



# The Crane

Volume 52 Number 6 July - August 2011

## Orange Lake and Bird Island

### A Hundred Years

A hundred years ago this spring, a New York patent lawyer with the estimable name of Philip B. Philipp was commissioned by the Secretary of the National Association of Audubon Societies (NAAS) to confirm accounts of a pristine bird rookery in a north Florida lake, a rookery said to contain thousands of nests of ibises, egrets, and herons. Philipp and a companion, B.S. Bowdish, traveled south and set up camp on the shore of the lake – our own Orange Lake – remaining from May 4 to May 12, 1911.

Philipp described the rookery, which comprised three islands, in a report that was published in the November-December 1911 issue of *Bird-Lore* magazine: "Bird Island covers about thirty-six acres, nine of which are, in an ordinary season, dry and grown up with a dense central growth of willow trees and bushes, with an outer growth of low elder. The remainder of the island is a wet marsh, covered with a heavy growth of rank grass and edged with lilies. Close to the main island are two similar smaller ones – Saw Grass Island of twenty-five acres, and Red Bird of five acres. Scattered about in the Lake, which is here very marshy, with many patches of lilies and rushes, are several large nameless 'tussocks,' or grassy, floating islands, all rich in bird life."

The accounts of the rookery were true. There were 10,000 pairs of birds nesting on the islands ("this estimate is an exceedingly conservative one"), including – and the numbers here refer to mated pairs – White Ibis 4,000, Little Blue Heron 3,500, Tricolored Heron 1,150, Anhinga 360, Green Heron 90, Snowy Egret 52, Great Egret 28, Black-crowned Night-Heron 25, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron 25, Least Bittern 8,

Glossy Ibis 6 (the only nests known in North America at the time), Great Blue Heron 1, and Reddish Egret 1, among other species. By far the largest numbers were on Bird Island.

This was a truly important discovery. At a crucial time in the history of bird conservation – the trade in feathers had devastated our wading bird populations, especially Great and Snowy Egrets – finding a rookery that had not been raided by plume hunters boosted the morale of bird preservationists and suggested that survivors of the plume trade would have a refuge if it could be preserved and protected.

The NAAS had learned about the rookery from a bird enthusiast named Oscar Baynard, who lived in Micanopy and who had been visiting Orange Lake for several years. Baynard informed them that Bird Island could be bought, and the reason for Philipp's visit was to determine whether NAAS should indeed purchase it. He concluded his report with these words: "There is every reason to believe that, with a little attention, a colony can be established which would be a monument to the National Association and one of the sights of Florida. Certainly no better chance will ever be offered."

T. Gilbert Pearson, who spent his youth right here in Archer, had worked his way up to the position of Secretary of the NAAS, and had been leading the fledgling organization since a stroke had felled President William Dutcher in October 1910. In his annual report, also published in the November-December 1911 *Bird-Lore*, Pearson noted that NAAS had (continued on Page 3)

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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  
July-August Crane:  
Aug. 15<sup>th</sup>**

**Around  
The County...  
By Mike Manetz**

In spring migration, the big show is usually at off shore and coastal hotspots like the Dry Tortugas, Ft. DeSoto, and more locally, Cedar Key. Here in Alachua County we content ourselves with leftovers from the great fallouts at those storied locations. This year, the last two weeks of April migration was

weak on both coasts, and predictably it was slim pickin's here, too. The few exceptions included a Wood Thrush April 16 at San Felasco Hammock, a pre-dawn flight of Veeries noticed by Bob Wallace over his place in Alachua on the 20<sup>th</sup>, and the same day a Louisiana Waterthrush seen at San Felasco by Dalcio Dacol. Other than that, the last half of April was pretty unremarkable. By early May, however, huge waves of warblers were being reported from both coasts, and we were delighted to have some of these birds ripple our way. Between May 4 and 10, there were suddenly numerous sightings of Redstarts, Blackpoll, and Black-throated Blue Warblers from several observers and locations in our area. One of the few local reports of both Cape May and Worm-eating Warblers came May 4 from Palm Point. Rex Rowan and I found several Bank Swallows at the Point that same day. Bobolinks didn't make their appearance until around the same time, and by then they were pretty reliably seen along La Chua trail through the middle of May.

One very unexpected migrant was a Swainson's Thrush discovered by Linda Hensley May 18 in her yard. Another notable yard sighting came from Geoff Parks, who reported a dark-phase Short-tailed Hawk at his place in northeast Gainesville.

The spring shorebird migration can be pretty good here if water levels are attractive, but this year that was not the case. Most of our naturally wet areas were bone dry, and manipulated artificial wetlands such as Chapman's Pond and The Hague Dairy Lagoon were too high. The muddy edge at Newnans Lake attracted a few Spotted Sandpipers and Black-necked Stilts, and a Solitary Sandpiper made a cameo appearance at the dairy, but the only really unusual shorebird sighting was at Orange Lake, where on May 4 John Hintermister and Rex Rowan found eight Semipalmated Sandpipers. They also noted a lingering Canvasback and several Ring-necked Ducks.

As migration closed with a whimper, local birders started to warm up for the June Challenge, but it took an out of town birder to light the spark. Cole Fredericks paid a birding visit to Alachua County and found a trove of birds for us to chase. On May 29 he reported both Least and Black Terns from the Windsor boat ramp (Newnans Lake), and at Camp Canal he found a white-phase Great Blue Heron (Great White Heron), the first one seen here in nearly ten years. If

that wasn't enough, he also found two locally scarce Yellow-crowned Night-Herons, and noted the continued presence of Roseate Spoonbills that were first sighted back in early April.

By dawn of June 1, the first day of the June Challenge, at least three-dozen local birders were at the starting gate to try and see as many birds in the county as possible during the month. At the time of this writing, the collective number of species tallied by all "Challengers" was already around a hundred species, including such goodies as Laughing Gull and the above-mentioned Roseate Spoonbills. If lake levels continue to drop, places like Newnans and Orange Lake could attract a treasure trove of post-breeding shorebirds and waders. To keep tabs on the competition and to find out the winner you can check the Alachua Audubon website and click the link for "Recent Sightings".

Thanks to all who shared their sightings through June 10, 2011

## **Orange Land and Bird Island**

(Continued from Page 1)

seized the opportunity: "At a cost of \$250.20, provided by interest accruing from the Mary Dutcher Memorial Fund, Bird Island, covering an area of thirty-five acres, and situated in Orange Lake, Alachua county, Florida, was purchased during the year, and Mr. O.E. Baynard, who conducted the transaction for the Association, guarded the colony of birds located there throughout the summer, without remuneration other than his living expenses."

The National Audubon Society currently has an extensive sanctuary system across the United States, numbering about 150 properties, but Bird Island, right here in Alachua County, was the first, and this is its centennial.

On May 4, 2011, one hundred years to the day after Philip B. Philipp and B.S. Bowdish set up camp on the shore of Orange Lake, six members

of the Alachua Audubon Society and three representatives of the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission visited Bird Island in an airboat and found it devoid of nesting herons and ibises. Many of the trees that supported the rookery died in the 1990s, possibly from an overzealous application of herbicide, and less than a decade later the worst drought in a century had allowed predators such as raccoons to swarm across what had once been alligator-infested waters onto the island. Now the vegetation seems to have recovered – it looks much as Philipp described it in 1911—and FWC plans to live-trap any remaining predators as part of a restoration plan developed in partnership with Alachua Audubon.

Will the birds come back? A casual survey of other islands around the lake found Anhingas, Green Herons, and Cattle Egrets nesting in small numbers, but little else. We will be disappointed if they don't return, but glad for the generations of birds that have fledged from the island over the past century, and proud of the Audubon spirit that made their lives possible, which was well expressed by Pearson in 1911: "It is no small privilege to live at this time in history, among the beginnings of so many things which make for material and spiritual uplift. Fortunate indeed are those of us whom the currents of life have drawn into the field, to form a line of defence as best we may between the wild creatures and the greed of thoughtless men. A reward enjoyed by all who contribute in any way to the success of the Audubon movement is the consciousness that, as true pioneers, they are helping to foster and upbuild a national sentiment for the appreciation of wild animal life, which, in years to come, shall contribute prominently to the joy of human existence."

By Rex Rowan

## The June Challenge

This year's June Challenge has attracted the largest number of contestants ever, both locally and elsewhere (including Kent County, Delaware, and the county of Norfolk, England). As of June 15th, Bob Carroll is in the lead with 102 species, but Becky Enneis is right behind him with 100, and several others are in the 80s and 90s with two weeks in which to catch up.

Only one spring migrant species dawdled late enough to be included in the Challenge, Spotted Sandpipers that Craig Parenteau found at Palm Point on the 1st, but two other birds were even more surprising. Bob Carroll found a Common Loon stranded in a fountain along University Avenue just west of 34th Street on the 11th. The bird has since been rescued by Florida Wildlife Care and is currently receiving veterinary treatment. And an American Goldfinch that Scott Flamand first noted at his backyard feeder on May 21st was still being seen on June 14th, making it the latest ever recorded here by two days.

Unless some very early fall migrants appear during the last week in June (we have June records for Louisiana Waterthrush and Lesser Yellowlegs), this Challenge will be won by the birder who has both the persistence to track down locally-rare breeding species like Wood Thrush, Limpkin, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Broad-winged Hawk, and the willingness to go out after dark in search of owls and Chuck-will's-widows. But the main idea of the Challenge is to have fun, and I'm betting that all the contestants are winners in that regard.

By Rex Rowan

## Conservation Matters

Please consider signing up for Audubon of Florida and National Audubon Society action alerts to connect with state or national representatives and environmental issues that are being debated. It is an easy step and helps forward important environmental policies. And we are certainly in a time of need! For state action, go to: [http://fl.audubonaction.org/site/PageServer?pagename=fl\\_homepage](http://fl.audubonaction.org/site/PageServer?pagename=fl_homepage) For national action, go to: <http://policy.audubon.org/take-action>

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a fat ampersand,  
  
on the sandpaper  
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making eyes  
at a snipe,  
  
fanning  
the passions  
  
of the sandpiper  
nation.

By Sidney Wade; MFA@FLA Creative Writing Program in the English Department at UF and Alachua Audubon Member. Recently published in *The Nation*, a New York City Newspaper.



Photograph of Whimbrel taken by Glenn Price

## The Flicker Mystery

The Northern Flicker seems to be rare in summer in Alachua County. But does that signify a decline? Has it ever been common? We can't say, because we have no historical data against which to measure current observations. Almost all our knowledge of their historical abundance is based on winter surveys (Frank Chapman in 1886-87, John Dennis from 1949-51, Christmas Bird Count from 1957 to the present), and in winter the Florida population swells with wintering northern birds, so those surveys didn't tell us anything about the size of the locally-resident population.

During the months of June, July, and August I'm asking Gainesville-area observers to take note of any flickers they see, and to contact me by email at [rexrowan@gmail.com](mailto:rexrowan@gmail.com) or to leave a message on my phone at (352) 371-9296 with the location (as exact as possible), the date, and number of birds seen. If you find a nest that would be particularly valuable.—Rex Rowan



## AAS Upcoming Priorities

Alachua Audubon Board Members convened on June 18th for their annual planning meeting and to develop a roadmap for the upcoming year. Priorities that were identified for the upcoming year are as follows:

- « Organize and lead fieldtrips to local and out-of-town birding hotspots (41 last year and a comparable number again this year!)
- « Continue youth education through activities such as youth birding fieldtrips, kids Christmas Bird Count, Audubon Adventure Kits for local classrooms, and classroom presentations using the Bird Detective slide show
- « Continue teaching the Bird Identification class through Santa Fe College's Community Education Program with Class Coordinator, Kathy Haines and volunteers from Alachua Audubon Society
- « Continue the annual Christmas Bird Count coordinated by John Hintermister and Howard Adams
- « Continue supporting the bird feeding stations at Haven Hospice along with volunteer Jean Kaufman
- « Continue installing Kestrel nesting boxes that are constructed by the Boy Scouts. Bob Simons leads this activity and has installed over 80 nesting boxes during the last four years!
- « Continue to schedule and organize educational presentations
- « Install Purple Martin nesting boxes at Chapman's Pond
- « Develop a restoration plan for Bird Island on Orange Lake in collaboration with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission
- « Continue monitoring Chimney Swift nesting locations

## Haven Hospice Bird Feeders

Alachua Audubon Society continues to provide bird seed so Jean Kaufman can maintain 18 bird feeding stations for the patients, families, and

staff at Haven Hospice to enjoy. Realizing the joy Jean's mother derived from watching the birds while spending her last days at Haven Hospice, Jean began this work to continue the program that her mother so enjoyed. We have received very positive feedback from the families and staff regarding how comforting it is to watch the birds feeding, especially during the high stress time when family and friends are patients at Haven Hospice. Alachua Audubon is spending approximately \$300 per year to supply the bird seed and we are looking for a few donations—ideally 6 donations at \$50 each—to cover the cost of this service. If you would like to donate to a cause that helps both Haven Hospice and the birds, please consider sending a donation to help cover the bird seed. Please send a check made payable to Alachua Audubon to our treasurer, Dotty Robbins at 25125 NW 210th Lane High Springs, FL 32543. Please indicate "Hospice Bird Seed" on the check.

## Who Is This?

In 1920 an eleven year old boy joined the Junior Audubon Club, a program of the National Association of Audubon Societies, which was being formed by his teacher, Miss Hornbeck. He signed an oath to "learn all he could about the wild birds and to be kind to them and protect them." He paid 10 cents to become an Audubon member and to receive a set of color bird pictures and informational materials. Who was this? Why, Roger Tory Peterson!

Could you help Alachua Audubon provide classroom sets of environmental material produced by National Audubon which are designed specifically for elementary school children? The **Audubon Adventures Kits** provide material to engage children in lessons about nature and the environment. Please consider sponsoring an **Audubon Adventure Kit** for children for a local classroom. The cost is \$46. If you are interested in being a sponsor please contact Emily Schwartz at [emilysgfl@gmail.com](mailto:emilysgfl@gmail.com) or 372-0754. Or send a check made payable to Alachua Audubon to our treasurer, Dotty Robbins at 25125 NW 210th Lane High Springs, FL 32543. Please indicate "Audubon Adventure" on the check.

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July-August 2011

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