrels at your feeders? Would you enjoy a wider range of bird species in your backyard habitat? Ron will discuss ideas and techniques that will attract the widest possible variety of bird species to your backyard. Topics include basic habitat design, squirrel proofing, the importance of providing water, the best ways to provide water, and special features and foods that will attract a broader range of species.

**Birds of Panama**, Saturday, March 24, 2018, at 2:00 p.m. **Please note this is a Saturday program.** Clyde Stephens, a fifth generation Floridian, enjoyed a career in banana research in Central America. He and his wife Phyllis have a solar-powered home on a remote tropical island in Bocas del Toro, Panama, where they promote the wonders of nature. **Birds of Panama** presents personal experiences, bird behavior, habitats and biodiversity of some of the 976 recorded species in Panama.

*A special thank you to the Millhopper Branch Library staff for displaying interesting library materials related to each topic of our speakers.*

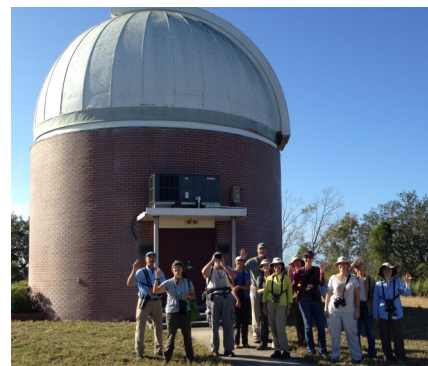
## Florida Ornithological Society Conference held in Gainesville



The Florida Ornithological Society (FOS) held their Fall 2017 conference at Gainesville's Matheson History Museum under the direction of President Adam Kent. Members of the Alachua Audubon Society were on hand to help with every aspect from providing keynote speakers, leading multiple field trips, and providing snacks. The Friday keynote was given by Dr. Robert Knight, Howard T. Odum Florida Springs Institute & Debra Segal, President, Alachua Audubon Society: *"Treatment Wetlands Produce Cleaner Water, More Birds."* The Saturday keynote was presented by Dr. David Steadman, Curator of Ornithology at the Florida Museum of Natural History (FMNH): *"Ice Age Birds of Florida and the Bahamas."* In addition to oral presentations and research posters, there was a silent auction, bird art contest, and a bird skin quiz using specimens from the FMNH collection during the lively social hour. Overall the conference was an enjoyable and informative experience for all.

## Rosemary Hill Observatory

A recent field trip led by Deena Mickelson took us to a special University of Florida property near Bronson – Rosemary Hill Observatory. The UF facility sits on 80 acres of turkey oak, sandhill and rosemary scrub surrounded by pastures. Access to the observatory property is restricted so this was a special treat. In addition to enjoying the beautiful day for birding, we also experienced the thrill of going inside to see the gigantic telescope.



*Photo by Emily Schwartz*

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## Around the County

(Continued from Page 2)

Best was a lingering Yellow Warbler, spotted by John. Summer Tanagers continued their trend of sticking around into winter though this might be related to the growing number of people stocking feeding stations with goodies such as peanuts, suet, jelly, and fruit. Individual tanagers have been visiting the yards of Tom Hocter, Felicia Lee, Linda Hensley, and Keith Collingwood; Bubba Scales estimates as many as three around his neighborhood, and it's likely there are others of which I am not aware.

The last Short-eared Owl reported in the county was in 2012, so it was with great interest that one was found recently near Archer; unfortunately, the bird had a fractured wing. It was taken into the able hands of Florida Wildlife Care for evaluation and then transferred to the good folks at the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey for rehabilitation. At last check this endearing bird was on the mend and had been moved to the “flight barn” in anticipation of release into the wild. Many thanks to the above-mentioned organizations for their admirable work and to the Good Samaritan who initially retrieved the bird and gave it a second chance!

Debbie Segal and Bob Knight were driving past the farm pond along SR 121 near the county line November 18<sup>th</sup> when they spotted a Blue-phase Snow Goose. The bird graciously stayed for at least a few day so others could see it. Horned Grebes are fairly common on Lake Santa Fe, but elsewhere they can be hard to find. Linda Hensley discovered one at Sweetwater Wetlands December 6<sup>th</sup>. But despite all the water in the county, waterfowl numbers were decidedly down. Modest numbers of Teal and Shovelers were regular at Sweetwater Wetlands, along with a smattering of other puddle ducks and divers, but no large flocks were evident anywhere. Hopefully the Christmas Count teams will revise this by discovering some great hidden rafts out on the basin or at Newnans Lake. Look for results of the count elsewhere in this issue.

Thanks to those who shared their sightings through December 15<sup>th</sup>.

By Mike Manetz



*Short-eared Owl on the mend at the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey. Photo used with their permission.*

### Short-eared Owl Update:

This just in: The Short-eared Owl mentioned in *Around the County* by Mike Manetz (above) was found injured November 21st in an agricultural field in Archer. The owl underwent a month of rehabilitation, first by Nan Soistman and then by the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey in Maitland. It was released on December 23rd in the field where it was found.

*Photograph by Adam Soistman.*



## Ichetucknee / Santa Fe / O'Leno Christmas Bird Count

The Ichetucknee/Santa Fe/O'Leno Christmas Bird Count (FLIS CBC) held its ninth annual event on Tuesday, December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2017. The FLIS CBC covers many natural and state-managed properties including Ichetucknee Springs State Park, O'Leno State Park, the recently acquired Gilchrist Blue Springs State Park, the Ichetucknee River, 25 miles of the Santa Fe River, Fort White Wildlife and Environmental Area, along with a wide-range of private lands (residential, agricultural, and silvicultural).

This year's 15-mile wide circle, centered near the town of Fort White, involved 34 participants traveling by car, foot, and canoe. Many participants are members of the Four Rivers Audubon, Alachua Audubon, Duval Audubon, Florida Park Service, and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. The group welcomed four new faces this year and recognized six individuals for participating in all nine years of the FLIS CBC.

The day's weather was warm and humid, beginning overcast and then breaking into sunshine by late-morning. The temperatures ranged between 57°F and 78°F (a day-record high) with a mild west wind. Of the five birding teams, three concentrated their efforts on state lands while the other two focused on additional river sections, uplands, private lands, and neighborhoods. After birding, the five teams gathered at picnic tables to compile data and enjoy the remaining beautiful day. Inside, a pizza dinner was served while everyone swapped stories and listened to each team's report.

The FLIS CBC recorded 6,878 birds comprised of 94 species. These observations included six high count records, in addition to two new species. Record high counts were observed for Hooded Merganser (305), Black-Crowned Night Heron (2), Bachman's Sparrow (5-tied), Brown Creeper (1-tied), Common Grackle (302), and Wilson's Snipe (14). Bird species new to the FLIS CBC were Greater Yellowlegs (1) and Black-bellied Whistling Duck (350). Observed species which are not commonly seen within the FLIS CBC include Grasshopper Sparrow (1), American Pipit (14), and Snowy Egret (1). Of the 60 species recorded yearly on the FLIS CBC, three species were notably absent (Northern Bobwhite, Rock Pigeon, and Eastern Meadowlark). These reported data do not include Count Week species. Although of interest, a flock of White Pelicans flew over Ichetucknee Springs State Park, but occurred a day previous to the Count Week reporting period.

Next year, the FLIS CBC will celebrate its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, so mark your calendar for Tuesday, December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2018! Come out to count with us and celebrate! The FLIS CBC recognizes the efforts of all volunteers and appreciates their contribution to its success!

By Ginger Morgan, FLIS CBC Compiler

Photo of Baltimore Oriole by Tedd Greenwald



## 2017 Gainesville Christmas Bird Count Summary

*(Continued from page 4)*

These high counts are testament to the hard persistent work by the multitude of observers. In the truly amazing category was 235 Limpkins! The previous high for Gainesville was 66 in 2015. The previous all-time high for all CBCs was 160 in Sarasota in 2016. Creation of Sweetwater Wetlands, the high water, and the burgeoning exotic apple snail has pumped up Limpkin numbers to beyond comprehension; before 2013 we never had more than seven.

Bob Carroll and Andy Kratter are the co-compilers for the count. We thank Griselda Forbes for provisioning the counters at the compilation, Bruce Haguewood from Life South Community Blood Center for providing facilities for our compilation, John Martin for his endlessly humorous and innovative computer work for tallying up the day's birds, Alachua Audubon for sponsoring the event, and all the great birders who participated. Next year's Gainesville Christmas Bird Count is December 16th.

**Species list:** The species setting or tying all time counts are shown in bold numbers below. The unexpected species names are shown in bold.

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck 662; Snow Goose-White 1; Muscovy Duck 252; Wood Duck 562; Gadwall 120; American Wigeon 33; Mallard 2; Mottled Duck 109; Blue-winged Teal 1014; Northern Shoveler 106; Northern Pintail 9; Green-winged Teal 163; Ring-necked Duck 1811; Lesser Scaup 24; Bufflehead 25; ; **Red-breasted Merganser 3**; Hooded Merganser 203; Ruddy Duck 3; Northern Bobwhite 16; Wild Turkey 6; Pied-billed Grebe 126; Rock Pigeon 59; Eurasian Collared Dove 9; Mourning Dove 473; Whip-Poor-Will 1; **Vaux's Swift 4**; **Ruby-throated Hummingbird 1**; King Rail 5; Virginia Rail 3; Sora 54; **Purple Gallinule 1**; Common Gallinule 991; American Coot 5138; Limpkin **235**; **Whooping Crane 1**; Sandhill Crane 6012; Killdeer 244; Least Sandpiper 42; **Long-billed Dowitcher 3**; Wilson's Snipe 288; American Woodcock 1; Spotted Sandpiper 1; Greater Yellowlegs **89**; Lesser Yellowlegs 11; Bonaparte's Gull 6; Laughing Gull **9**; Ring-billed Gull 310; Herring Gull 5; Forster's Tern 12; Common Loon 8; Wood Stork 44; Double-crested Cormorant 679; Anhinga 316; American White Pelican 7; American Bittern **26**; **Least Bittern 4**; Great Blue Heron 186; Great Egret 375; Snowy Egret 197; Little Blue Heron 316; Tricolored Heron 77; Cattle Egret 65; Green Heron 35; Black-crowned Night-Heron 132; **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron 1**; White Ibis 1805; **Roseate Spoonbill 2**; Glossy Ibis 355; Black Vulture 477; Turkey Vulture 912; Osprey 7; Bald Eagle; Adult 43; Bald Eagle; Immature 23; Bald Eagle; Unknown 13; Northern Harrier 32; Sharp-shinned Hawk 5; Cooper's Hawk 11; Accipiter; sp. 1; Red-shouldered Hawk **197**; Red-tailed Hawk 47; Barn Owl 1; Eastern Screech-Owl 13; Great Horned Owl 40; Barred Owl 63; Belted Kingfisher **83**; Red-headed Woodpecker 6; Red-bellied Woodpecker 384; Yellow-bellied Sapsucker 87; Downy Woodpecker 174; Northern Flicker 94; Pileated Woodpecker **173**; American Kestrel 58; Merlin 4; Eastern Phoebe **591**; **Ash-throated Flycatcher 1**; Loggerhead Shrike 28; White-eyed Vireo 117; Blue-headed Vireo **131**; Blue Jay 282; American Crow **813**; Fish Crow 136; Crow; sp. 36; Tree Swallow 3204; Carolina Chickadee **379**; Tufted Titmouse 423; Brown-headed Nuthatch 8; House Wren **282**; Sedge Wren 37; Marsh Wren 36; Carolina Wren 453; Blue-gray Gnatcatcher **858**; Golden-crowned Kinglet 1; Ruby-crowned Kinglet **934**; Eastern Bluebird 257; Hermit Thrush 79; American Robin 3088; Gray Catbird 150; Brown Thrasher 17; Northern Mockingbird 147; European Starling 23; Cedar Waxwing 261; House Sparrow 18; American Pipit 2; House Finch 74; American Goldfinch 333; Ovenbird 11; Northern Waterthrush 4; Black-and-White Warbler **138**; Orange-crowned Warbler 96; Common Yellowthroat 204; American Redstart **4**; Northern Parula 3; Palm Warbler 1157; Pine Warbler 286; Yellow-rumped Warbler 1532; Yellow-throated

*(Continued on page 12)*

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## Alachua Audubon Hosts EagleWatch Training

Volunteers throughout north and central Florida, 33 in all, gathered at the Mill Pond Clubhouse on November 5<sup>th</sup> while Audubon Florida EagleWatch coordinator, Shawnlei Breeding, educated the audience on Bald Eagle nesting behaviors. Like most raptors, female bald eagles are larger than males, about 25 percent larger. Bald eagles maintain a high mate fidelity and remain paired until one partner dies. When an eagle loses its mate, it will generally choose a new mate. Bald Eagles build the largest nest of any North American bird species by adding to the nest each year. A nest can reach up to 13 feet deep, 8 feet wide, and weigh 1 ton. After 5-10 years, tree branches supporting the nest may collapse, forcing the pair to build a new nest in a different tree.

The breeding cycle of Bald Eagles begins much earlier than most other birds, starting as early as September or October. The female generally lays 1 to 3 eggs and both parents incubate the eggs during the 35-day incubation period. Eaglets fledge the nest at 10 – 14 weeks of age, but will remain close to the nest for another month or so.

According to Steve Nesbitt, retired ornithologist with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), many Bald Eagles in Florida undergo a reverse migration. After breeding, adult eagles head north for the summer and then return south in the fall to begin the next nesting season, whereas most other northern hemisphere birds move north to nest then south post breeding. While many adult eagles depart Florida after their breeding season is complete, a smaller population of adults remain in Florida, perhaps because they have an adequate year-round food source or to maintain their territory in areas where territorial pressures are great.

Once the breeding cycle is completed in late spring and early summer, the eagles drift north up the east coast. Tagged juveniles that fledged from nests in Florida spent the summers around the Chesapeake Bay area and on up into the Maritime Provinces of Canada.

Volunteers in the EagleWatch program monitor known eagle nests from the master Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission map and also report new or relocated nests. Nest observations are made every 2 – 3 weeks throughout the breeding season until the young fledge. During the monitoring events, observations such as adults in or near the nest, young present, number of young seen, behavior of the eaglets (i.e., being fed, flapping wings, perched on outer branches), and fledging are recorded. These data are entered in the online EagleWatch database and become extremely useful in the case of nearby development that could potentially disturb active eagle nests or, when needed, to release rehabilitated eagles in areas away from active eagle territories. Thanks to this EagleWatch training program, significantly more nests will now be monitored in and around north-central Florida.

By Debbie Segal

### 2017 Gainesville Christmas Bird Count Summary

*(Continued from page 11)*

Warbler 55; Prairie Warbler 6; Wilson's Warbler 2; Yellow-breasted Chat 1; Eastern Towhee 87; Field Sparrow 3; Chipping Sparrow 712; Vesper Sparrow 40; Savannah Sparrow 224; Grasshopper Sparrow 5; Henslow's Sparrow 10; Song Sparrow 40; Swamp Sparrow 257; White-throated Sparrow 5; White-crowned Sparrow 1; Northern Cardinal 642; **Summer Tanager 3; Western Tanager 1; Indigo Bunting 4;** Painted Bunting 12; Red-winged Blackbird 9922; Eastern Meadowlark 174; Common Grackle 691; Boat-tailed Grackle 1502; Brown-headed Cowbird 592; Baltimore Oriole 49.

By Andy Kratter

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## Melrose Christmas Bird Count

On December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2017, 44 participants from Santa Fe , Alachua and Duval Audubon, and other volunteers fanned out in boats, cars, and on foot to survey all the birds that could be seen and heard for the 26<sup>th</sup> annual Melrose Christmas Bird Count (CBC). The Melrose CBC covers a 15 -mile diameter circle centered at the intersection of SR 219 and SR 100 that encompasses parts of Clay, Putnam, Alachua, and Bradford Counties. This dedicated effort resulted in locating 113 species of birds.

Many bird-rich natural areas occur in this circle and include Lake Santa Fe, Santa Fe Swamp, Gold Head Branch State Park, the Ordway Preserve, and numerous lakes and forests. We are grateful to generous landowners who welcomed volunteers on their property to count.

Several species had unexpected high totals: Tree Swallows, 5,590; Ring-bill Gulls, 1500; Sandhill Cranes, 1,030; and American Robins, 1,570. New species for the count were Painted Bunting, Wilson’s Warbler, and Blue Grosbeak. Uncommon for the count were American Woodcock and Wilson’s Snipe.

More individual birds were seen this year – over 16,000 – than last year’s total of 7,484. The 2015 count totaled 9,265 individual birds.

At the end of the day-long survey, participants congregated at Betty’s Pizza in Melrose to tally the results, to share stories of the day’s birding highlights, and of course to feast on the local cuisine. Laura Berkelman, Santa Fe Audubon president, compiled the list of birds that were surveyed by twelve birding teams.

The Melrose CBC was begun in 1990 by Jan and Bill Bolte of Melrose; this year marked 27 years of participation in the count. Begun 118 years ago in New York City’s Central Park, Christmas Bird Counts provide important insight into the health of the environment. Since birds are the most visible of our wildlife and the easiest to survey, bird survey data provide an indication of the overall health of the less visible wildlife species. An abundant and diverse avian community can reflect healthy ecological habitats, while declining bird populations can signify disturbing trends in our land development patterns and their detrimental effects to natural areas. Changes in the range of some bird species have implications in assessing results of climate change. National Audubon has identified 314 bird species in the U.S. that will be affected by climate change.

Results from the Melrose CBC, combined with data from hundreds of other CBC surveys throughout the world, allow ornithologists to assess bird trends on a national and international scale. If you would like to see the complete list of birds seen on the Melrose CBC, please contact Joyce King at [Joyceking2635@gmail.com](mailto:Joyceking2635@gmail.com) or Laura Berkelman at [lberkelman@windstream.net](mailto:lberkelman@windstream.net).

By Joyce King



*Red-shouldered Hawk photo by Ida Little.*

**Alachua Audubon Society**  
**P. O. Box 140464**  
**Gainesville, Florida 32614-0464**  
[AlachuaAudubon.org](http://AlachuaAudubon.org)

*The Crane*  
Jan–Feb. 2018

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Please send any questions to [AlachuaAudubonMembership@gmail.com](mailto:AlachuaAudubonMembership@gmail.com)