



The Crane

Alachua Audubon Society

Volume 41 Number 6, February 2000

Calling the Question on Rodman Dam

is the topic for the Alachua Audubon program meeting on February 26.

David White, Ocklawaha Project Coordinator, Florida Defenders of the Environment (FDE) will be the speaker. The meeting and slide presentation begins at 2 p.m. at the Tower Road Branch Library, 3020 SW 75th Street. Please note that both the date and place for the meeting are changed from those previously announced.

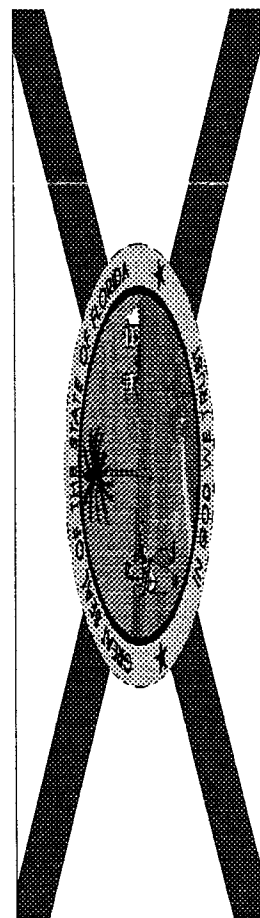
A lawyer specializing in public interest environmental law, David White is on the board of directors of Florida Wildlife Federation and Nova University's Environmental and Land Use Law Center. He lives in Gainesville and works at FDE on the Ocklawaha River Restoration Project. For eight years prior to coming here, he was regional counsel in Atlanta for the National Wildlife Federation and represented the federation in litigation under the Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, National Environmental Policy Act, and National Forest Management Act.

Most AAS members are familiar with the long struggle to remove the Rodman Dam and its reservoir which inundates the Ocklawaha River floodplain. Governor Chiles was a solid proponent of removal and, despite continued objection and obstruction by George Kirkpatrick, our local state senator, there was strong statewide support for restoration. Although Senator Kirkpatrick was able to block most funding except for studies and an environmental impact statement, the Department of Environmental Protection has taken the first tentative steps towards removal of the dam.

Now Jeb Bush is governor, and he has yet to make his position clear. No doubt he would like to please everybody, but he probably can't do that. And he won't be able to delay much longer. Although it is little realized—and is a bit complicated—there is a federal permit for the dam (it's in the Ocala National Forest), and that permit is about to expire. If the dam is going to remain, the state will have to apply for a renewal of the permit. So for the governor, it's decision time or time for ***Calling the Question on Rodman Dam***. What's going to happen?

To get some idea, join us for this informative presentation. As always, there will be refreshments and a chance to exchange birding stories with other Audubon members.

- John Winn, Program Chairman



AAS Calendar

➔ Wednesday, February 9, 6:30 p.m.

Board Meeting

All AAS members and the public are invited to attend monthly board meetings, held in the Conference Room of the Florida Museum of Natural History on the University of Florida campus.

➔ Saturday, February 12, 6 a.m.

Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge

Meet at Target (Archer Road just east of I-75) to carpool. John Hintermister will lead. With the possible exception of Everglades National Park, this is the best birding spot in Florida. Its beaches, salt marshes, tidal pools, and palmetto scrub can yield a hundred species of birds in a day. Ducks, shorebirds, waders, and hawks are particularly easy to see, and you'll spend the day riffling back and forth through the first half of your field guide, looking up American Avocet, Northern Gannet, Glossy Ibis, Roseate Spoonbill, Reddish Egret, Northern Pintail, Florida Scrub-Jay...expect a busy and rewarding day. Beginners will find this an excellent opportunity to see big, colorful birds at close range while staying within a hundred feet of the car. Bring lunch, water, and a little extra money for the toll roads.

➔ Friday, February 25

Crane deadline for March issue

- e-mail to evperry@aol.com
- mail or deliver to The Branch Office
519 NW 60th Street, Suite A
Gainesville, FL 32607

➔ Saturday, February 26, 2 p.m.

Program at Tower Road Branch Library

"Calling the Question on Rodman Dam"

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 **February 25** to be included in the March 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, G-ville 32607. Or fax to 331-2585. Or e-mail evperry@aol.com.

The Crane is printed on recycled paper.

"I saw my first peregrine on a December day at the estuary ten years ago. The sun reddened out of the white river mist, fields glittered with rime, boats were encrusted with it; only the gently lapping water moved freely and shone. I went along the high river-wall towards the sea. The stiff crackling white grass became limp and wet as the sun rose through a clear sky into dazzling mist. Frost stayed all day in shaded places, the sun was warm, there was no wind.



"I rested at the foot of the wall and watched dunlin feeding at the tide-line. Suddenly they flew upstream, and hundreds of finches fluttered overhead, whirling away with a 'hurr' of desperate wings. Too slowly it came to me that something was happening which I ought not to miss. I scrambled up, and saw that the stunted hawthorns on the inland slope of the wall were full of fieldfares. Their sharp bills pointed to the northeast, and they clacked and spluttered in alarm. I followed their point, and saw a falcon flying towards me. It veered to the right, and passed inland. It was like a kestrel, but bigger and yellower, with a more bullet-shaped head, longer wings, and greater zest and buoyancy of flight. It did not glide till it saw starlings feeding in stubble, then it swept down and was hidden among them as they rose. A minute later it rushed overhead and was gone in a breath into the sunlit mist. It was flying much higher than before, flinging and darting forwards, with its sharp wings angled back and flicking like a snipe's.

"This was my first peregrine. I have seen many since then, but none has excelled it for speed and fire of spirit. For ten years I spent all my winters searching for that restless brilliance, for the sudden passion and violence that peregrines flush from the sky. For ten years I have been looking upward for that cloud-biting anchor shape, that crossbow flinging through the air. The eye becomes insatiable for hawks. It clicks towards them with ecstatic fury, just as the hawk's eye swings and dilates to the luring food-shapes of gulls and pigeons."

— J.A. Baker, *The Peregrine*

Around the County...

by Mike Manetz

As Rex Rowan stated in a recent excerpt from his local birding hotline...."If you want to build a big county year-list, this is the year to do it." Indeed, this winter has continued to be truly remarkable for rarities in our area. Last month the main focus of attention was on the prairie basin. In January it shifted to the shores on Newnan's Lake. Water levels there have dropped lower than most folks have ever seen, exposing such a wide band of open lake-bed that, were it not so mucky, might remind one of being at the beach.

During the first week of the new year, while seeking the Christmas Count **Wilson's Warbler** near Palm Point, another great winter bird, a **Winter Wren**, was discovered along Lakeshore Drive. That weekend, as birders converged at Newnan's to see this two-for-one special, Rex was noticing that the receding water level on the lake was creating good potential shorebird habitat. Undertaking a trail-blazing expedition along the mucky margins south from Powers Park, he discovered a flock of shorebirds that would seem reasonable at Cedar Key, but was certainly unprecedented here. The composition and numbers in the flock changed from day to day, but a composite total would include over 100 **Dunlin**, 225 **Least Sandpipers**, 5 **Western Sandpipers**, 12 **Stilt Sandpipers**, and 10 **Black-bellied Plovers**, along with dozens of **Forster's Terns** and over a hundred **Bonaparte's Gulls**, flocks of **Hooded Mergansers** with a few **Blue** and **Green-winged Teal** and **Northern Shovelers** thrown in. But the real star of the show has been the **Reeve**, first located by Rex on Jan. 12. The **Reeve** (female, same species as the male **Ruff**) is a Eurasian shorebird that is very rare in Florida, and this individual was the first ever recorded in the county. The bird attracted observers from all over the state who couldn't resist the chance of seeing not only a **Reeve**, but also some of Gainesville's other reliable rarities, including **Rusty Blackbirds**, a **Vermilion Flycatcher**, **Black-chinned Hummingbird**, **Dark-eyed Junco**, **Wilson's Warbler**, and **Winter Wren**, all less than a half-hour drive from each other.

Temporarily adding to the birding frenzy at Newnan's was the appearance of another exciting county first, a **Common Black-headed Gull**. This bird (which looks like a **Bonaparte's Gull**, but with a red bill) was picked out of a flock of **Bonaparte's** by John

Martin, Lloyd Davis, and myself on a trip to look at the **Reeve**. As we recovered from our astonishment at such a lucky and wonderful find, I remembered I had a cell-phone in my pocket and sent out the word. While the bird was seen later that afternoon, there has unfortunately been only one other report since then, and the gull is presumed to be gone.

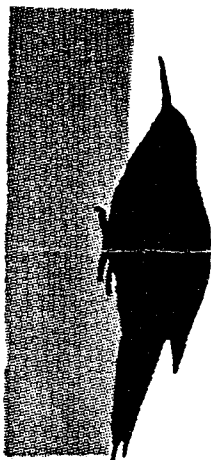
Ducks, shorebirds, and **White Pelicans** remained distant, but in good supply, on the prairie basin. Since the closure of LaChua Trail, one of the better views of the basin has been from U.S. 441. North of the observation boardwalk, there are a few places where you can scan the bird concentrations, but you would definitely need a scope. I ran into a touring group of the Galveston Bird Club Jan. 16, and they informed me that a week earlier they detected two **American Bitterns** at the boardwalk.

Bivens Arm Lake was choked with waterfowl through January. Typically, the number of **Coots** was in the thousands and **Ring-necked Ducks** in the hundreds. A few **Ruddy Ducks** and a drake **Canvasback** were standouts there. Chapman's Pond saw a reduction of teal by mid-month, but a couple of dozen **Gadwall**, a few **American Widgeon**, and one of the few **Lesser Scaup** of the season could still be found.

Elsewhere, the **Brown Creeper** at San Felasco was relocated Jan. 16 by Karl Miller. It was found on the north side of Millhopper Road, just south of the fork where the blue-yellow trail splits away to the left and the blue trail continues north. As luck would have it, I was in San Felasco that morning looking for that very bird.

Unsuccessful in my search and making my way out of the hammock, I heard an owl tape coming from the woods. Further investigation showed Karl to be the source of the tape, as he was gathering data on feeding-flock behavior. The Creeper had just arrived in response to the tape as I approached. We got to watch it foraging for at least five minutes before it quietly "crept" away. I was also lucky enough to find a **Hairy Woodpecker** Jan. 9 in the Farms of Kanapaha. As I pulled into the subdivision and rolled down my window, I immediately heard one calling, stopped my truck, jumped out, and found the bird foraging at the corner of SW 75th St, and 93rd Ave.

In the sparrow department, the restricted area around Persimmon Point continued to be a hot spot. Howard Adams, John Hintermister and I, while on a ranger-led camp-out Jan. 1, found a good assortment including **Field** and **Fox Sparrows** and an *ammodramus* hat-trick, that is, three species from that genus,



including Grasshopper, Henslow's, and LeConte Sparrows. Normally, LaChua Trail produces its share of sparrow sightings, but the collapse of the main culvert and a subsequent controlled burn there has curtailed birding activity. On Jan. 22, John Hintermister picked out one of the winter's few **White-crowned Sparrows** in a weedy field along the graded road that ends at Watermelon Pond. Since White-crowns are most often reported from LaChua Trail, it's good to know there is an alternate location.

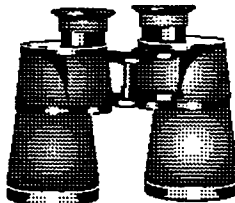
I suspect winter sightings will continue to dominate the attention of birders through February, but remember that spring is coming and so are our neotropical breeding birds. By the time you receive this issue of *The Crane*, Purple Martins will have arrived, and folks will be listening for the first singing Northern Parula. Now is the time to get out that bird tape and start refreshing your memory.

Thanks to those who shared their sightings through January 22, 2000.

New Homes for Old Binoculars

by Rex Rowan

From the jungles of Central America, Roan McNab sends the following appeal to Alachua Audubon:



"I write with a strange request. I currently direct a project for the Wildlife Conservation Society here in the Peten of Guatemala. We are attempting to support a local group of para-biologists that are now gearing up for village bird-guiding and wildlife surveys to study the densities of key species in the forest.

"We need binoculars to do that. My program is not a huge US AID based project, we fight and scratch to get everything we can. I was wondering if the Alachua Audubon Society might possibly be able to put out a message to their members to donate any old functional pairs of binocs to these poor Guatemalan folk. Pairs that might be repairable would also be acceptable, as repairs can be gotten for cheap here."

If you have an extra pair of binoculars sitting idle in the closet, please consider donating them to this organization. Many of the birds we see in Gainesville winter in Latin America, and the health of their winter environment is as critical to their survival as that of their nesting grounds. However, tropical conservation is only in its infancy, and support at this stage is crucial.

If you can help, please call Rex Rowan at 371-9296. I'll be happy to pick them up at your front door and deliver them to Roan when he visits Gainesville this spring.

Cedar Key Christmas Bird Count

30 December 1999

by Dale Henderson

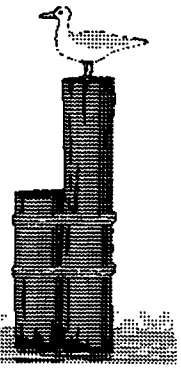
It seems that the 1999 Cedar Key Christmas Bird Count fell victim to Y2K related problems; the counters were present and unaffected by scheduling changes, but the birds were so confused they failed to show up to be counted!

The day itself was particularly auspicious. A clear, crisp morning with calm conditions on the Gulf and favorable tides seemed to promise that we would finish out the 90's in fine fashion. Alas! The good news was the absence of Brown Headed Cowbirds, the bad, the absence of so much else.

As for highlights, both the University boat which surveys the open water and islands south of town, and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service airboat in the shallow northwest section of the circle, saw Peregrine Falcons, and the airboat boys also added Long Billed Curlew for just the second time.

Meanwhile back on Way Key, a Western Kingbird, was found vacationing at Fenimore Mill on the eastern edge of the island. New highs registered were for Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Peregrine, Western and Least Sandpipers, House Wren, and House Sparrow.

All in all, "goodies" were hard to come by, but our loyal band resolved to try again next year, December 29, 2000.



(See count results in detail on Page 6)

The little flock of sanderlings wheeled out over the bay in a wide circle, flashing white wing bars; they returned, crying loudly as they passed over the flats where the young were still running and probing at the edge of the curling wavelets; they turned their heads to the south and were gone.

— Rachel Carson (1907-1964)

Don't Want No NTV

by Rex Rowan

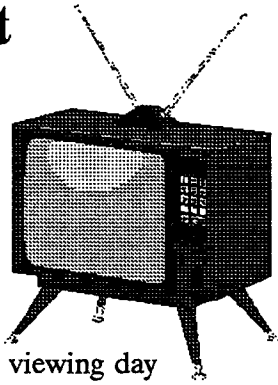
When they find I don't own a television, friends object, "But there are so many good shows on!" And they're right, of course: especially with cable, you can find worthwhile viewing day or night.

Which is exactly the problem. An abundance of good television is more dangerous than an abundance of bad television because you will be tempted to spend that much more of your one and only lifetime sitting in front of an electrical device watching things that you will soon forget.

But my gripe today is not with the tube in general, it's with nature television — let's call it NTV. I talk to lots of people who watch nature shows and think I should watch them too, but I seldom meet these people in the woods. One reason, obviously, is that you can watch television in an air-conditioned room with a cold beer in your hand and a bag of Doritos in your lap. You can't take a walk on Paynes Prairie like that.

The second reason is a little more subtle and a lot more harmful. Suppose Ralph turns on a nature show. He sees marvelous things. Whales giving birth. The private life of the hyena. A moose facing down a grizzly bear. Amazing stuff. Ralph decides nature is really interesting, and drives down to San Felasco Hammock to see some of it. He parks his car and starts down the trail. There are some trees. And some more trees and ... more trees. A flower. A mosquito biting his forehead. More trees. Another mosquito. Ralph breaks into a sweat. It's a little warm and humid in there! More trees. No moose yet, no whales, no hyenas. Not even a bird. Just trees and — slap! — mosquitoes. Ralph heads home for the Doritos and the beer and another nature show.

Because reality can't compare with television. My home life doesn't stack up to a TV family's — I don't employ a scriptwriter or it most certainly would — and nature as we normally see it doesn't stack up to TV nature. The thirty-minute program you watch is the distillation of a couple years' labor by one or more photographers working in blinds or in even more complicated setups paid for by university research grants or the BBC. You could see what they saw if you worked under the same conditions. Since you don't, you get impatient with nature when it doesn't provide you with the up-close-and-personal experiences you get



from NTV.

And even worse, you begin to think that nature is Out There: the Everglades, maybe, and Yellowstone. The Amazon. Africa. Anywhere but here. So when someone wants to build a 16th Avenue connector along Paynes Prairie, you figure, "What's the harm? It won't bother the wildlife, because all the wildlife is in the Amazon. I know the wildlife is in the Amazon because I've seen lots of TV shows about it, and I've never seen a TV show about Gainesville. Therefore there's no wildlife here to worry about."

And that's not true. If you brought those wildlife photographers to Gainesville and gave them a couple years, they could produce a fascinating hour on sandhill cranes, or bobcats or bald eagles — or a hundred other things. You'd sit and watch the show, transfixed. You'd go outside to see some of this nature. You wouldn't see it. You'd head for the beer and the Doritos again.

You have to adopt the photographers' methods if you want to see what they see. Spend time out there, above all. They don't go out once or twice a year. And when you go out, open your eyes. Be still and quiet. And when you're lucky enough to see something — be it fox, snake, cardinal, or honeybee — watch it and see what it does. Photographers have to keep staring through the camera at their subject if they want good footage. You have to keep staring too.

I'm sure I've seen some incredible things on television, but to be frank they all blend together in my memory. I don't remember one of them. (Do you? Think, now.) But I will never forget the moment when, watching a bumblebee at an azalea, I noticed that the petal from which the bee got nectar was heavily marked with streaks of red — a visual cue for her. Such a small thing, so much smaller than a whale giving birth. But the things we discover ourselves, the things we live ourselves, mean so much more, and are so much more real, than the things we see on TV. So turn off the set and step outside and, if the dullness and tedium of the programming haven't finished off your senses, look closely and pay attention.

It's a whole world of wonders.

Participate in the
Great Backyard Bird Count
February 18 - 21, 2000
<<http://birdsource.org>>
sponsored by National Audubon Society and
Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology

Cedar Key Christmas Bird Count – 30 December 1999

Compilers: Ron Christen and Dale Henderson. Other observers: Howard Adams, John Hintermister, Grace Kiltie, Carmine Lanciani, Mike Manetz, Brian McNab, Don Morrow, Barbara Muschlitz, Bryant Roberts, Betty Smocovitis, Dave Steadman, Terry Taylor.

Common Loon	38	Am. Oystercatcher	483	Carolina Chickadee	29
Pied-billed Grebe	2	American Avocet	26	Tufted Titmouse	15
Horned Grebe	20	Greater Yellowlegs	45	Carolina Wren	32
Am White Pelican	96	Willet	665	House Wren	48
Brown Pelican	248	Spotted Sandpiper	13	Sedge Wren	9
Dbl-cr Cormorant	4042	Whimbrel	30	Marsh Wren	31
Anhinga	3	Long-billed Curlew	1	Golden-cr Kinglet	1
Great Blue Heron	83	Marbled Godwit	21	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	75
Great Egret	82	Ruddy Turnstone	110	Bl-gray Gnatcatcher	21
Snowy Egret	75	Red Knot	33	Eastern Bluebird	9
Little Blue Heron	23	Sanderling	300	Hermit Thrush	4
Tricolored Heron	16	Western Sandpiper	2439	American Robin	3074
Blk-cr Night-Heron	33	Least Sandpiper	392	Gray Catbird	59
Ylw-cr Night-Heron	46	Dunlin	2702	Northern Mockingbird	46
White Ibis	2	Peep, sp.	1100	Brown Thrasher	8
Wood Stork	9	Short-bld Dowitcher	1353	European Starling	158
Wood Duck	2	Dowitcher, sp.	6	White-eyed Vireo	15
Green-winged Teal	380	Common Snipe	4	Blue-headed Vireo	4
Lesser Scaup	501	Laughing Gull	153	Orange-cr Warbler	7
Common Goldeneye	4	Ring-billed Gull	1107	Ylw-rumped Warbler	1643
Bufflehead	34	Herring Gull	54	Ylw-throated Warbler	3
Hooded Merganser	119	Gull, sp.	30	Pine Warbler	15
Red-brstd Merganser	77	Caspian Tern	16	Prairie Warbler	3
Black Vulture	34	Royal Tern	22	Palm Warbler	45
Turkey Vulture	59	Forster's Tern	246	Blk-&-White Warbler	6
Osprey	29	Black Skimmer	349	Ovenbird	1
Bald Eagle	17	Eur. Collared Dove	99	Common Yellowthroat	54
Northern Harrier	5	Mourning Dove	52	Northern Cardinal	62
Sharp-shinned Hawk	3	Common Ground Dove	27	Eastern Towhee	79
Cooper's Hawk	2	Rose-Ringed Parakeet	3	Chipping Sparrow	10
Red-shouldered Hawk	3	Eastern Screech Owl	4	Field Sparrow	1
Red-tailed Hawk	3	Great Horned Owl	4	Savannah Sparrow	4
American Kestrel	5	Barred Owl	5	Nelson's Sh-tailed Sp.	13
Peregrine	3	Belted Kingfisher	29	Seaside Sparrow	8
Wild Turkey	3	Red-bell. Woodpecker	24	Song Sparrow	19
Northern Bobwhite	10	Ylw-bell. Sapsucker	3	Swamp Sparrow	54
Clapper Rail	29	Downy Woodpecker	11	White-thr Sparrow	8
King Rail	4	Northern Flicker	13	Red-winged Blackbird	230
Virginia Rail	1	Pileated Woodpecker	9	Eastern Meadowlark	1
Sora	9	Eastern Phoebe	28	Boat-tailed Grackle	382
Common Moorhen	2	Western Kingbird	1	Common Grackle	10
Black-bellied Plover	278	Blue Jay	16	American Goldfinch	133
Wilson's Plover	4	Florida Scrub-Jay	6	House Sparrow	53
Semipalmated Plover	75	American Crow	16		
Piping Plover	1	Fish Crow	32		
Killdeer	34	Crow, sp	5	No. of species	131
				No. of individuals	25117

Thank you, Karen!

Alachua Audubon Society recently received a check for \$45 from Karen Ausley who, along with Jim Ahlers, makes and sells very well designed, sturdy bird nest boxes. Karen has been very kind in her support of AAS by being a sponsor and also contributing a percentage of sales of the boxes to AAS. Call them for your nest boxes; see ad, next page.

Time for Nominations!

Martha King, chairperson of the AAS Nominating Committee, requests the help of members in nominating people for the board and also to serve as officers of AAS. Please call her at 372-4149 with your suggestions OR to tell her YOU would be interested in serving.

Alachua Audubon Society Officers and Chairpersons of Standing Committees, 1999-2000

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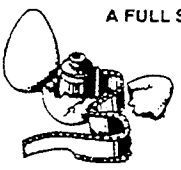
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For Year-Round 24-hour AAS Information: Call SunDial Bird Line: 335-3500, ext. BIRD (2473) for information on field trips, programs, where to see birds, and what's happening in AAS.
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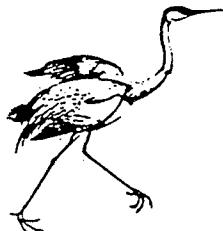
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The Crane

February 2000



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To join Audubon on 3 levels (National, Florida, and Alachua), fill in this application and mail to:
Paul Moler, 7818 Highway 346, Archer, Florida 32618

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

National Audubon Society

If you have any questions, call Paul at 495-9419.

NEW MEMBERS ONLY

NOT FOR RENEWALS

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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**