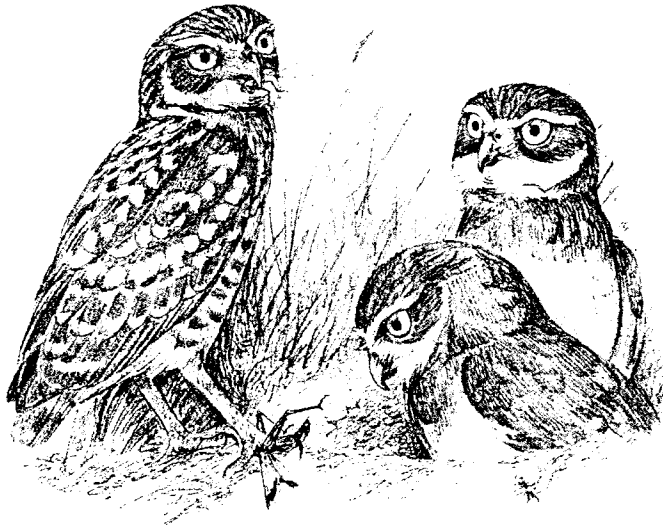




The Crane

Alachua Audubon Society

Volume 40 Number 8, March 1999



Saturday, April 3, 2:00 p.m.
Pamela Bowen speaking on
"Burrowing Owls in Florida"

What's nine inches tall, has feathers, and burrows underground? If you guessed "Burrowing Owl," you're right. Originally restricted to the prairies of the central peninsula, the Florida Burrowing Owl has expanded its range over the last century as forests

have given way to pastures, housing developments, and other open country (it was first noted in Alachua County in 1962). Where are these owls found now, and what threats do they face? Although they are listed as a Species of Special Concern, no census has ever been conducted on them - until now. Pamela Bowen of The Florida Burrowing Owl Project will tell us about her ambitious attempt to map every owl colony in the state. If this unusual and very charming little bird has sparked your curiosity, come and join us for Ms. Bowen's presentation.

Tower Road Branch - Alachua County Library - 3020 SW 75th Street (Tower Road)

NOTE NEW LOCATION: Our usual meeting place, the Millhopper Branch Library, has been temporarily closed for renovations. This month's program meeting will be held at the Tower Road Branch Library, 3020 SW 75th Street (Tower Road).

Other AAS Activities This Month:

-Field Trips-

- Saturday, March 13, 8:00 a.m.
Gum Root Park / Gum Root Swamp
- Saturday, March 27, 8:00 a.m.
San Felasco Hammock State Preserve

See Details on Next Page

-Board Meeting-

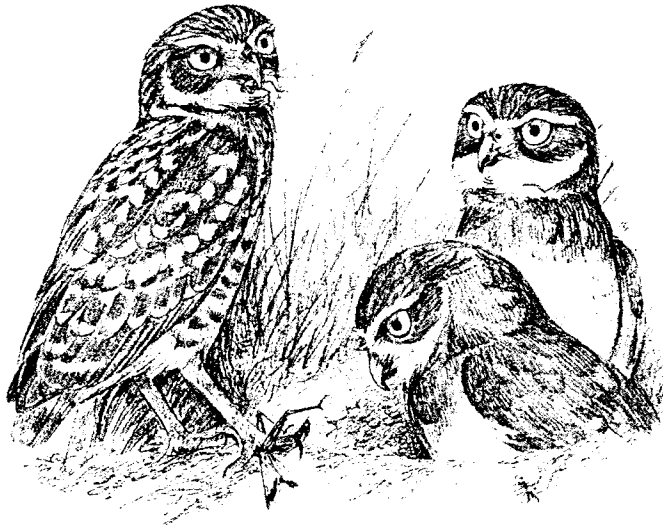
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of Natural History on the UF Campus.
Open to all members and to the public.



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*You are invited to come on these
guided field trips:*

Saturday, March 13, 8:00 a.m.

Gum Root Park / Gum Root Swamp

Meet at the front gate of Morningside Nature Center, on University Avenue two miles east of Waldo Road. We'll be visiting two relatively new city-owned parks: the trail at Gum Root Park leads through oak woodland to a huge field, while that at Gum Root Swamp parallels Hatchet Creek to its outlet at the north end of Newnans Lake. We can expect to see the usual woodland birds, as well as butterflies and wildflowers. Come get acquainted with these lovely but little-known natural areas. We should be finished by lunchtime.

Saturday, March 27, 8:00 a.m.

San Felasco Hammock State Preserve

Meet in the parking lot of the Hunter's Crossing Publix (NW 43rd Street and NW 53rd Avenue) and carpool from there to save the \$2 parking fee. Spring will be a week old, and we'll be looking for some of the earlier arrivals among our nesting birds: Red-eyed and Yellow-throated Vireos should be singing (so should White-eyed and Blue-headed Vireos - it's a very *colorful* group of birds, in name if not in reality), and Hooded Warblers, Summer Tanagers, and Great Crested Flycatchers are also possible. Most of the year-round residents - Pileated and Red-headed Woodpeckers, Carolina Chickadees, and Pine Warblers among others - should be singing and nest-building. With new green leaves on the trees, butterflies nectaring on the spring flowers, and (cross your fingers) balmy early-spring weather, it ought to be a nice morning's walk.

For Year-Round

24-hour AAS Information:

Call SunDial Bird Line: 335-3500, ext. BIRD (2473) for information on field trips, programs, where to see birds, and what's happening in AAS.

Visit AAS Web Site:

<http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/aud/aud.htm>

The Crane is published monthly throughout the year except June and July. 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. Submissions to *The Crane* are welcomed, can be e-mailed or on disk or hard copy and must be received by **March 24** to be included in the April issue. Please limit each article to no more than two pages. Mail or bring your disk or hard copy to Evelyn Perry, The Branch Office, 519 NW 60th St., Suite A, Gville 32607. Or fax to 331-2585. Or e-mail evperry@aol.com.

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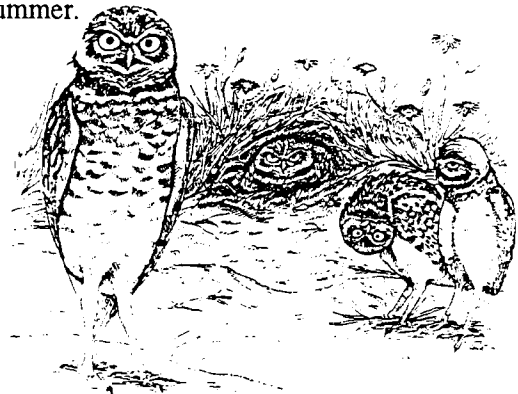
One Step Closer

by David O'Neill

The Paynes Prairie Wildlife Passage System is one step closer to reality. The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) recently completed the engineering plans for the innovative conservation project. The FDOT designed the wildlife passage system to alleviate the tremendous wildlife roadkill that occurs on U.S. 441 where it crosses Paynes Prairie in Alachua County. An estimated 100,000 animals are killed each year on the 2-mile section of highway, making it the deadliest road in Florida for wildlife.

The design includes a series of eight wildlife passages connected to a set of 3.8-foot-high wildlife barriers. The barriers will be built along each side of the highway to prevent animals from gaining access to the road. The top of the barriers will be installed at road level to prevent animals from being trapped on the highway and to preserve the famous vista. Eight wildlife passages will allow animals to travel back and forth across the two sections of prairie divided by the highway.

The system is expected to stem the excessive roadkill and help re-integrate the separated sections of prairie. Construction of the wildlife passage system could begin this summer.



Do you have burrowing owls?

The local birding community is aware of only two Burrowing Owl colonies in this area, both of them between High Springs and Newberry: one is about a mile south of Poe Springs, on the Alachua-Gilchrist county line, the other is a few miles further south, in a rural neighborhood in eastern Gilchrist County.

Do you know of another colony in North Central Florida? There are reports of one near Archer; and quite a lot of western Alachua County looks like suitable habitat. The Burrowing Owl may be more widespread in this region than we think it is.

If you have any information about local owl colonies, please call Rex Rowan at (352) 371-9296. The information will be passed on to Pam Bowen's Florida Burrowing Owl Project; if you contact Rex before April 3, Pam may even come out to look at the colony when she visits Gainesville for the program meeting.

Around the County...

by Mike Manetz

The first sign of spring for birdwatchers in Alachua County is the arrival of **Purple Martins**. They usually arrive at the end of January to begin the new year's nesting cycle, and this year was no exception. Two reports came in on January 26, one from Tusawilia Prairie by out-of towners Bill and Helen Dowling; the other, not surprisingly, came from Lyn Badger, who maintains an elaborate martin condominium on Kanapaha Prairie. A rude surprise awaited the martins that have, for years, nested in the open pipes of the railroad



crossing structure at NW 6th Street and University Avenue. Over the past year the Department of Transportation dismantled the structure, which likely would mean the birds would be forced to compete for limited nesting space elsewhere. Several people expressed concern for the situation, but Gary Appelton did something decisive about it. He wrote an eloquent plea for the donation of a Purple Martin house in a letter to the editor that was featured prominently in the Gainesville Sun, and, as a result of that plea and his further efforts, a new martin house now stands near the corner of that intersection. This just goes to show that the efforts of one person can make a difference. Thank you, Gary.

Another early sign of spring is the arrival **Northern Parulas**. Usually you can begin hearing their zippy little song toward the end of February, but they seemed to arrive well ahead of schedule this year. Andy Kratter saw a pair at Bolen Bluff as early as Feb. 4; while it's possible these were wintering birds, several other people reported Parulas at various locations through the first two weeks of February.

While hunting for sparrows on Jan. 28, Rex Rowan and David Wahl stopped to check the large field of sedge along Waldo Road across from the Gainesville Airport. As they waded through the waist high field, they found, among more common species, a locally rare **Henslow's Sparrow**. The following weekend I checked the field briefly and missed the Henslow's but found lots of **Savannah and Swamp Sparrows**, and two **Grasshopper Sparrows**. Since then the field has been mowed, but John Hintermister checked about a week later and the Henslow's was still there.

A **Lincoln's Sparrow** was discovered by Tampa birder Brian Ahern near Cone's Dike, roughly in front of the Visitor's Center at Paynes Prairie. Brian also thought he caught a glimpse of a **Bewick's Wren** at the same location, but he was not certain of the identification. If confirmed,

this would have been big news, as the declining Bewick's has not been reported here in many years. Several birders checked for it unsuccessfully before it was made clear that the section of mowed path where Brian made his discoveries was off limits and closed to further inspection.

On Feb. 8, Ruth Palinek was observing a large flock of Cedar Waxwings in her yard and spotted among them what she believed was a **Western Tanager**. Unfortunately the bird did not stay around long enough for a detailed look. Unusual species can sometimes be found in large flocks of waxwings. Recall a couple of years ago a Gainesville birder noticed an Evening Grosbeak in a tree full of waxwings and robins.

As far as I know, we have had three wintering hummingbirds in the county. Two of these have been deduced to be *Selasphorus*, most likely the expected Rufous; but the hummer in Dave Beatty's yard seems to be of the genus *Archilochus*. In winter in North Florida, the most likely *Archilochus* is the **Black-chinned Hummingbird**, which has never been officially recorded here in the county. Needless to say, several people are keeping an eye on this bird for the most positive indication of its identity: a purple feather at the base of the throat.

Barbara Muschlitz called Feb. 24 to report a **Black-bellied Whistling Duck** at the flooded section of La Chua Trail. That species, last reported on the Christmas Count, seems to have been present on the basin since at least last summer, though no evidence of nesting has ever been detected.

By the time this issue of *The Crane* reaches your mailbox, Ruby-throated Hummingbirds will be arriving, and each day forward could bring the early arrival of our other neotropical migrants. Now is a good time to brush up on your bird song identification. By early April, the woods will be in gloriously full chorus.

Thanks to those who shared their sightings through February 22, 1999.

Volunteers are needed to man AAS's booth at the Kanapaha Spring Garden Festival on Saturday and Sunday, March 27 and 28. Shifts are usually 1½ to 2 hours duration with two-three people "on duty." It's a good chance to meet the public, talk about birds, birding, and AAS, and give out copies of The Crane. Please call Rex Rowan at 371-9296 if you are interested in helping.

Call for Nominations

It's time again for Alachua Audubon's nominating committee to meet to name candidates for the election of officers and board members at the annual picnic in April. If you are willing to serve or would like to suggest someone who would strengthen our leadership, please contact nominating committee chairman, Martha King at 372-4149.

LEAFS Interpretive Trail

by John Winn

Many readers of *The Crane* are aware of the sad decline of the longleaf pine ecosystem. LEAFS (Longleaf Ecology and Forestry Society) is a nonprofit land trust trying in a small way to reverse that trend by encouraging private landowners to reforest with longleaf pines and use prescribed burning to maintain something approaching a naturally functioning ecosystem. I've been the LEAFS trustee and land manager since 1993.

On a 100 acre tract between Waldo and Orange Heights, LEAFS has a demonstration project showing some ways of restoring longleafs. There is a half-mile self-guiding interpretive trail running through the project; trail users pick up a brochure at the trailhead and stop at numbered stations to read about such topics as prescribed burning, pine flatwoods habitats, timber harvesting and forest regeneration.

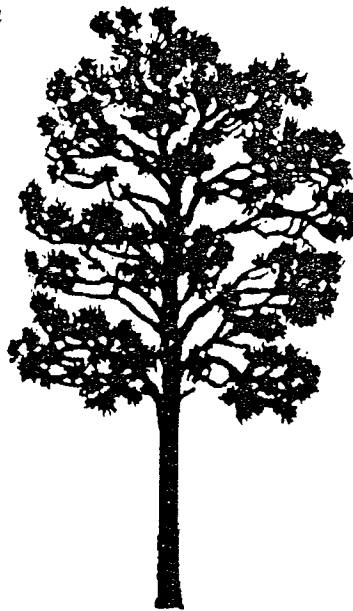
The trail begins at a small parking area and passes some areas which have been planted with longleaf pine seedlings. It then enters a stand of larger pines of mixed species: longleaf, slash, and loblolly. The trail guide indicates that some of these maturing pines will soon be harvested with a few of the longleafs left to provide seeds for reforestation. The trail guide makes it clear that the goals of LEAFS project include timber production, making it a bit different from parks on public property such as Morningside, the assumption being that private landowners must get at least some economic return from their property, to pay their property taxes, if nothing else. Yet, as we hope trail users can see, that's no reason why, despite some timber harvesting, there can't also be an abundance of wildlife and native plants.

Parts of LEAFS are burned every two or three years. In fact, the trail doubles as a fireline and when it's plowed up can sometimes be a little rough. If you pass by an area which has recently been burned, it may look black and lifeless, but within a few weeks, it will be turning green again. In summer, the wildflowers after a burn—particularly deer tongue, a purple aster relative—can put on a spectacular display. In fact, it's the wildflowers and other understory plants in a longleaf pine flatwoods ecosystem which make it interesting to amateur botanists like me. The ecosystem's diversity is in the understory, as virtually the only tree species is longleaf pine, at least where regular fires occur.

As for birds, it's always seemed to me that bird numbers and diversity in pine flatwoods are somewhat low. (In pine plantations where there's been extensive site preparation, it's almost a bird desert.) For about five years now at LEAFS, we've been participating in a statewide census of spring and fall migrations sponsored by the Game and Freshwater Fish Commission. The migrants passing through and visiting LEAFS are few and far between. On the other hand, year-round residents, such as Eastern Towhees and Common Yellowthroats are consistently recorded in high numbers. I think if the counts were conducted in winter, we'd have decent numbers for catbirds and robins, especially robins.

After passing some stops with discussion in the trail guide about native plants and birds, the trail loops back past the planted sections to the parking area. The trail map shows a couple of unmarked side loops going to some lower areas where there are different plants (and sometimes more birds) but cautions that the trail might be wet. There are times when that's an understatement, as after heavy rains, there are spots where the trail is totally under water. That's typical of pine flatwoods which sometimes are poorly drained. However, the main trail is usually pretty dry, at least within a few days after rain.

(see directions on how to get to LEAFS on next page)



The Planting of the Tree

Grow little tree

And may you be spared
The wounds of the careless

Who would sacrifice thy beauty
To a passing whim.

May the sound of the woodsman's axe
Never profane the sacred stillness
Of this lovely wood.

May those who come after us,
Who shall inherit the land,
Come here to rest

Beneath these spreading branches.
May they,

In this shadowy silence,
Commune with nature
And Nature's God and so find peace
And courage to fulfill
Their Destiny.

May children laugh and sing
Within thy benevolent shade
And birds find safety for their nestlings
High hidden in thy lofty spire.

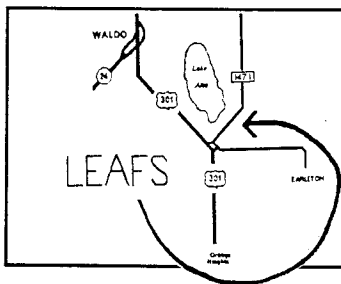
May our sons and daughters,
Grow, like unto thee,
Tall and straight

In mind and spirit
May they, too, bear fruit, good fruit
For the Lord of the Forest
Our Creator,

Who made and loves us all,
Even thee, little tree,
Even thee.

-Herbert Luke





Directions to LEAFS

From Gainesville, take the Waldo Road (SR 24) to Waldo. In Waldo, just past the Island Foods store, turn right on SW 2nd Place; go over the railroad tracks to a stop sign on US 301. Turn right on 301 and go 2.2 miles. Look for the sign to Earleton and then the big yellow sign for the Wild Trader shop (on left of 301). As 301 starts to curve right, turn left off 301 onto CR 1469. Within a few hundred feet, turn left onto CR 1471. Go about 1/2 mile; the LEAFS sign and parking is to the right.

New Year's in Puerto Rico

by Rex Rowan

Expectation is a funny thing. For instance, you would probably expect — having read so many of my pieces in *The Crane* over the years — that I'm brilliantly witty and charming, not to mention devastatingly handsome. Well okay, in this particular case you would be right, but much more often the expectation and the reality are at odds.

Puerto Rico was like this. I'd always envisioned Puerto Rico as a flat, scrubby landscape, and had the impression that it served mainly as a wintering ground for North American breeding birds, with few native species of its own.

I found out different when I spent the week after Christmas in Fajardo with a group of high school friends, one of whom works in San Juan for U.S. Customs. Hoping to make the most of my vacation abroad, I purchased Raffaele's *Birds of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands* and started studying. I was surprised at the number of fairly common species that never, or rarely, strayed to the United States — nearly 40 of them.

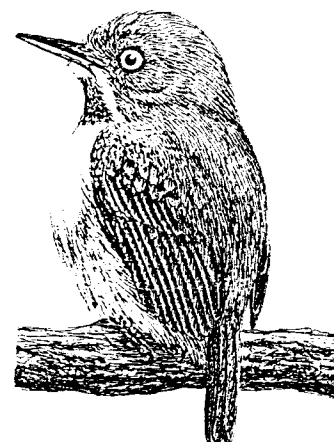
When the plane touched down in San Juan on December 27, it was after dark. I could do nothing but look at the strange weeds and shrubs around the dingy airport parking lot (where waiting cab drivers sat at a small table playing cards) and inhale the smells and look at all the signs in Spanish.

But the next morning I was off and running. Or sitting, actually — on the porch, because my host's yard birds were amazing. There in the royal poinciana tree were a Bananaquit and a Stripe-headed Tanager, while Black-faced Grassquits sat on the feeder, and a huge green hummingbird with a sickle bill and an electric-blue breast, the Green-throated Carib, nectared at flowers in the garden. Across the street, Pearly-eyed Thrashers dashed back and forth, while Gray Kingbirds, as common down there as mockingbirds are up here, called from the telephone wire, and Magnificent Frigatebirds sailed over the house. Perhaps, I thought, I'd been a little hasty in dismissing Puerto Rican birding.

My second surprise was the landscape, which I'd been unable to see the night before. Green with forests, and hilly, even mountainous, its natural splendor stood in startling contrast to the human squalor around us. It was quite common to see ramshackle buildings and garbage

.dumps against a backdrop of breathtaking emerald slopes.

The first place we visited was Caribbean National Forest ("El Yunque," pronounced el JOONG-kay), the only tropical rainforest in our National Forest system. And a rainforest it was; it drizzled, or worse, during 75% of our walk up the Mount Britton Trail. The birds here were largely disappointing. A feeding flock came through as we started up the trail, but every single bird in it was a Puerto Rican Tanager, a rather uninspiring gray-and-white thing. I also spished out a female Black-throated Blue Warbler and a Black-and-white Warbler (the migratory birds responded to spishing, but the native species seemed immune to it). Our only really exciting find was a **Puerto Rican Tody**: imagine a hummingbird-sized kingfisher with a back the color



of spring greenery, a yellow belly, and a dab of scarlet in the middle of its throat. I kept an eye out for the huge Puerto Rican Lizard-Cuckoo, the rare Elfin Woods Warbler (only discovered in 1971), and the sublime Antillean Euphonia, but saw none of them. The euphonia was conjectured to be a casualty of this fall's Hurricane Georges; not a single one had been found on the Fajardo Christmas Count a week before.

Our second full day was spent fishing at the La Plata Reservoir near Bayamon. Our host spent \$600 to charter two boats, having read a report of a 29-pound largemouth bass being found during a fisheries survey there. This ended up costing him about \$300 per pound of fish caught. Although I myself hooked nothing, and was suffering from a horrendous cold, I managed to enjoy the birds that populated the steep green banks of the reservoir, among them Mangrove Cuckoos, Puerto Rican Todies, Smooth-billed Anis, Scaly-naped Pigeons, and a at least million Bananaquits. Snowy Egrets and Little Blue Herons added a touch of home. (My guide, a native Puerto Rican named Tomas, confessed that in all his years of fishing he had never seen — or noticed, anyways — a Little Blue! I gave

him my bird book: the blind shall see!)

On the third day we went to San Juan and did the tourist thing, which would have been quite enjoyable even without the dozens of Cave Swallows flying over El Morro (the fort that stands guard over San Juan harbor), the Zenaida Doves with their ruddy breasts, or the Greater Antillean Grackles with their occasionally wild careening flight and surprisingly pretty vocalizations. As evening came on, we watched a Peregrine Falcon chase a Rock Dove among the tall buildings near the Custom House.

On our fourth and last day, we went back to El Yunque and birded the raised walkway at the Visitor Center. This turned out to be wonderful. We found a singing Yellow-faced Grassquit before we even left the parking lot and a pair of Black-cowled Orioles, jet black and brilliant yellow, cavorting in trees just off the railing of the walkway. Several Puerto Rican Todies chased each other around, making their peculiar buzzes, while two or three breathtaking Red-legged Thrushes, catbird-gray with bright red eye-rings, legs, and bills, sent me into transports of enthusiasm, and the prize of the day, a pair of Puerto Rican Woodpeckers, worked over a small tree. My sole disappointment was hearing the song of a Puerto Rican Bulfinch and being unable to see the bird itself.

I haven't said a word about the lizards and frogs. It was fascinating to see the different sorts of anoles there, as well as the amievas, related to our whiptail lizards but three times bigger, and the enormous Green Iguanas basking on the asphalt at Roosevelt Roads Naval Station (they actually have an "Iguana Crossing" sign!). The many species of treefrogs are all known as "coquis," a word that represents their song: co-KEE! co-KEE! co-KEE! Several called every night outside the open windows of our hosts' home, and the freshness, sweetness, and clarity of the sound wrung my heart. I dearly wished I could transplant a few into my own back yard.



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There is nothing in which the birds differ more from man than the way in which they can build and yet leave a landscape as it was before.

-Robert Lynd (1879-1949)
Irish journalist



Is this the first time you've read The Crane?

If you received this issue of *The Crane* at the Kanapaha Spring Garden Festival or perhaps from a UF class or from a friend, we hope you enjoy reading it. We invite you to come on the field trips and to the monthly programs. For information on what's happening next month, call 335-3500, extension 2473 (bird). We welcome you to join Alachua Audubon Society; one membership fee includes AAS and all National and State privileges and publications. Use the form on the outside of this issue to take advantage of the low introductory rate!

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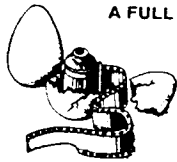
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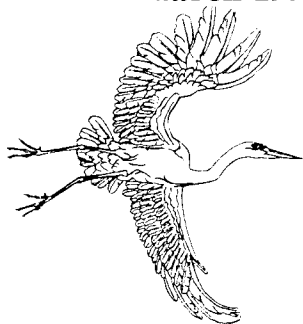
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The Crane

March 1999



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Check the level of membership desired and enclose your check payable to:

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Please print.

Name _____ Telephone _____

Address _____ Apt. _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Please check level of membership.

_____ Basic \$35 _____ Senior \$15 _____ Student \$15

_____ **INTRODUCTORY MEMBERSHIP \$20**

_____ **TWO YEARS \$30**