



# The Crane

Volume 52 Number 4 March —April 2011

## March and April Field Trips

**Saturday, March 12, 8:00 a.m.**

### **Hatchet Creek Tract**

Meet trip leader Adam Kent at the Hatchet Creek Tract on State Road 26 (parking lot is on the left, 1.9 miles east of the flashing light at the junction of 26 and County Road 222). Hatchet Creek is the northernmost section of the Newnans Lake Conservation Area and includes over 2,000 acres of mainly pinewoods and creek bottom. By mid-March, pinewoods residents like Pine Warbler, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Carolina Chickadee, Common Yellowthroat, Eastern Towhee, and newly-arrived Yellow-throated Vireos should be singing and even nesting. A rare Hairy Woodpecker was seen at this time last year. Wear comfortable shoes and bring water – it's a long hike! Difficulty: 3

**Sunday, March 20, 8:00 a.m.**

### **O'Leno State Park**

Meet trip leader Craig Parenteau at the High Springs Winn-Dixie on US-441 to carpool to the park, which has a \$5.00 per vehicle admission fee (\$4.00 single-occupant vehicle). The park should be beautiful, with lots of spring greenery and wildflowers (possibly including wild azaleas). Your chances of a Vireo Grand Slam – White-eyed, Blue-headed, Yellow-throated, and Red-eyed, all singing – should be quite good. Diff: 2

**Saturday, March 26, 8:00 a.m.**

### **Morningside Nature Center – CLEP\***

Meet City Naturalist Geoff Parks at the Morningside parking lot. MNC contains more than seven miles of trails that wind through sandhills, flatwoods, cypress

domes, and habitat restoration areas. We might be just close enough to April to see newly-arrived Summer Tanagers and Great Crested Flycatchers, but the resident breeders – Pine Warblers, Eastern Towhees, Brown-headed Nuthatches, and Red-headed Woodpeckers – should be busy singing and building nests. Difficulty: 2

**Sunday, April 3, 7:30 a.m.**

### **Ocala National Forest**

Meet trip leader Bob Simons in the Sweetbay parking lot at the corner of SW 20th Avenue and SW 34th Street. Bob knows pine forests better than almost anyone, and he's a great guide to the longleaf sandhills and scrub of this marvelous 383,000-acre remnant of aboriginal Florida. Birdwise, we'll hope to see Florida Scrub-Jay, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Bachman's Sparrow, and Swallow-tailed Kite. Difficulty: 1 or 2

**Saturday, April 9, 7:30 a.m.**

### **Prairie Creek Lodge – CLEP\***

Meet trip leader Ivor Kincaide at Powers Park. Ivor is the land manager for the Alachua Conservation Trust, which concluded the purchase of the Lodge and the surrounding property in 2009. We'll walk the trails through upland oak woods, swampy edges, and the borders of Prairie Creek, looking for such neotropical migrants as Prothonotary Warbler, Northern Parula, Yellow-throated Warbler, and Blue Grosbeak. Difficulty: 2

*(Field Trip Descriptions Continued on Page 4)*

**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  
May-June Crane:  
Apr. 15<sup>th</sup>**

## **Around The County...**

**By Mike Manetz**

Once the Christmas Count is in the record books and most of the rare and unusual birds have been accounted for, many birders are content to hunker down for winter's latter-half and wait for spring's new arrivals. But for our most devoted and hard-core bird hounds, January and February mean the start of a new year,

a fresh beginning, and more importantly, a new list; and so back into the swamps, forests, and fields we go!

Some of our early winter rarities remained with us through at least February. The Ross's Goose at the Beef Teaching Unit and the Brown Creeper at San Felasco County Park were enjoyed by many after the first of the year. With at least six of each, we had more Winter Wrens and Fox Sparrows than any other winter in recent memory. Still more remarkable was the number of Rusty Blackbirds wintering with us. According to the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, the population of Rusty Blackbirds has plummeted by more than ninety percent over the last forty years. In the nearly twenty years I have been birding in Alachua County I don't know anyone who has ever seen more than a few at a time, and in some years they are not reported here at all. During this December's Christmas Count, Michael Meisenburg observed an astonishingly large flock of at least 120 Rusty Blackbirds foraging actively in a neighborhood off NW 43rd Street. Caleb Gordon counted at least 33 on February 1st in the Loblolly Woods along Eighth Avenue. Phil Laipis and Lloyd Davis discovered a probable roost site in a wooded swamp behind Magnolia Park near NW 39th Ave. and 43rd Street. It was there on Feb. 9 that Chip Deutsch counted 92 Rusty Blackbirds. These sightings were likely constituents of the same flock Michael Meisenburg first discovered; still, why should so many endangered blackbirds choose to winter within Gainesville city limits instead of some remote, inaccessible swamp? It's anyone's guess, but it certainly highlights the value of preserving our urban wetlands.

Two of our sharpest ear-birders reported notable fly-overs. Andy Kratter heard an Evening Grosbeak over his yard December 30, the first report of that species in the county in over twenty years. Caleb Gordon noted the call of our first Pine Siskin of the year on January 4. By the end of January, Pine Siskins were becoming more obvious and widespread. Lloyd Davis was checking feeders in a neighborhood off 43rd St. January 31 and tallied 20 of them. The yard of Adam and Gina Kent was a "hot" spot this winter, with as many as three Summer Tanagers and a Northern Parula hanging about; both species are common in summer but rare in winter. Likewise, an Indigo Bunting showed up at (Continued on Page 3)



## Around the County (continued from Page 2)

Ron Robinson's feeders on February first.

There were some interesting reports from Payne's Prairie Basin. John Martin found an Ash-throated Flycatcher January 15 along La Chua trail. Despite an extreme drop in water levels at Alachua Lake in January, one or two Snow Geese were seen repeatedly, and White Pelicans began to show up in large numbers, with over 300 by the end of the month. With heavy rain in early February the lake level came up, bringing hundreds of ducks back as well.

The first returning Purple Martin was seen behind George's Hardware at the end of January. By the time this issue of the Crane goes to print our breeding Northern Parulas will be singing on their territories and Ruby-throated Hummingbirds will be just arriving. As the old rock anthem by Journey says, "wheel in the sky keeps on turning". Thanks to those who shared their sightings through February 11, 2011.

There are still spaces for the Birds and Conservation Tour in Costa Rica this June. If you've ever had the urge to explore the world of tropical birding, or have not experienced birding the beautiful rainforests of Costa Rica, this is a great opportunity. Please check the website and feel free to contact me for more info and bird lists. [www.birdsandconservation.weebly.com](http://www.birdsandconservation.weebly.com)

## Proposed Closing of State Parks

A couple of months ago the FL Department of Environmental Protection proposed closing 53 State Parks in response to the state budget crisis. Although the Governor said he wants the parks to remain open, his budget cuts will greatly reduce the funding to manage the parks. This may well stimulate additional proposals for closing parks.

On behalf of Alachua Audubon, we ask that none of Florida's State Parks be closed. The state park that was proposed to be closed in this area that we are most concerned about is San Felasco Hammock Preserve. This 7,000 acre park was purchased in 1974 to protect a vulnerable area of the Floridan aquifer; protect important wildlife, archeological, and geological areas; and provide high quality outdoor recreation. Because of the complex geology, San Felasco Hammock contains numerous surface drainage systems that flow,

unfiltered into sinkholes. Beneath the surface is a complex cave system that recharges a vulnerable aquifer system that could become polluted if not well protected. Additionally, San Felasco Hammock supports a wide diversity of habitats and land forms that provide high quality wildlife habitat and high recreational value. Hikers, bird watchers, long distance runners, mountain bikers, and equestrians enjoy the many miles of trails at San Felasco Hammock.

The visitor revenue taken in by the park covers the operation budget at San Felasco Hammock. Thus, closing the park will save little if any money, but will hurt the local economy because about 50,000 visitors visit the park every year, many from out of state. For example, two men from Poland came to Gainesville a few years ago to visit this park because it is similar to the forest in Poland where they work. They spent about a week at a local motel, ate their meals at local restaurants, and shopped at local stores. The fees they paid to the park were a few dollars each day. The money they spent in the local economy exceeded \$100 per day. Of course, there is much more at stake than economics. These parks were bought for many reasons—environmental protection, recreational value, and wildlife habitat.

Closing parks to improve the budget situation for state government will hurt Florida's tourist industry, reduce profits for Florida business owners, and ultimately reduce revenues for the state government. Clearly, the state government needs to operate on a balanced budget, but the places to cut should be chosen carefully so that Florida's economy, our recreational opportunities, and ultimately our quality of life are not damaged.

Bob Simons

## 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>



## Field Trips (Continued from Page 1)

**Sunday, April 10, 7:30 a.m.**

**San Felasco Hammock (north entrance)**

Meet trip leader Mike Manetz at the tag agency on NW 34th Street near the Highway Patrol Station to carpool to the park (\$4.00 per vehicle parking fee). San Felasco was recently proposed for closure, and since Alachua Audubon spearheaded the effort to buy it in 1974 we're especially interested in showing everyone what a beautiful place it is. We'll follow a trail along Lee Pond and Cellon Creek, looking for woodland-nesting species and spring migrants. Difficulty: 3

**Saturday, April 16, 8:00 a.m.**

**Mill Creek Nature Preserve – CLEP\***

Meet at the tag agency on NW 34th Street near the Highway Patrol Station. Mill Creek was the first Alachua County Forever purchase, and trip leader Michael Drummond, a county biologist, will show you why the property was such a high priority. You'll see the southernmost population of American Beech trees, and we hope to encounter such deep-woods birds as Hooded Warbler and Acadian Flycatcher. Difficulty: 2 or 3

**Sunday, April 17, 8:00 a.m.**

**Watermelon Pond Wildlife Area**

Meet FWC biologist Norberto Fernandez in the Jonesville Publix parking lot (corner of Newberry Road and County Road 241). This large complex of upland woodlands, grasslands, and marshy ponds recently received a 1300-acre addition specifically for conservation of Sherman's Fox Squirrels and Gopher Tortoises. We'll be watching for those, as well as for upland birds like Common Ground-Dove, Eastern Meadowlark, Northern Bobwhite, and the threatened Southeastern American Kestrel. Difficulty: 2

**Saturday, April 23, 8:00 a.m.**

**Ft. DeSoto County Park**

Meet trip leader John Hintermister at the Ft. DeSoto visitor center in St. Petersburg. This is one of Florida's top migrant traps, and if the migrants cooperate (always a gamble) you can see

20 species of warblers not to mention tanagers, grosbeaks, buntings, thrushes, and cuckoos. Even if migrants don't show, there are plenty of shorebirds, and such coastal specialties as Reddish Egret and Magnificent Frigatebird. Difficulty: 1

**Sunday, April 24, 8:00 a.m.**

**San Felasco Hammock (south entrance)**

Meet trip leader Steve Hofstetter at San Felasco's Millhopper Road parking lot (\$4.00 per vehicle parking fee). Sandhills, meandering streams, forested slopes, and sinkholes set the stage for the diversity of birds we hope to find, such as Yellow-throated and Red-eyed Vireos, Hooded Warbler, Acadian Flycatcher, and the locally-rare Wood Thrush. Difficulty: 2

**Saturday, April 30, 8:00 a.m.; La Chua Trail**

Meet trip leader Caleb Gordon at the La Chua trailhead (\$2.00 per person admission). Paynes Prairie will be alive with wildflowers and birds at the end of April. Summer residents like Purple Gallinule, Least Bittern, Indigo Bunting, Orchard Oriole, and Yellow-billed Cuckoo will be the main attractions, and if the water levels are right we might find Black-necked Stilts and migrant shorebirds. Bring water and sunscreen. Diff: 3

**Sunday, May 1, 6:30 a.m.**

**Cedar Key**

Meet trip leader Rex Rowan in the Target parking lot on Archer Road at I-75. The emphasis on this trip will be migrants – mainly warblers and shorebirds. We'll also look for some uncommon and/or coastal nesting species: Gray Kingbird, Swallow-tailed Kite, and possibly Short-tailed Hawk. Some people stick around after the trip for lunch. Difficulty: 1

*\*Conservation Lands Educational Program (CLEP) is designed to bring attention to local land conservation efforts. These trips are conducted on properties purchased to protect natural resources and will be led by a representative who will discuss ecological features and history. CLEP trips will be educational experiences, so the emphasis will be on much more than birding.*



## Spring 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 spring course in Field Bird Identification. The next class starts April 9th and concludes through April 30th. 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 \$49 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 March 16th.

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.



Photo of Bob Simons with his just-installed kestrel nesting box. Photo taken by Susan Sommerville.

## Would You Like to Receive the Crane Electronically?

You now have the option of receiving the Crane Newsletter electronically rather than a mailed paper copy. Just notify us at [AAS-thecrane@att.net](mailto:AAS-thecrane@att.net). 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 AAS 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](mailto:AAS-thecrane@att.net). In the subject line put the word Newsletter. Please include your name and address. 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.

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.

## Volunteer Spotlight

Bob Simons and Susan Sommerville repaired Eastern Bluebird boxes at Dudley Farms in preparation for the upcoming nesting season. Bob Simons also continues to install Southeastern American Kestrel nesting boxes in appropriate kestrel nesting habitat in hopes of increasing the nesting success of this important and dwindling small falcon. Thanks volunteers!



## Christmas Bird Count for Kids

On January 16, 2011, kids of all ages gathered in the Millpond Clubhouse for some pizza they had truly earned. All morning the kids, accompanied by an adult experienced in birding, had been birding in groups, trying to spot every last bird in Gainesville that they could. The teams each covered different ponds or forests around town from the moment they woke up till noon. "It's a joy to share birding and the Christmas Bird Count tradition with my children and their friends," said Caleb Gordon, one of the parents accompanying the kids.

The Audubon Christmas Bird Count takes place every year in America, but kids are mostly excluded from it. So now we have the Christmas Bird Count for kids. This is Gainesville's third year having it, and even though it's not big, everyone enjoys themselves very much.

This year we tallied a total of 94 species with all the groups! With only 24 kids, that's pretty impressive! We got many common birds, but a few rare ones, such as a Limpkin, Northern Flicker, and Greater Scaup.

Lily Gordon (13 years old)



Photograph (from left to right) of Libbe Greenberg, Hannah Friske, Lily Gordon, Alexis Greenberg, Ethan George, and Phoebe Gordon.

## Speakers Corner

Dr. Dana Griffin will present a program on **Toxic Plants on March 16th at 7:00 p.m. in the Millhopper Library.** Humans are virtually never the target of plant poisons and yet we often seem to wind up on the target list. Learn to recognize local toxic plants, how to avoid them, and how to deal with the consequences if and when treatment is available.

Why save the Whooping Crane and the Florida Panther? Conservation biologist and writer Joe Roman gives an illustrated talk on **April 26 at 7:00 p.m. in the Millhopper Library** on how the extinction of species matters to our health, cultural, spiritual well-being, and local economy. He will discuss the value of the Endangered Species Act, an unprecedented attempt at a zero-tolerance law that allows for no new extinctions. He will sign his new book "Listed: Dispatches from America's Endangered Species Act." after his talk.

Mark your calendar for these very interesting programs!

## 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](mailto:helenkwarren@cox.net), subject line Volunteer for Spring Garden Festival, or call 352-214-7755.



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### **Audubon Academy**

The Audubon Academy will be held March 18-20 at the Paramount Plaza in Gainesville. Please consider getting more involved with an Audubon chapter and register for this years gathering. Workshops will provide opportunities to meet other chapter leaders, share ideas for involvement and get connected to a great community. Go to [www.audubonofflorida.org](http://www.audubonofflorida.org) to get more info and download your registration.

### **Community Calendar**

Mar 5 and Apr 2 Sierra Club *Ardisia* pull, San Felasco Hammock <http://florida.sierraclub.org/ssj/>

Mar 8 NABA (N. American Butterfly Assoc.) meeting <http://www.naba.org/chapters/nabancf/Events.htm>

Mar 15 and Apr 19 Native Plant Society meeting <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Paynes-Prairie-Chapter-of-FNPS/124351387638422>

Mar 26 Florida Black Bear Festival, Umatilla <http://www.umatillachamber.org/BlackBearFest/index.htm>

Mar 26 & 27 Kanapaha Botanical Gardens Spring Garden Festival (Come visit our Booth!)

Apr 9 Fanning Springs Garden Festival, Fanning Springs <http://fanningspringsgardenfestival.com/>

Apr 28-May 1 Florida Birding & Fotofest, St. Augustine <http://foridasbirdingandphotofest.com/>

### **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!"



## AAS 50th Anniversary Celebration

A heartfelt thank you to the many hard-working members of Alachua Audubon Society (AAS) who made our 50th Anniversary Celebration such a happy success on January 15th at the Prairie Creek Lodge, just south of Paynes Prairie.

Following a morning of birding trips around Paynes Prairie, more than 50 people met for appetizers and hot drinks at the Lodge, a spacious, 3-story log structure owned by the Alachua Conservation Trust (ACT) and perfect for big events. Laid out around the periphery of the main hall were exhibits and photographs, the CRANE newsletter, and newspaper clippings illustrating our Audubon activities over the years. Most of the photographs were from Frank Meade's collection. Frank has been our historian and photographer for many years.

After a catered barbecue lunch, Ivor Kincaid, AAS and ACT member, described the purpose of ACT and acquisition of the Lodge and surrounding land. John Hintermister, the sole surviving charter member of AAS, then described his long and colorful birding career, and entertained us with stories from his early birding days. Rex Rowan presented a more historical view of people and activities that have helped shaped AAS's existence and the important accomplishments in our first half-century. Some of AAS's important predecessors include Helen Hood, Marjorie Carr, David Anthony and their legacy to halt the Cross Florida Barge Canal and also to secure the purchase of land that is now San Felasco State Park. Helen Warren, AAS President, then spoke about plans for the coming half-century and the opportunities for AAS.

After the official meeting ended, many folks stayed to visit with old friends, help with cleanup, explore the property, and go birding! We had a great time, and some wondered why we don't get together more often.

Martha King, Alachua Audubon Historian

## Congratulations to John Hintermister

John Hintermister will receive an award from the Alachua Conservation Trust (ACT) on Friday, March 18th for his charter membership with the Alachua Audubon Society and for his many years of involvement in community conservation activities. Join us to congratulate John at the 2011 Conservation Stewards Awards Ceremony & Banquet at the Prairie Creek Lodge. There will be a social hour, swamp boil dinner, silent auction, and lots of musical entertainment. Contact ACT for tickets.



Photograph of Key and Astrid Scales dancing at the AAS 50-Year Anniversary Celebration with Bubba Scales observing the dance. Photograph by Helen Warren. (If you receive the Crane electronically you can view this photograph in color).



Alachua Audubon Society  
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*The Crane*  
Mar—Apr 2011

## Audubon Academy

March 18-20  
Paramount Plaza in Gainesville

Go to [www.audubonofflorida.org](http://www.audubonofflorida.org) to  
get more info and  
download a registration form

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