



# The Crane

Volume 51 Number 3 December 2009 –January 2010

## December and January field trips

### **Saturday, December 5, 8 am; La Chua Trail**

Table your bias against sparrows and get a fresh start with Caleb Gordon on the new LaChua trail. Meet at the trailhead on Camp Ranch Road. LaChua Trail in Paynes Prairie is one of the area's best spots for close study of a variety of sparrows. Also look for wintering flycatchers, raptors, and bison. Note: Bring \$2 in case access fee is established by the time of this trip. Diff: 2

### **Saturday, December 12, 8 am Morningside Nature Center—CLEP**

Gainesville's premier nature park and one of the last remaining examples of fire-dependent longleaf pine woodlands in the area. More than seven miles of trails wind through sandhills, flatwoods, cypress domes, and habitat restoration areas. Meet Geoff Parks, Habitat Naturalist with the City of Gainesville, in the Morningside parking lot (approximately three miles east of downtown Gainesville on SR 26). Diff: 2

### **Sunday, December 20, SPECIAL EVENT Christmas Bird Count**

Call John Hintermister [386.462.1109] to discuss details if interested in participating.

### **Saturday, January 9, 8 am St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge**

Meet John Hintermister at the St. Marks visitor center for a trip to one of Florida's premier winter birding spots. Overnight option. Call Wild Birds Unlimited [352-381-1997] to register. Limit 20 people. Diff: 3

### **Saturday, January 16, 8 am Sweetwater Preserve—CLEP**

Less than two years ago, Alachua County Forever unveiled the new trail system adjacent to Paynes Prairie. Meet Alachua Co. senior planner Michael Drummond at Boulware Springs parking lot on SE 15th St. for a special tour of this mixed forest community along Sweetwater Branch. Diff: 2

### **Saturday, January 23, 8 am Gum Root Park—CLEP**

Gum Root Park features trails through a variety of natural communities including blackwater stream, flood-plain swamp, xeric hammock, and pine flatwoods. Meet Geoff Parks, Habitat Naturalist with the City of Gainesville, in the Powers Park parking lot (east of downtown Gainesville on SR 20). Diff: 3

### **Saturday, January 30, 8 am; Alligator Lake**

Meet Jerry Krummrich at the Alligator Lake Park parking lot (enter from SE Country Club Rd. in Lake City) for one of the field trip season's newest highlights. Difficulty: 3

**Saturday/Sunday , February 6 & 7  
Tall Timbers Research Station Sparrow Banding**  
Call Wild Birds Unlimited [352-381-1997] for details or to make a reservation. Overnight Saturday in TTRS' comfy bunkhouse and leave early the next morning for a day of birding in The Wade Tract, a 200-acre stand of old growth longleaf pine. Jim Cox and Adam Kent will be the lead.

**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/

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*The Alachua Audubon Society's mission is to foster appreciation and knowledge of birds and other native wildlife, to protect and restore wildlife populations and their habitats, and to promote sustainable use of natural resources.*

Content of *The Crane* is the sole responsibility of the editor and fulfills stated objectives and goals of Alachua Audubon Society. Annual subscription to *The Crane* is included in AAS dues. Non-Audubon members may subscribe to *The Crane* for \$8 annually. All checks for subscriptions or changes of address should be mailed to Paul Moler, Membership Chairman: see back page for address. Submissions to *The Crane* are welcomed. *The Crane* is printed on recycled paper.

**Deadline for Feb-Mar  
Crane:  
Jan 15<sup>th</sup>**



Fall migration ended with a glorious flurry of migrants, many of which were recorded by Alachua Audubon field trip participants. John Hintermister led a group to O'leno State Park October 11 and found twelve species of warblers, an amazing six **Scarlet Tanagers**, and a locally-rare **Philadelphia Vireo**. The previous day Darrell Hartman picked out another local rarity at Loblolly Envi-

ronmental Center, a **Black-billed Cuckoo**, and at Bolen Bluff John Martin got our only **Canada Warbler** of the season. October 17 was the exclamation point at the end of fall. Michael Meisenburg led a field trip to Bolen Bluff that scored fifteen warbler species including several **Bay-breasted** and **Black-throated Green Warblers**, plus 5 **Wood Thrushes**, a **Gray-cheeked Thrush**, four **Rose-breasted Grosbeaks**, and two **Scarlet Tanagers**. Michael continued birding after the trip and felt he may have seen as many as fifty **Magnolia Warblers** total for the day. The same day Andy Kratter reported a **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** near the horse pasture at La Chua trail, and a **Winter Wren** in his backyard! Bob Carroll had five **Rose-breasted Grosbeaks** at his feeders and several birders, including Ron Robinson and John Killian, had **Black-throated Green Warblers** in their yards. Also the same day, Peter Polshek found another **Black-billed Cuckoo** at Bolen Bluff.

At the very end of fall there is a little window of time during which nearly anything can show up here. The Scissor-tailed Flycatcher mentioned above fits into that category, as do a few species of blackbirds that are most possible in late fall. Rex Rowan, while searching the Hague Dairy for the rare but nearly annual Yellow-headed Blackbird discovered on October 18 something even rarer: a **Bronzed Cowbird**. That bird stuck around long enough to be joined October 31 by an even-rarer-yet **Shiny Cowbird**, found by Bob Simons, much to the delight of an Audubon field trip that had just arrived as Bob had it in his scope! With hundreds of Brown-headed Cowbirds also present, this was likely the first time birders have ever witnessed all three species of North American cowbirds at the dairy on the same day.

There were some interesting reports from the prairie basin. Rick Lockwood reported a **Roseate Spoonbill** from La Chua trail October 22. It was joined by a second and both stuck around at least a week. Caleb Gordon had four late **Pectoral Sandpipers** October 25 at La Chua. They, too, stayed for several days. A flock of seven **American White Pelicans** were spotted October 17 by Andy Kratter. They continue to be seen at Alachua Lake as of this writing. **Barn Swallows** lingered later than usual on the basin, and Caleb Gordon managed to pick out a **Bank Swallow** among them November 7. As a first real sign of winter, Chuck Littlewood saw and photographed a **Snow Goose** November 5 near Alachua Lake; the same day, Rex Rowan spotted four **Gadwalls** and **Northern Shoveler** there. Another sign of winter was a **Golden-crowned Kinglet** seen by John Hintermister as he was birding the Prairie Creek property November 4. Makes me shiver just thinking about it!

Thanks to those who shared their sightings as of November 7, 2009

### Gainesville's 2008 Christmas Bird Count

The 51<sup>st</sup> consecutive Gainesville Christmas Bird Count (CBC) was conducted on December 14, 2008. **Over 100 people** fanned out across Alachua County to identify and count every bird that could be seen or heard. Bird watching (or rather bird listening) began in the predawn hours to listen for the characteristic calls of the more nocturnal birds.

Like CBCs throughout the world, Gainesville's bird census encompasses a 15-mile radius across Alachua County. Eleven designated territories comprised the count circle and each participant strives to count every bird encountered from pre-dawn to sunset within their designated territory. After the count, participants converge at the Civitan Regional Blood Center to compile the day's results, share birding stories, and consume many boxes of pizza. Alachua County's CBC is organized by John Hintermister and Howard Adams, while John Martin is the person to thank for inputting and compiling the bird data. Results of the CBC are displayed on a large screen to illustrate the number of birds counted by species and by territory. The bird species data are also compared to previous CBC data so annual species trends can be discerned.

Results of the 2008 Alachua CBC were fascinating and have added to the knowledge of winter bird use within our county, changes that have occurred in bird populations, and how winter bird use has fluctuated in previous years. Sandhill cranes were the most abundant bird counted in Alachua County during Gainesville's 2008 CBC. The largest population of sandhill cranes (6,000) was counted at Paynes Prairie. Red-winged Blackbirds were the second most abundant bird species tallied on the 2008 CBC (7,405). Other abundant species (which exceeded 500) were Yellow-rumped Warbler, American Coot, American Robin, Boat-tailed Grackle, Brown-headed Cowbird, Ring-necked Duck, Ring-billed Gull, American Goldfinch, Blue-winged Teal, Double-crested Cormorant, White Ibis, Chipping Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Palm Warbler, Wood Duck, Black-bellied Whistling Duck, American Crow, and Mourning Dove.

While some bird species were concentrated within specific habitat types (i.e., Sandhill Cranes at Paynes Prairie) other bird species were ubiquitous throughout Alachua County and were county within all 11 territories. These omnipresent species included Ring-billed Gull, Red-shouldered and Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Barred Owl, Turkey and Black Vulture, Little Blue Heron, American Crow, woodpeckers (Red-bellied, Downy, Pileated, Northern Flicker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker), Hermit Thrush, Killdeer, Mourning Dove, Northern Mockingbird, Gray Catbird, Eastern Phoebe, American Goldfinch, Northern Cardinal, Blue Jay, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, multiple warblers (Palm, Pine, Black-and-white, Yellow-rump, Common Yellow-throat), Blue-headed and White-eyed Vireo, Carolina and House Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, and Eastern Bluebird.

Several rare bird sightings enlivened the birdwatchers and included an Ash-throated Flycatcher, a Black-throated Green Warbler, a Yellow-breasted Chat, two Wilson's Warblers, a White-faced Ibis, a Black Tern, and a Harris Sparrow.

The annual CBC data can provide an insight into the avian changes that are occurring in Alachua County. Bald ea-

gles and ospreys appear to have increased over time. Red-shouldered Hawks have maintained a robust population in Alachua County and may have even increased in abundance based on sporadic bird surveys conducted in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These hawks appear tolerant of development as long as sufficient forested areas and wetlands remain. Likewise, some woodpecker species appear to have also maintained a robust or increasing population in Alachua County and include the Red-bellied, Pileated, Downy, Yellow-shafted Flicker and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. Contrary, other woodpecker species have declined in Alachua County – the Hairy, Red-cockaded, and perhaps even the Red-headed Woodpecker.

The number of wintering Sandhill Cranes in Alachua County has increased markedly during the last five decades. Why are more Sandhill Cranes flocking to Alachua County to winter? Perhaps because of the active and dedicated wildlife management practices implemented at Paynes Prairie State Park. Park staff have restored marshes by infilling drainage canals and have maintained low vegetative communities with controlled burning which favors Sandhill Cranes. Perhaps there are more Sandhill Cranes wintering in Alachua County because previous wintering grounds have succumb to development and the infilling of wetlands.

Disturbing trends in Alachua County's avian population were confirmed with the 2008 CBC data. For instance, only four Northern Bobwhites were counted in the 2008 bird survey. This is down from 227 counted in 1978. Northern Bobwhites were a common sight in fallow fields a few decades ago and were regularly hunted. Sadly, rare does one now flush a covey of quail or hear quail calling in their subtle manner from a stand of brush. The widespread decline of Northern Bobwhites is thought to be attributed to a number of factors – fire ants raiding the ground nests, coyotes capturing young quail, intensive farming practices that fail to preserve fallow brushy areas, development of farms and fields, and perhaps previous over-hunting practices. Similar historic declines have also been observed for a number of waterfowl (Pintail, Shoveler, Widgeon, Black Duck, and Green-winged Teal), Purple Finch, Eastern Meadowlark and Common Ground Dove. Although cautiously interpreted, the results of the annual CBC data provide an important insight into the environmental health of our community. Conscientious land use practices in Alachua County have contributed to our diverse and large avian population—namely preservation of ecologically important areas, tree protection ordinances, and habitat restoration.

Come join the Gainesville 2009 CBC on December 20th followed by the evening data compilation party at the Civitan Regional Blood Center to learn of the exciting results!

Debbie Segal

A Tribute to Alice Tyler



## President's Report

As summer is ending, much of the discussion at AAS board meetings pertains to our annual fundraising events: the Christmas tree sale and our holiday social and silent auction. This year will be the third year we have done these, and I hope both will continue for many years as they've been very successful. Alachua Audubon Society has not yet spent most of the proceeds from the last two years, but having these sources of revenues (in addition to unexpected sources such as local artist Phil Robinson donating the proceeds of his recent showings) means that we will have some ability to support more significant issues than has been possible in the past.

In this newsletter is an announcement for this year's Christmas tree sale. The morning after our social last year, former president Scott Flamand and I flew to Roanoke, rented a truck, loaded the trees, and drove overnight back to Gainesville. We arrived around 7:00 am and were greeted by AAS board members who distributed the trees that day. It is a lot of work, especially for those that make the drive, but is worth the effort. One point should be made: while we promote the trees as the only organically-grown trees available to Alachua County residents, buyers should know that the trees are not *certified* as organic. In the past, the tree farm completed the annual certification process, and they ensure us that their practices have not changed from when the trees were certified. Having driven to the farm the last two years, I can confirm that it is a very environmentally-friendly operation. The farm's operators, Tom and David, own over 100 acres of land in the Allegheny highlands of southwestern Virginia, much of it left as Appalachian ravine forest. They have some huge old-growth trees, including a northern red oak that serves as a black bear den tree where a female bear has given birth to cubs in recent years. They have found more than 90 species of birds breeding on their farm, including locally-declining loggerhead shrikes and golden-winged warblers. The Christmas trees are planted at lower densities than they are at mass-production farms, and no pesticides are sprayed. Birds that use successional forest habitat (such as juncos, sparrows, towhees, and grosbeaks) often nest in the planted trees. Known as Clover Hollow Christmas Tree Farm, it is a fine place and

certainly the type of operation that should be supported.

Alachua Audubon Society currently has 902 members (which I believe is the most we have ever had). Last year at this time we had about 850 members and sold 85 trees. Taking into account the cost of the airfare, truck rental, and fuel, our break-even point was about 70-75 trees, but will probably be higher this year. Our rental truck has room to spare for more trees, and I see no reason why we cannot sell more this year. The trees are comparably priced with other locally-available trees: not as cheap as the big retailers (though much better quality), but not as expensive as many of the parking lot vendors. Although they must be paid for ahead of time and are bought sight unseen, rarely are buyers unhappy. If you will be putting up a Christmas tree this year, please consider buying one from AAS. And don't be afraid to ask your friends, neighbors, or co-workers. Feel free to cut out the flyer from The Crane to distribute or e-mail me and I'll send you an electronic file. Your purchase will support one of the most eco-friendly growers in the industry, local environmental causes, and AAS.

Michael Meisenburg

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## Audubon Adventures Thank You, Sponsors!

Alachua Audubon Board would like to thank the following members who generously donated money to provide Audubon Adventures kits to local classrooms: K. M. and S. P. Eoff, John Winn, Martha F. Pilcher, Ann F. Paul, Karen S. Johnson, Barbara and Bud Muschlitz, Jane Brockman, Don and Mary Lou Eitzman, Susan S. Rout, Barbara Larson, Martha E. King, Mary Louise Brey, Thomas D. Carr, Barbara S. Mollison, Paul Moler, Alice M. Tyler, W. Jape and Audrey D. Taylor, John R. Sharpe, Claire and Betty Schelske, Catherine W. Lee, Carol R. Alderson, Helen Warren, Mary Landsman, Carol Cobb, and Dotty Robbins.

Each Audubon Adventures sponsored class receives four sets of newsletters with materials for 32 students. They are filled with information and learning activities. There is also a teacher's manual with support ideas, activities, and evaluations.

If you are interested in sponsoring call Emily Schwartz at 372-0754.

## Community Calendar

- ♦ 5 Dec Right Whale Festival, Jacksonville Beach Right Whale Festival: <http://www.rightwhalefestival.org/>
- ♦ 5 Dec Sierra Club /Ardisia/ pull, San Felasco Hammock <http://florida.sierraclub.org/ssj/outings.htm>
- ♦ 12 Dec Sierra Club Prairie Creek paddle / barbeque
- ♦ 2 Jan Sierra Club /Ardisia/ pull, San Felasco Hammock
- ♦ 19 Jan Florida Native Plant Society local meeting <http://www.fnps.org/pages/chapters/chapterpg.php?keyword=PaynesPrairie>
- ♦ ?? Jan Sparrow presentation by Adam
- ♦ 27 Jan—1 Feb The Space Coast Birding and Wildlife Festival <http://www.nbbd.com/fly>
- ♦ ?? Feb eBird presentation by Adam
- ♦ 16 Feb Florida Springs Rally in Tallahassee; The message will be "Real Legislative Protection of our Springs in 2010" [floridasprings@comcast.net](mailto:floridasprings@comcast.net)
- ♦
- ♦ 4 Mar Tower Road Library 7 pm; Wet your appetite with a talk on Edible Wild Plants of Florida presented by Dr. Dana Griffin
- ♦

## 4th Annual Holiday Social is almost here! Dec. 11 at Wild Birds Unlimited

In addition to having an evening of fun, this is also one of our big fund raisers thru the silent auction. If you own a business, provide a service, create cool art, or have items to donate for the silent auction, please contact Stacy Porvasnic (352-359-7441) or Helen Warren (352-214-7755).

## Sunday, December 20—All Day Gainesville Area Christmas Bird Count

Those interested in attending should contact John Hintermister (352-316-2396; [jhintermister@gmail.com](mailto:jhintermister@gmail.com)) or Howard Adams (352-665-3716; [howardppsp@aol.com](mailto:howardppsp@aol.com)) by Dec. 16th.



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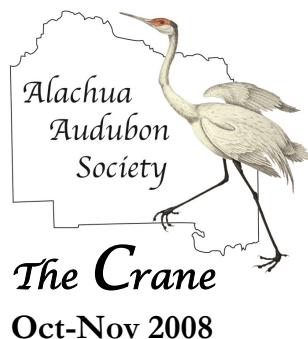
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## Third Annual Holiday Social December 5, 6:30pm

Fall is just around the corner and that means it is time to think about the Holiday Social. If you've been counting, this will be our third annual event for getting together with music, food, good spirits and good friends. We will be holding the social on **Friday, December 5, 6:30-9pm at Wild Birds Unlimited.**

In addition to having an evening of fun, this is also one of our big fund raisers thru the silent auction. If you own a business, provide a service, create cool art or have items to donate which can be part of the silent auction, please contact Helen Warren, 352-214-7755.



## Join Audubon!

To join Audubon on 3 levels (National, Florida, and Alachua), fill in application and mail to:

Paul Moler 7818 Highway 346 Archer, Florida 32618

Questions? Contact Paul 495-9419 or paul-moler@bellsouth.net

### Chapter E-18 New Membership Application **Not for renewals!**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Please check level of membership:**

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