January and February Field Trips

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

Meet John Hintermister at the St. Marks visitor center (Saturday 8 am) for a trip to one of Florida's premier winter birding spots. Expect a large number and wide variety of birds on this field trip. Overnight option. Sunday's meeting time and location will be decided on Saturday. Call Wild Birds Unlimited [352-381-1997] to register. Limit 20 people. Diff. 3

Saturday, January 15, 8 am Persimmon Point, La Chua Trail, or Cones Dike

Join Alachua Audubon for our 50th Anniversary Celebration. The celebration will begin with a choice of three field trips. The Persimmon Point requires registration with Wild Birds Unlimited [352-381-1997]; registration is not required for the other two field trips. More information is provided on Page 6 of this newsletter.

Saturday, January 22, 8 am Alligator Lake

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

Saturday/Sunday , February 5 & 6 Tall Timbers Research Station Sparrow Banding and the Wade Track

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. Come see how Florida looked 200 years ago. Difficulty 2

Saturday, February 12, 8 am Matanzas Inlet at Crescent Beach

Matanzas Inlet is the only inlet on the east coast of Florida without a permanent hardening structure thus making it highly dynamic and full of ephemeral topographic features. Large, diverse flocks of gulls, terns, and other seabirds and shorebirds often gather on the sandbars in Matanzas Inlet while the nearshore waters can host large flocks of Northern Gannets and occasional Marauding Jaegers. Purple Sandpipers are also known to use the exposed limestone on the south side of the inlet. Difficulty 3

Saturday, February 19, 8 am Gum Root Park—CLEP

Gum Root Park features trails through a variety of natural communities including blackwater stream, floodplain swamp, xeric hammock, and pine flatwoods. Join Rex Rowan at Gum Root Park to look for woodcocks and other elusive birds. Difficulty 2

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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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 Mar-Apr Crane: Feb. 15th



Early winter, roughly the period between late October and early December, is the most exciting time for birding in Alachua County. The weather is mild, and the birds...well; you never know what will show up! Stray flycatchers and blackbirds from the west, irruptive finches, waterfowl, and other goodies from

the north, almost anything seems possible. This early winter saw an exceptional number of unusual birds. One of the most outstanding was the Groove-billed Ani at La Chua Trail mentioned in the last issue of the Crane. The Ani lingered and was seen by dozens of local and out-of -town birders through at least early December. There was an explosion of usually uncommon Golden-crowned Kinglets, with sightings too numerous to mention, but the place they were most easily seen was San Felasco County Park. It was also there that Pat Burns found at least one, probably two Brown Creepers October 30. Bubba Scales saw another November 20 in his neighborhood. We had an unprecedented number of Winter Wrens in the area. One was found at Possum Creek Park November 3 by Geoff Parks, two were turned up by Caleb Gordon along Camp Canal, and two more by Caleb in the Loblolly Woods just south of 8th Avenue. He also found Rusty Blackbirds at Loblolly for at least the second winter in a row. I came across a Least Flycatcher on Cone's Dike October 24 around the 3-mile marker, a fairly reliable spot for that species in early winter. Lloyd Davis hiked Cone's Dike a couple of times and was rewarded October 28 with a Dickcissel and an Ash-throated Flycatcher November 19. Andy Kratter found a second Dickcissel December 9 along the 6th Street Rail Trail. There were three brief appearances by Dark-eyed Juncos, one in the yard of Howard Adams and Barbara Mollison near the north rim of the prairie, one at my NW Gainesville yard, and another spotted by Caleb Gordon at the beginning of La Chua trail.

The Hague Dairy was a hotspot, with more Brown-headed Cowbirds than the past few years. Some estimated the huge seething flock to contain more than six thousand birds. Out of that restless avian mass Matt Hafner picked out a Bronzed Cowbird on November 7. The same day Matt also found a Cave Swallow, only the second ever reported in the county. While sifting through the flock November 20 I found a Yellow-headed Blackbird (one was seen earlier in the period by Peter Polshek at the Beef Unit pasture off Williston Road). Other birds of interest at the Dairy included a Painted Bunting, which was noted by several birders, and a myiarchus (probably Ash-throated) flycatcher photographed by Michael Dupee.

John Hintermister and Steve Nesbitt were birding Tuscawilla

Prairie November 12 when they noticed a hawk overhead that turned out to be an immature Swainson's Hawk. I mentioned in the last issue that John was barnstorming a state big-year, and at the time of this writing he is up to an astounding 360 species.

As usual, some of the most exciting reports came from La Chua Trail. Felicia Lee, Glenn Price, and Helen Warren got a look at a Lark Sparrow that popped up along the Alachua Sink boardwalk the day after Thanksgiving. An Alachua Audubon field trip led November 28 by Bubba Scales tallied eight species of sparrows, including a very patient Grasshopper Sparrow and a locally rare Clay-colored Sparrow. But probably the best sighting at La Chua (aside from the Ani) was a Tundra Swan found and photographed at Alachua Lake November 29 by Chuck Littlewood. Difficult to view due to its great distance from the La Chua Trail platform, it was only the third sighting of that species in the county. Several White Pelicans and a blue-morph Snow Goose joined the swan briefly December 4. By that time Alachua Lake had drawn down to an extremely low level, concentrating food sources and drawing impressive flocks of ducks, coots, and wading birds, several species of shorebirds, plus the usual massive numbers of Sandhill Cranes, creating a wonderful pandemonium of trumpeting, squawking, honking, and quacking...just one of the many things we love about Payne's Prairie!

As the deep winter chill sets in its time to think about the sunny tropics. Last year's Birds and Conservation Tour of Costa Rica was so much fun I will be organizing another trip for June 2011. We will see lots of fabulous birds and visit pioneering institutions at the forefront of conservation and sustainability efforts in tropical America. If you are interested in joining us or want more information email me at mmanetz@yahoo.com. Thanks to those who shared their sightings through December 12, 2010.

Happy New Year and Thanks to All!

Alachua Audubon has reached **50** years mostly because a lot of people have shared their passion for birds and natural Florida and have volunteered their time to move this legacy forward. On behalf of our half-century mark we will celebrate with an event on January 15th at Prairies Creek Lodge. Thanks to Mar-

tha King for spearheading the celebration of this BIG benchmark!

Our Christmas tree sale was a great success and again sold many trees and wreathes. Thanks to Stacy Porvasnik for organizing the sale and for Andrew Howard and Charles Hadad for traveling to Virginia to pick up the trees and wreaths. Again we appreciate the use of space at The Gardener's Edge provided by Dorn's Liquors and Wine Warehouse for our distribution activity.

The Holiday Social at Wild Birds Unlimited was well attended and continues to provide a warm gathering of friends. Thanks to Barb Kerkhoff for her festive and peaceful harp music. Thanks to Joni Ellis and Leslie Straub for collecting donations for the silent auction and thanks to all who graciously donated items. And of course, thanks to the staff at WBU who donated their store and helped us set up and clean up.

With our successful fund raising activities we have taken on several projects that before seemed financially infeasible. The money has provided bird feeders and seed for residents at Haven Hospice to enjoy watching birds outside their rooms. This was made possible by Jean Kaufman, who visits Haven Hospice regularly and keeps the feeders cleaned and filled with fresh seed.

We also contributed the materials for a bird bath and drip system at Dudley Farm. It was under the vision, planning and sweat of Susan Sommerville, and assistance of Ron Robinson, that got the project completed.

Another big project that AAS has taken on is Kids and birding. Many teachers, parents, and young folks have come together for these events. We were able to buy field guides for all public schools and several charter schools. We have purchased more binoculars for student activities. It has been an exciting process to foster kids and birding.

AAS just completed its 52nd Christmas Bird Count. Data compilation at the end of the count is an exciting event. Thanks to Griselda Forbes for organizing the food and drinks, a task she has done for more than 20 years. Thanks also to John Martin who compiles the bird data with his fancy and interactive computer program.

Helen Warren, AAS President

Book Review on Native Plant Landscaping for Florida Wildlife by Craig N. Huegel. 2010, University Press of Florida. \$24.95.

There are plenty of books on Florida's native flora, and general books on attracting wildlife by landscaping with North American plants, but none that tell the Florida homeowner how to capitalize on the biological and physical attributes of Florida's own native plants in order to attract wildlife to his or her property. This is the best book of its kind that I've seen.

Huegel prefaces everything by establishing a central principle: we must plan carefully to create a full habitat, "the type of food, water, and cover that allows [wildlife] to grow, mature, successfully reproduce, and persist in time through its offspring." Then he leads us step by step through the planning process, which requires of us both creativity and a realistic assessment of limitations. We decide on the style of the landscape we wish to surround ourselves with and what wildlife we want to attract, and then, within the restrictions of space, preexisting vegetation, and soil and moisture conditions (e.g., is the home built on old flatwoods, sandhill, hardwood forest?), we choose the plants themselves, the elements of the habitat we're going to create.

Choosing the plants – and for creation of a habitat you'll want several species – requires knowledge of when they flower and fruit, the size of the fruit they produce and how big the crop is, whether both male and female plants are required (as in hollies), whether they attract insects with their bark, foliage, or blooms, whether their branch structure is suitable for cover and nesting, and how much light or shade they need. All of this is the subject of "Plant Selection," which takes up half of the book's 285 pages. In this chapter you'll find detailed descriptions of 133 species of woody plants (no wildflowers or grasses) that provide food or cover, usually both, for wildlife. Of these, 100 are suitable for the Gainesville area.

Huegel sees landscaping for wildlife as

more than a hobby, he sees it as a "significant modern-day conservation initiative" that allows any Florida homeowner to incorporate his or her private property into Florida's shrinking supply of wild lands. He sees an aesthetic dimension to it as well: "Armed with a palette of native plants virtually unequalled in natural beauty and textures, we can be equipped with no better arsenal to fight off the blandness and artificial character that we have, for some reason, created and learned to accept."

Incidentally, Huegel maintains a blog, "Native Florida Wildflowers," that features beautiful photos and a lot of information, at http://hawthornhillwildflowers.blogspot.com/It's well worth a visit.

Rex Rowan

Gainesville Christmas Bird Count Results

Approximately 100 people participated in the December 19th Gainesville Christmas Bird Count (CBC) - the day long event of searching for and counting every encountered bird. This year we set a new record for the 53-year-old Gainesville Count, with 157 species.

Two new birds were added to our Count list. The Tundra Swan, which had last been seen on December 5th, was relocated and photographed by Steve Collins in an off-limits area of the Prairie. And John Martin, counting the 2,000-plus Sandhill Cranes at the UF Beef Unit at Williston Road and SW 23rd Street, noticed that they had company: the county's fourth-ever Ross's Goose.

Other good birds included 4 Whooping Cranes, 2 Winter Wrens, 2 Dark-eyed Juncos, a Brown Creeper, an Ash-throated Flycatcher, 5 Fox Sparrows, one Painted and Indigo Bunting, a Yellow-breasted Chat, and an amazing flock of 120 Rusty Blackbirds. The Gainesville Sun covered the CBC. See the story at www.gainesville.com/article/20101219/ARTICLES/101219508

Birding Class Offered

Would you like to learn more about bird identification? Santa Fe College's Community Education Program in collaboration with The Alachua Audubon Society (AAS) is offering a four week field course in Field Bird Identification. The next class starts January 22nd and concludes February 12th. Classes are on Saturday mornings and last 2.5 hours. The final class will be a longer trip to Cedar Key. Each class is led by a local birding expert. This class will benefit both beginning birders and more advanced birders. Learn to identify local birds by use of binoculars, field guides, birding scopes, and other media. We will visit local natural areas to identify birds in their natural habitat.

The course costs \$50 and generates revenue for The AAS. Registration is through Santa Fe College. For more information and registration go online to Santa Fe College Community Education or call (352) 395-5193. Registration for the class begins on January 3rd.

This class has received great reviews and many students have returned for additional instruction. Limit 12 students so register early as this class fills quickly. Hope to see you in class.

Kathy Haines, Class Coordinator.

Volunteers Needed

AAS plans to set up and maintain a booth at the Kanapaha Botanical Gardens Spring Garden Festival on March 26th and 27th. This is one of the largest festivals in our area for plants, gardening, arts and crafts, live entertainment, and children's activities.

We need some friendly folks to help staff our AAS booth and share information about birds, our field trips, AAS programs, and kids birding activities. There are several shifts a day for 3-4 hours each. Set up is Friday night and pack up is Sunday at 5pm. If you would be interested in helping us with this event, please contact Helen Warren at helenkwarren@cox.net, subject line Volunteer for Spring Garden Festival, or call 352-214-7755.

Would You Like to Receive the Crane Electronically?

In the last newsletter we announced that the Crane Newsletter will now be available electronically, however we goofed and published an email address that was not correct. Here is the correct email address: AAS-thecrane@att.net.

So starting with the next Crane Newsletter, you will have the option of receiving the Crane electronically rather than receiving a mailed paper copy. The reason for this change is two-fold. First, we are an organization focused on conservation and by reducing our use of paper and all the energy and resources that go into the paper, printing, and mailing - we will inch closer towards our conservation goal. Second, we will save money by reducing the number of newsletters we print and mail. This is money that can be better spent towards bird-related activities. By receiving the Crane electronically you can view the Crane in color (color photos are so much better) and you can more easily share the Crane with other birding enthusiasts.

If you choose to receive the Crane electronically, we will not bombard you with emails. Typically you will receive only one email per newsletter and the email will contain a link to the Alachua Audubon Website. Simply click on the link and you will have your newsletter. Your email address will not be given to anyone and there will always be an unsubscribe option. To start receiving the Crane electronically, simply send an email to AAS-thecrane@att.net. In the subject line put the word Newsletter. Please include your complete name, address, and membership number, if possible (top number on your mailing label on the back page of the Crane). If you wish to continue receiving a mailed paper copy of the Crane, simply do nothing and delivery of your copy of the Crane will not change.

Youth and Birding

Do you have a child or grandchild who would be interested in participating in the AAS Children's Christmas Bird Count on Sunday, January 16? We will bird all morning and then meet for pizza and a tally at noon. You will need to accompany your child on this outing. Targeted ages are 6 – 16. If you would like to reserve a place please respond to Emily Schwartz at schwares@gm.sbac.edu for elementary age children and Mike Manetz at mmanetz@yahoo.com for teens. Start times and directions will be emailed to you.

Alachua Audubon Celebrates 50 Years Saturday, January 15, 2011

Join us for a day of celebration as we gather around Paynes Prairie for field trips, food, and stories. With 50 years behind us, we can honor those who have guided us to this point. Come and share stories of your favorite Audubon moment! Adam Kent will lead a field trip to Persimmon Point for sparrows and Rex Rowan will lead a group out La Chua Trail. Both of these trips will meet at 8 am at the La Chua Trail parking lot. John Hintermister will meet a group at the Alachua Conservation Trust's Prairie Creek Preserve to car pool to Cone's Dike. The Persimmon Point field trip requires registration with Wild Birds Unlimited [352-381-1997]; registration is not required for the other two field trips.

Right after the field trips, please plan to join us for lunch and the main festivities at the Lodge of the Prairie Creek Preserve. Doors will open at 11:30 am and with some flexibility, lunch will start about 12:30 (catered by Pearl's Country Store and BBQ). We will have a brief program starting about 1pm to highlight some of the chapter successes and individuals who have provided their leadership.

The rest of the afternoon will be open for short trips from the lodge to explore some areas of the recently acquired Prairie Creek Preserve. The new Conservation Burial, Inc, a green cemetery, is a short hike away and the trail leads through stunning Florida hammock.

The Prairie Creek Preserve is located at 7204 SE County Road 234; Gainesville, Florida 32641.

Please RSVP for lunch and mail a check (\$10 per person) to cover the cost of food from Pearl's Country BBQ. Its well worth the price! Please send payment by January 10th.

Here's my RSVP for Alachua Audubon Society's 50 Year Celebration.

Please RSVP _____ meal(s) for the Celebration on January 15, 2011.

Make checks payable to Alachua Audubon Society and mail to: Helen K Warren 1215 NW 36th Terrace, Gainesville, FL 32605.

Speakers Corner

Don't miss our upcoming programs on plants presented by Dr. Dana Griffin. On January 19 at 7:00 p.m. in the Millhopper Library Dr. Griffin will speak on Medicinal Plants. It's a look at nature's pharmacy. What might have turned early humans to plants as sources of medicine? What role did the Doctrine of Signatures play in early medicinal practices? What precautions attend the use of wild plants as medicine?

In March Dr. Griffin will present a program on **Toxic Plants**. This program will be at **7:00 p.m.** in the Millhopper Library on March 16. It may offer small comfort to the victim, but toxic plants are not out to get you. Humans are virtually never the target of plant poisons and yet we often seem to wind up on the target list, like it or not. Learn to recognize several local plants that are toxic, how to avoid them and how to deal with the consequences if and when treatment is available. Mark your calendar for these very interesting programs!

Alachua Audubon Society is now on Facebook!

"Visit Alachua Audubon Society's Facebook page and become a fan. You will then be kept up-to-date on field trips, special events, and other items of interest!"



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Alachua Audubon Society Wildlife-Friendly Yards Tour February 26, 2011 10:00 am to 4:00 pm

Interested in making your yard more attractive to birds and other wildlife? The Alachua Audubon Society invites you to take a self-guided tour of local yards that are wildlife havens. Tickets are \$10 per person and are available for purchase at Wild Birds Unlimited. Ticket holders will receive addresses and maps to each location at the time of purchase.



4215 NW 16th Blvd. Gainesville, FL 32605 www.wbu.com/gainesville

Each yard has unique features to attract a variety of birds and other wildlife such as possible wintering hummingbirds, orioles, finches, wintering sparrows, and other unexpected winged visitors, as well as our year-round residents. You will be inspired to maintain your own yard or green space for wildlife, whether it is one birdfeeder, one nest box, one wildflower bed, one garden path, or one natural area. Make a difference for wildlife, one yard at a time! Join us for our first annual Wildlife-Friendly Yards Tour and fundraiser to benefit Alachua Audubon Society. For more information contact: Ron Robinson 352-322-4867 or gonebirden@cox.net

INFORMATION FOR DAY OF TOUR

- « Please wear or show wrist band for admission to yards.
- « Please do not block driveways.
- « Please walk only in designated areas.
- « Less noise and motion in bird feeding areas will result in more wildlife viewing.
- « Sorry no public restrooms will be available.
- « Additional tickets may be purchased on the day of the tour at sales locations. Exact cash or check payable to Alachua Audubon Society needed.
- « Rain or shine. Dress for weather.
- « Bring binoculars.
- « Self-tour may be conducted in any order.

MANAGEMENT OF BISON, CATTLE, AND HORSES ON PAYNES PRAIRIE

Recently the administration of Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park proposed changes to its Livestock Management Plan that will affect the bison, cracker horses, and Florida cracker cattle living in the park. The Alachua Audubon Society has adopted the following position on this matter:

Paynes Prairie was the State of Florida's first State Preserve and was so designated to indicate that the main reason for its purchase and the main management focus was to preserve and maintain the native ecosystems and native plants and animals of Florida. Most of Florida's State Parks are not so designated, and offer a more balanced focus between resource protection and recreation. There are also state historic sites such as Fort Clinch and Dudley Farm, which focus on historic preservation.

Are the animals in question part of the native ecosystem the Preserve was intended to safeguard? The answer is clearly no. Bison were not native to Florida during the last ten thousand years and were never observed on Paynes Prairie, even during the brief period in the 16th and 17th centuries when a small number of plains bison wandered into North Florida (the nearest were in the vicinity of Lake City). Cattle and horses are not native to North America, although some of the horses' distant ancestors were here millions of years ago.

All of these large grazing animals are on the Prairie to provide a combination of education and entertainment for visitors. The bison, in particular, are very popular with visitors and attract people out onto the trails who would probably not come otherwise. As long as this does not obstruct the efforts to manage the ecosystems of the preserve, cause a drain on funding or manpower, or endanger visitors, then there are no problems. If there are problems, they need to be resolved. As appealing and popular as these animals are, the overall health of the Prairie must take priority.

Bison: The chief problems posed by bison are (1.) the proclivity for bulls to wander off the Prairie and (2.) the risk of aggression toward humans posed by bulls and by cows with calves. Preserve staff is also concerned about inbreeding, since all the bison are descended from the same bull. These problems could be addressed by removal of all bulls from the population. Cows do not have the bulls' wanderlust and are not prone to be aggressive in the absence of young. Inbreeding would cease to be a problem once the bulls were gone. And as natural attrition reduced the size of the herd, additional females could be brought in to keep the population stable.

Florida Cracker Cattle: The cattle are currently managed on a separate, fenced area – Hickory Ranch – which is part of the preserve, but not crossed by trails used by visitors. This seems to be a satisfactory situation.

Cracker Horses: The horses are having health problems associated with being loose on the basin, and would be better off with more care. In particular, the survival rate of foals is very low. The park management proposes to use some of these horses for their work horses and to remove all male horses from the herd that are loose on the basin. This will allow for better care of the horses that remain. It would also use this breed of horse as it was used when it was brought here, for managing the basin. This seems like a reasonable solution. As with the bison, additional females could be brought in to take the place of those that die.

Enclosure: The park has proposed to put three bison and three cracker horses into a fenced area of about 150 acres near the main visitor center. Nothing could be further from the spirit of a nature preserve.

These are not perfect solutions – we will miss the sight of magnificent bull bison and gangly foals – but they seem a reasonable compromise between the wishes of the public and the mission of the Preserve.

Alachua Audubon will have more to say on ecosystem management at Paynes Prairie in an upcoming issue of The Crane. Alachua Audubon Society P. O. Box 140464 Gainesville, Florida 32614-0464 Non-profit Organization U.S. Postage Paid Gainesville Florida 32601 Permit No. 18



The Crane
Jan.-Feb 2011

ALACHUA AUDUBON CELEBRATES 50 YEARS!

SATURDAY JANUARY 15, 2011

FIELD TRIPS IN THE MORNING

CATERED LUNCH AT 12:30 PM BY PEARL'S COUNTRY STORE AND BBQ

See article inside for more info and to mail in RSVP form for lunch

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