



# The Crane

Volume 54 Number 5 May-June 2012

## May Field Trips and Program

*These are the last four Audubon-sponsored fieldtrips of the season.*

### **Saturday, May 11, 8:00 a.m. La Chua Trail**

Meet trip leader Adam Kent at the trailhead on Camp Ranch Road to search for Yellow-breasted Chat, Indigo Bunting, Blue Grosbeak, and other prairie-dwelling birds.

### **Saturday, May 18, TBA Backwaters of Cedar Key with Captain Doug Maple**

Join this veteran backwater guide on a canopied pontoon boat ride into some of the better known shore-bird haunts of the Cedar Key area. Tidewater Tour owners offer a special Alachua Audubon price of \$25.00 per person for this trip. Call Wild Birds Unlimited [352-381-1997] to reserve a spot and for details.

### **Sunday, May 19, TBA Butterflies with Jaret Daniels**

The guide for this Alachua Audubon special event will be Jaret Daniels, Assistant Director of Research at the McGuire Center for Lepidoptera and Biodiversity and author of Adventure Publication's Butterflies of Florida. Destination depends upon current conditions. Call Wild Birds Unlimited [352-381-1997] to reserve a spot or for more details.

### **Saturday, May 25, 8:00 a.m. Longleaf Flatwoods Reserve (CLEP)**

Meet trip leader Michael Drummond at the Longleaf Flatwoods Reserve. Birds that are likely to be encoun-

tered include Bachman's Sparrow, Indigo Bunting, Blue Grosbeak, Northern Bobwhite, Eastern Wood Pewee, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Red-headed Woodpecker, and others. Directions: east on Hawthorne Road to CR 325. Right (south) on CR 325 for roughly 2 miles. Preserve will be on right (west) side of CR 325. Bring bug spray, sunscreen, and water.

*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.*

## Speakers Corner

**Tuesday, May 14, 7:00 p.m. Cuba and Cultural Exchange**—Adam Kent and Joni Ellis will entertain us with photographs and descriptions of their recent cultural exchange trip to Cuba where they saw a wide variety of endemics and migrants and met with conservation professionals who manage some of the world's most special places. Millhopper Library, 3145 NW 43rd St., Gainesville.

**Saturday, May 25, 2:00 p.m. Enhance Your Photography**—Erika Simons will share tricks and tips for enhancing nature photography in the backyard and using Photoshop to make your photos look unstaged. Millhopper Library, 3145 NW 43rd St., Gainesville.

**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 National Audubon dues. See back page for subscription information. Submissions to *The Crane* are welcomed.

**Deadline for  
July-Aug Crane:  
June 15<sup>th</sup>**



Bird enthusiasts always have the distinct pleasure of marking spring much earlier than the general public. For instance, Caleb Gordon reported our first returning Purple Martins January 26. By February 15 Northern Parulas seemed to be everywhere. Ron Robinson spotted a couple of extra-early Swallow-

tailed Kites over his house February 21. Pat Burns noted a small flock of returning Barn Swallows February 25 in Alachua. Our first Louisiana Waterthrush was found March 2 along Cellon Creek at San Felasco Progress Center. On March 8 Debra Segal discovered an early but dead Chuck-wills-widow along Sweetwater Dike. It had been partially plucked by its predator. There were several reports of late winter American Redstarts, but I think one Jonathan Mays found April 2 near the new Sheet Flow project on Payne's Prairie may have been our first returning Redstart of spring.

Barr Hammock continues to show promise as a great new birding site. Jonathan Mays, who found a wintering Least Flycatcher along the loop earlier in winter, discovered a nice shorebird spot with Pectoral Sandpipers. Adam Zions visited the area on March 16 and found two LeConte's Sparrows. A pair of Hairy Woodpeckers was reported March 7 in a small section of sandhill at Longleaf Flatwoods Preserve. This species is a year-round resident of the county but is rarely seen here and its habits are not well known. Hopefully we will be able to locate and monitor a nest of this pair.

Out on Paynes Prairie, several of our rare winter visitors persisted into early spring. Apparently there was more than one White-faced Ibis at the end of La Chua Trail. Adam Zions noticed one in nearly full adult plumage around the same time Lloyd Davis had photographed the immature/non-breeding plumaged individual that had been seen through the winter. During mid-March, a flock of four Snow Geese appeared and were reported by several birders. As spring progressed, three Whooping Cranes were easily seen, much to the delight of both local and out-of-town birders. Also, Black-necked Stilts returned, and will likely attempt to nest if water levels remain stable.

The Ewing family has been keeping track of birds in the Watermelon Pond area of SW Alachua County, and they have consistently come up with interesting sightings. One outstanding example was a Cliff Swallow photographed March 26 by Sam Ewing. There were some interesting feeder birds in late winter. Rachel Rocke had a male Western Tanager coming to feed on bark butter at her home near Alachua.. Rachel also had visits from multiple Painted Buntings. A Rose-breasted Grosbeak continued in the (continued on page 3)

## June Challenge Is Almost Here!

The Tenth Annual June Challenge will run from June 1st through June 30th. The Challenge is a friendly competition originated by Alachua Audubon's Becky Enneis in 2004 in order to get us outside where we belong. The goal is to see as many species of birds in Alachua County as you can during June. It's a competition because the desire to win, or at least beat your last year's total, will motivate you to go birding, but we don't take that aspect too seriously.

June is a month that most birders spend indoors, and consequently it's largely terra incognita as far as bird movements are concerned. In 2004, the first year we did it, we were amazed to find several locally-rare tern species on Newnans Lake, and in 2006 we found a Snail Kite on Paynes Prairie; obviously we wouldn't have known about any of those birds if we'd stayed indoors. Who knows what might be out there this year? If you're interested in joining us, here are the rules:

1. Only birds seen in Alachua County during the month of June may be counted. (Those of you living in other counties are encouraged to do June Challenges there too, and to report the results to me at the email address below when it's over. You folks in Gilchrist, Marion, and Columbia Counties may find yourselves discovering new birding spots.

2. Heard birds do not count; you've got to see those Chuck-will's-widows and Eastern Screech Owls.

3. You are free to put Muscovy Ducks, retention-pond Mallards, and Whooping Cranes on your list.

That's simple, isn't it? Now here are a few tips: Do as much birding as possible during the first half of the month. You're more likely to see lingering spring migrants that way. Purple Martins, Northern Rough-winged Swallows, and Orchard Orioles may complete their nesting and leave before the month's end, so get them early too. But don't neglect the last few days of the month either, because they've produced early fall-migrant Louisiana Waterthrush, Black-and-white

Warbler, and Lesser Yellowlegs.

Make several visits to Newnans Lake and other large bodies of water to scan for gulls, terns, and pelicans, which may come and go on a daily basis. Go to Longleaf Flatwoods Reserve for Bachman's Sparrows and San Felasco Hammock for Hooded Warblers. There are over 100 species possible here in June. The first and last few hours of daylight are best. Birds tend to sing early in the morning.

Good luck to all of you who decide to join us! In the spirit of good sportsmanship, let me know ([rexrowan@gmail.com](mailto:rexrowan@gmail.com)) when you see an unexpected bird so I can pass the word. Don't keep it a secret - as I say, it's a *friendly* competition based on our shared enthusiasm for birding rather than a desire to come in first.

And of course follow the progress of the Challenge at <http://www.alachuaudubon.org/>

By Rex Rowan

**Around the County** (continued from page 2)  
yard of Shirley Lassiter, while a very rare Buff-bellied Hummingbird appeared and was photographed in the yard of Yvonne Frederick. A Red-breasted Nuthatch continued to be a regular visitor to the feeders of Felicia Lee and Glenn Price.

We still have room for a couple more people on our Birds and Conservation tour in Costa Rica June 17-25. I will be doing much of the bird guiding, and we will have some Costa Rican guides as well, including a naturalist who will help us with plants and other wildlife. This is the third time we have made this trip. It has been a wonderful experience for all who have attended, so if you are thinking about it please let me know as soon as possible ([Mmanetz@yahoo.com](mailto:Mmanetz@yahoo.com)). The day-by-day itinerary and details can be found at [www.birdsandconservation.weebly.com](http://www.birdsandconservation.weebly.com)

Thanks to those who shared their sightings through April 6, 2013

## Chimney Swift Alert

Chimney Swifts are small, about five inches long, cigar-shaped black birds with slender pointed wings. They are the only swift species that we have here in the eastern U.S. These birds migrate from Chile, South America to breed and raise their young here in the states. They scout for nesting places during March but because of habitat destruction, the large tree cavities and rock crevices used as nesting sites are largely gone. The only alternative that they have is to use human structures such as buildings and chimneys.

We encourage everyone to leave a safe nesting site open for Chimney Swifts. If you have a stone or brick fireplace keep the top open and the damper to the flue closed from March through September. The parents and young will be long gone before you start any fires. If you don't have a damper, place a large piece of foam rubber into the opening to seal it. This will prevent the adults from flying into the house. During heavy rains the humidity weakens the nest of young swifts and may cause it to fall. The damper (or foam) will stop the fall and the parents will continue feeding the chicks as they cling to the wall of the chimney.

You will know if you have Chimney Swifts by the chattering you will hear in the chimney every time the parents fly in to feed the babies. You will also observe their aerial acrobatics as the adults and fledglings feed around your house. Either early March or October is the time to get your chimney cleaned. This will keep your fireplace safe for you and provide a better surface for Chimney Swift nests to adhere to. If you have a metal chimney PLEASE make sure it is capped properly. Any animal that enters a metal flue will fall to the bottom and be unable to climb the slippery walls.

From Florida Wildlife Care

## Chimney Swifts are Back!

The arrival of spring is marked with the return of many summer avian residents. Chimney Swifts are just one of those species that spend the summer half of their year here in Florida. Chimney Swifts arrived in my neighborhood during the last week of March and announced their arrival with their characteristic call. Each year a colony of Chimney Swifts returns to my neighbor's chimney, which they use for their summer roost site. While this colony is lucky to have this roost site to return to each year, many colonies are losing structures as homeowners close access to their chimneys.

Alachua Audubon is exploring options to build a Chimney Swift roosting structure. This type of structure will contribute to the conservation of these day time insect eaters while also providing a wonderful learning experience for school groups. With bats feeding on insects at night and Chimney Swifts feeding on insects during the day, we are receiving 24 hours of pest control.

If you have a colony of Chimney Swifts in your home or neighborhood, take a moment to notice the number of swifts overhead. See if the size of the colony grows as summer progresses. Can you locate the roost? Although Chimney Swifts are challenging to census, the best way to count them is when they enter the roost just after sunset.

Many communities have a 'Swift Night Out' in late August or mid September and survey the number of Chimney Swifts in local roosts. If you have a roost to report, send an email to [helenkwarren@cox.net](mailto:helenkwarren@cox.net) with "chimney swifts" noted in the subject line. If you would like to meet at one of the local large roosts or would like more information on Chimney Swifts, send a note in your email with your request. This type of gathering can be fun for the whole family!

By Helen Warren



## Neighborhood Nestwatch is Back

The summer months are fast approaching, which means that the Smithsonian Institution's Neighborhood Nestwatch program crew members are getting ready to visit your backyards for the coming season! We are looking to revisit those of you whom we were able to work with last year. We are also accepting new volunteers who are itching to know more about their backyard birds.

The Smithsonian Institution of Washington D.C. founded Neighborhood Nestwatch 12 years ago. This project spans across the East Coast and aims to determine how backyard bird populations are coping with urbanization. It also aims to educate the public about wildlife and the scientific process. As scientists working for the program, we seek citizen participants in the Gainesville area or close to city limits who are interested in learning first-hand about the common birds found in their backyard.

We will arrive at your home early in the morning (7:00 a.m. at the latest) and conduct a census and nest search. We will also conduct a resighting effort if we were able to visit you in the past. We will then set up nets, catch birds, record data, and band them. This process will last 3-4 hours at the most, and we encourage you to come out and see what we're doing. However, if you are unavailable to join us, that is perfectly fine. As a participant, you will be given a copy of the species of birds banded in your yard along with the color band combinations. We then ask you to keep your eyes peeled and report your observations of color-banded birds captured and released in your yard as well as the nests found and monitored!

This year, the second year of the program, visits will begin mid-April and go until mid-July. If you or someone you know is interested in being a part of this fun, hands-on project, feel free to contact us at any time to find out more information.

Julie Perreau

561-715-3280

[gainesvilleneastwatch@gmail.com](mailto:gainesvilleneastwatch@gmail.com)

[julieperreau@ufl.edu](mailto:julieperreau@ufl.edu)

## Rescued Owl Chicks

Blustery winds swept through Alachua County on March 6th. Around noon, my parents, Mike and Martha Sue Hill, discovered that a large nest had blown out of an oak tree next to their house, and lying next to the nest was a Great Horned Owl chick covered in gray downy feathers. Leslie Straub, with Florida Wildlife Care, quickly responded to my call and met me at the Hill's farm next to Paynes Prairie. Leslie examined the fallen chick, determined it was uninjured, and assisted us in placing the owl back in the tree. We could also see a second chick still perched in the oak tree. The heavy winds continued, and about two hours later the second owl chick was blown out of the tree. The second owl rescue of the day was carried out by Andi Crisman and me.



After the rescue, the Hills checked on the young owls almost daily. From the living room window, they watched the parents feed the chicks during dusk and dawn. And they noticed the chicks became more active and would climb higher into the tree. About 4 weeks after the rescue, the larger and more mobile Great Horned Owl chicks disappeared, presumably to begin their flight and hunting lessons from their parents. Many thanks to Leslie Straub and Florida Wildlife Care for assisting in the successful rescue of the two Great Horned Owl chicks.

By Debra Segal (Photograph by Erika Simons)

## Speak Out Against Wasteful Fishing Gear

Thanks to concerned citizens from around the United States, more than 320,000 public comments supporting greater protection for severely depleted western Atlantic bluefin tuna have been submitted in the past three years. These comments have pushed the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) to begin developing a new rule that could protect bluefin and other depleted marine life from wasteful surface longline fishing gear.

Surface longlines stretch on average for 30 miles—a length equal to 528 football fields—and dangle hundreds of baited hooks. Bluefin, blue marlin, sea turtles, sharks, and more than 80 other species get caught and killed on this gear. These harmful interactions are of particular concern in the Gulf of Mexico, the only known spawning ground for western Atlantic bluefin tuna. There are other ways to catch yellowfin tuna and swordfish, without killing hundreds of tons of other ocean wildlife.

Now, NOAA Fisheries has the opportunity to prohibit this harmful fishing practice in the Gulf and strictly limit unwanted bluefin mortality in the Atlantic surface longline fishery. These measures can also encourage the transition to other highly selective fishing methods, help protect bluefin and other severely depleted ocean wildlife, and benefit those fishermen who fish responsibly. In addition, restoration funds from the Gulf oil spill can provide fishermen with the resources needed to transition to smaller, more efficient vessels and less wasteful fishing practices.

NOAA Fisheries will release the proposed bluefin rule for public comment during the summer. This comment period is the best opportunity for the public to provide input on the rule. Visit [www.PewEnvironment.org/GulfTuna](http://www.PewEnvironment.org/GulfTuna) or contact [cjaggard@pewtrusts.org](mailto:cjaggard@pewtrusts.org) to learn how you can submit a comment.

By Cameron Jaggard

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Check out the fieldtrip with Tidewater Tours in Cedar Key on May 18th. See Page 1 of this newsletter.



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## Bird Conservation in the Tropics

Ever wonder who manages the birds during winter at the southern end of migration? Optics for the Tropics (OT) is a non-profit that has been supporting and promoting bird conservation in Latin America and the Caribbean since 2001. The main goal is to provide quality new binoculars to ornithologists and field assistants in the wintering grounds. This basic equipment allows enthusiastic field staff to monitor bird populations, observe new nesting sites, and watch the behavior of many birds being studied in the tropics. To date more than 1,200 pairs of binoculars have been donated to nearly 40 countries in the Caribbean and Latin America.

Some of the amazing work that has been done with the equipment donated by OT includes discovery of new nest sites for the Harpy Eagle that expands the range of this bird, rediscovery of the Cuban Kite thought to be extirpated, and observation of Cerulean Warbler in the wintering grounds to learn the threats causing the serious decline in population of this bird. Chris Rimmer, Director of Vermont Center for Ecostudies, led a field expedition that discovered the Bicknell's Thrush in Haiti with binoculars donated by OT. This bird was believed to only occur in the Dominican Republic due to deforestation issues in Haiti. There are many heartfelt stories surrounding the donation of binoculars to projects that are changing what we know about birds.

On a recent trip to Colombia, Joni Ellis, Director of OT, met with University of Bogota graduate students who are doing some amazing work on their own. In addition, they work with local schools to promote bird watching. These professional biologists mentor students in bird identification, inform them about what birds need from their habitat to survive, and identify threats to bird populations. They share monitoring techniques and other field observations in order to inspire these young people to consider a career in conservation biology.

To support their work, OT is partnering with Environment for the Americas (EFTA) to send three bird education kits to Colombia for classrooms. Each kit will contain 10 pairs of binoculars, 10 Spanish field guides, and a host of educational materials from EFTA, the organizers of International Migratory Bird Day. OT's goal this year is to get 10 kits to educational organizations in the tropics. If you would like to support the work of OT, please visit their webpage to make a donation and see some of the projects supported. <http://www.OpticsfortheTropics.org>

By Joni Ellis

*Alachua Audubon would like to thank Joni Ellis and Optics for the Tropics for becoming a new advertiser in the Crane Newsletter.*

## AAS Excels with Signatures!

Thanks to all of you volunteers who helped us collect signatures for Florida's Water and Land Legacy Campaign at the Kanapaha Spring Garden Festival and the Gainesville Downtown Arts Festival. Over 30 volunteers responded to our call for action, and together we collected over 1,000 signed petitions at these two events! Furthermore, Alachua Audubon has collected more signed petitions than any other Audubon group in Florida!

Please keep up the effort and continue to target events to gather more signed petitions. The future of our public lands and natural resources is increasingly threatened. *State funds historically allocated to land conservation and restoration efforts will run dry unless voters pass the Water and Land Conservation Amendment. This amendment will be placed on the 2014 ballot if we can gather enough signed petitions.* We need your help to continue to gather signatures for protection of our public lands. Contact Debbie Segal ([Debbie.segal@gmail.com](mailto:Debbie.segal@gmail.com)) or Emily Schwartz ([emilysgfl@gmail.com](mailto:emilysgfl@gmail.com)) and let us know how you can help.



## Conservation Issues In Hindsight

On the recent (April 6th) Alachua Audubon fieldtrip to the Ocala National Forest, we were delighted to see several clans of Florida Scrub Jays up close. They are common there. Indeed, there are more of Scrub Jays there than anywhere else, by far. It wasn't always so. In the 1960's, it was difficult to find Scrub Jays in the Ocala National Forest. There were only a few barely hanging on at the edges of the sand pine forests, along power lines and roads, and in and around the bombing range. It was only when the managers began selling sand pine for pulp, clear-cutting what was essentially virgin forest in a wilderness, that the Scrub Jays began to recover. It seems odd that clear-cutting and logging in wilderness would be a good thing for conservation. The major conservation organizations spent lots of time and money fighting against clear-cutting, fighting to save wilderness, and fighting to save virgin forests. But, as is often the case, blanket assumptions applied across the varied landscape of reality are rarely appropriate in all cases. And the sand pine scrub here in Florida is one such case. (Other, somewhat similar cases are jack pine forests and lodgepole pine forests.)

The mature sand pine forests that occurred in the Ocala National Forest in the 1960's were an artifact of the interference of people with the fire regime. Prior to the application of fire suppression, the scrub in the Ocala National forest was kept low by severe fires, as is evident both from photos taken in the early part of the twentieth century and from the descriptions of early naturalists in even earlier times. Scrub jays and other scrub endemic species were adapted to this low, open, fire-maintained condition. With fire suppression, these specialized species declined as the forest grew taller and denser. Clear-cutting, so vilified by conservation organizations, saved these species from the disaster of fire suppression by closely mimicking the effects of the fires that were no longer allowed to occur.

The other odd thing about this situation is that the bombing range in the middle of the Ocala National Forest was the main place where the Scrub Jays held out during their population crash. This was because of the frequent fires that the live bombs caused there, some of which burned out into the surrounding forest. Again, conservationists had advocated removing the bombing range from the forest, thinking that this would surely be a good thing to do.

Similarly, at Eglin Air Base in the Florida panhandle, there is a bombing range in the middle of what used to be a large National Forest. There is also what used to be 400,000 acres of longleaf pine sandhill there. The only sandhill that was still in good condition there in the 1980's was the area around the bombing range. This was because the live bombs used there often started fires that burned out beyond the edge of the bombing range into the surrounding forest, increasing the frequency of fire in the sandhill community and adding growing season burning to the strictly winter burn schedule that was being used at the time for prescribed burns.

The lesson is clear. Look before you leap, even if you are only leaping to conclusions.

By Bob Simons



Photograph of Jean Huffman collecting signatures for the Water and Land Legacy Campaign in Bay County. Photograph by Ron Houser.

## Winter Hummingbird Banding Update

We have completed our second most successful winter hummingbird banding season ever in south Alabama, south Georgia, and Florida. This winter, Mary Wilson joined our winter banding team. Fred Dietrich, Mary, and I combined to band 311 hummingbirds. Those include 220 Rufous, 52 Ruby-throated, 21 Black-chinned, 8 Calliopes, 4 Buff-bellied, 2 Allen's, 2 Broad-billed, 1 Broad-tailed, and 1 Costa's. This was the second winter with a large spike in Rufous Hummingbirds which accounted for 70% of our winter birds.

Nine species of hummingbirds were banded this winter, which ties our all time record. The star of the banding season was the second ever Costa's in the eastern US. Fred Dietrich banded that beautiful bird in Tallahassee, which overshadowed the two Broad-billed Hummingbirds he also banded there.

We caught 20 returning hummingbirds banded at or near the same location. Those include nine Rufous back for the second winter, one back for the third winter, and two back for the sixth winter. Two Ruby-throated were back for the second winter, and one each for a third and fourth winter. Two Black-chinned came back for the second winter. Very interesting returns were a male and female Buff-bellied back for the second and fifth winter at Renee and George Gollehon's home in Niceville, FL. That is the same home that previously hosted another Buff-belled for 3 1/2 years.

We had four recaptures of birds that were previously banded at other locations:

- « December 19, 2012 – At Cindy Walker's home in Foley, AL, I recaptured for the second consecutive winter a female Rufous banded July 19, 2011 in Dunster, BC Canada. That is the second longest distance between banding a recapture of a hummingbird, at 2,250 straight line miles.
- « January 5, 2013 – In Tallahassee at the home of Beth Lundsford, Fred Dietrich caught a male Black-chinned banded Febru-

ary 20, 2012 in Destrehan, LA.

- « January 6, 2013 – At the home of Shirley Sandoski in DeFuniak Springs, FL, I caught a male Rufous banded in October, 2012 in Lake Jackson, TX.
- « January 19, 2013 – A bander in Baton Rouge, LA caught a male Rufous that I had previously banded on November 22, 2011 near Magnolia Springs, AL at Charmaine and Tony Peterman's home.

Comparisons with the previous five seasons are:  
07/08 - 156 banded with 38 returns and 6 foreign recaptures  
08/09 - 128 banded with 30 returns and 9 foreign recaptures  
09/10 - 174 banded with 30 returns and 3 foreign recaptures  
10/11 - 172 banded with 34 returns and 5 foreign recaptures  
11/12 - 402 banded with 20 returns and 6 foreign recaptures  
12/13 – 311 banded with 20 returns and 4 foreign recaptures

Only time will tell if the large increase in Rufous Hummingbirds the past two years is here to stay or represents a cyclical pattern. One factor which I think positively affects winter hummingbirds is the continuing rise in the number of people maintaining winter feeders and looking for hummingbirds. Long term continuing research such as our winter banding in the Southeast provides valuable information about hummingbird population cycles and trends. We can only get that data because of the many hosts who allow us to add their very special winter visitors to our research. You can see a gallery of hummingbirds we banded this winter at <http://www.pbase.com/fhound/1213summary>, and all of our updates can be found at <http://www.hummingbirdresearch.net/p54.html>

Thanks for another fun and successful winter season. We look forward to seeing you and your hummers next winter.

By Fred Bassett

## Be Mindful of Wildlife—It's Baby Bird Season!

Spring is here and we have been busy with outside yard work—trimming branches and bushes, and mowing the tall grass. Much of our wildlife is also busy preparing their homes for spring. They are actively looking for mates, establishing territories, and seeking safe areas to raise their young. Young songbirds are snuggled in nests in the hidden places in your yard, in bushes, thickets, palm fronds, vines, crevices, and cavities. Truly wild places are diminishing but suitable nesting habitats still exist and many are right in the middle of developed areas.

Nests are built very quickly once a suitable site is found, and eggs are incubated until the young hatch. After a couple of days the parents roost on a nearby perch to keep an eye on the nest but do not brood them anymore. In many species, the parents both bring food to begging little mouths. Their stealth during feeding increases as the young chicks become more active and vocal so they don't attract predators. They wait until you aren't looking then dart in to feed. Before you know it the young birds are ready to fledge from the nest. Not able to fly for a few days, they follow the parents on the ground through vines and bushes. They learn to hunt for food and exercise their little wings. Woodpecker juveniles should never be on the ground. When they are ready to fledge from the nest cavity they hang on the trunk, flitting up and down the tree until their first flight. Parents don't abandon healthy babies. They diligently tend to the youngsters until they mature. Healthy fledglings have tails that are visible beyond their wingtips and the sheaths that cover the growing feathers are almost gone. Some species like woodpecker and cardinals stay together for months after the young are grown. Urban songbirds easily tolerate human activity. Mockingbirds, Mourning Doves and Northern Cardinals build nest in small trees and shrubs usually below 8 feet. Others, such as Carolina Wrens, Tufted Titmice, Carolina Chickadees,

and Eastern Bluebirds are cavity nesters and nest within 8 feet of the ground. Woodpeckers create their nest cavities above 8 feet in soft wood of dead trees (snags) and limbs. Old cavities are subsequently used by many other cavity nesters like Kestrels, Screech Owls, and flycatchers.

As we continue to reduce prime nesting habitat, the only place these nesting birds have left is our yards and the greenways through our neighborhoods. Making your yard healthier habitat will improve nest success, but we also need to make it safe for the young while they grow. There are many human-related threats that birds face on top of the natural threats. Please remember to keep cats and dogs inside, leave snags and protective brush standing, check for nests before you cut or prune, and don't use chemicals on your yard.

We share the land with many creatures, so take the time to look and listen to the activities around you. Be on the lookout for the abundant bird species that nest in your backyard. You never know what wonders you may witness when you make a safe place for our wild neighbors, and as always - please be mindful of wildlife.

If you observe a young bird that needs assistance, cover it with a towel and scoop it into a box with a lid. Place half the closed box on a heating pad set on low in a quiet place. Contact your local permitted wildlife rehabilitator as soon as possible.

Florida Wildlife Care treats native wildlife throughout 11 counties in north-central Florida, and admits over 1,000 songbirds annually through the 24 hour helpline [352-371-4400](tel:352-371-4400). For more information you can go to [www.floridawildlifecare.org](http://www.floridawildlifecare.org)

By Leslie Straub

*Alachua Audubon wishes to thank Leslie Straub and Florida Wildlife Care for their many wildlife rescues, rehabilitations, and releases. One particular rescue - a pair of Great Horned Owl chicks—is highlighted on Page 5.*

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*  
May-June 2013

### Check Out Our New Website

Visit us at [alachuaaudubon.org](http://alachuaaudubon.org) and peruse the wealth of information posted there, such as up-to-date local birding reports, a schedule of field trips, programs, and classes, a list of Alachua County's best birding sites, a history of birding in Alachua County, info on caring for injured birds, lists of other wildlife that occur in Alachua County, a page of links to other birding and conservation websites, and much more.

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