

# The Crane

*Alachua Audubon Society*

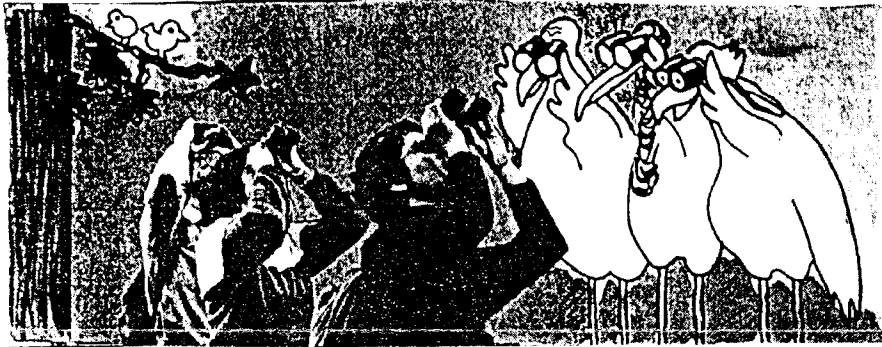
*Volume 41 Number 9, May/June 2000*

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## ***AAS Spring Migration Count Sets New Highs***

We added 11 new species plus the color morph Great White Heron (which someday may be a separate species if split from Great Blue Heron) to our overall list for the spring count. We also had more species and more individuals than on any of the previous 8 counts. Previous maxima were 135 and 11,189, resp. Basically these increases may be attributed to the drought. It was responsible for the wide "shore" around Newnans Lake and low water levels at Lake Tuscawilla. At the latter location, 390 of the total 427 Wood Storks were counted. Amazingly, 427 Wood Storks were counted on our Christmas Bird Count, 19 December 1999. Think about that; were these all the same birds? Most of the Great Blue Herons and Great Egrets were found at Newnans and Tuscawilla.

Except for the Gadwall found at Chapmans Pond, all the new species were found at Newnans Lake, but one American White Pelican and two Roseate Spoonbills were also counted at Lake Tuscawilla. When Rex Rowan first suggested walking around the edge of Newnans Lake, birders were hiking out a mile or more from Powers Park, a somewhat muddy route. Currently, the edge is accessible from the Boat Dock at Windsor. New species keep occurring.



Black-bellied Whistling Ducks had been reported occasionally in the past several months from Paynes Prairie, but all 12 were found on count day at

Chapmans Pond along with 90 Semipalmated Sandpipers, 6 Semipalmated Plovers, the only Solitary Sandpiper, 1 Spotted Sandpiper, and 1 Lesser Yellowlegs. With the exception of Killdeer, all the other shorebirds were found at Newnans.

All the Chats were on Paynes Prairie; two were located on the basin portion of the Bolen Bluff Trail (where they have been found off and on for several years); the other two were at 2 different locations on the basin across the prairie.

A significant increase in N. Rough-winged Swallows was from a previous maximum of 14 to 22. Showing steady increases each year are the two "introduced" species: Eurasian Colored Dove and House Finches, and the obligate parasite, Brown-headed Cowbird, not good news. On the other hand, Rock Doves were down. In the past, we've found them in good numbers in "our" territory both under I-75 at US 441 and at the Hague Dairy. Does anyone know of a program to eradicate them?

*Barbara P. Muschlitz*

## Officers and Board Members Elected April 26

### Officers

President - Alan Keitt  
Vice-President - Scott Flamand  
Secretary - David Wahl  
Treasurer - John Winn

### Board Members with terms expiring 2003

Mary Clench  
Craig Parenteau  
Sue Hartman  
Martha King  
Michael Meisenburg

### Board Members with term expiring 2002

Bob Simons

### 2001 Nominating Committee

Howard Adams  
Paul Moler  
Griselda Forbes

## June 10: Yulee Day in Archer

Every year in June, Archer celebrates "Yulee Day," honoring David Levy Yulee, one of the town's early residents who later went on to fame and fortune. This year on Yulee Day, part of the celebration will be to honor another early resident, T. Gilbert Pearson, one of the founders of the National Audubon Society. Pearson spent his youth in Archer and later was a leader in the early days of the conservation movement.

A plaque telling of Pearson's connections with Archer will be dedicated at this year's celebration on June 10. As usual, the main events at Yulee Day are centered around the old Archer train depot, which doubles as the Archer Historical Museum. The town's museum has a collection of Pearson memorabilia which will be on display.

Yulee Day begins with a parade at 8:30 a.m. and activities continue all day. It is sponsored by the Archer Historical Society which was instrumental in obtaining the Pearson memorial.

### 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.

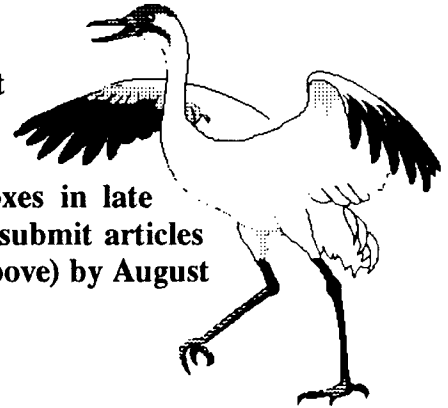
### Visit AAS Web Site:

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

*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. All checks for subscriptions should be mailed to Membership Chairman; see back page for name and address. Submissions to *The Crane* are welcomed, can be e-mailed or on disk or hard copy. Please limit each article to no more than two pages. Mail your disk or hard copy to Evelyn Perry, 9419 SW 67th Drive, Gainesville 32608. Or fax to 331-2585. Or e-mail [evperry@aol.com](mailto:evperry@aol.com).

*The Crane* is printed on recycled paper.

➔ The next issue of *The Crane* will be in your mailboxes in late August. Please submit articles to editor (see above) by August 18.



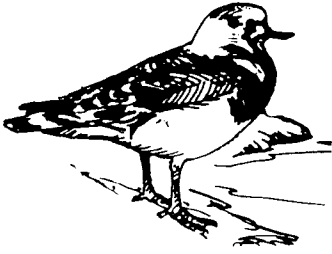
## New AAS Members

Barbara Roy Abell	Mary Helen Birchfield
Elizabeth DeLeon	John Dempsey
Paul Fortin	Carter Gilbert
Dana Griffin III	Nancy Henry
Regina Hines	Marcy Jones
Alexis Oliver	Steven Remmert
Ken/Betty Scott	Beverly Sensbach
Mark Smith	Ruth Maren
Grace Ann Coughlin	John Dewitt
Chales Halveson	Emilia Hodge
Catrina Humphrey	Robert Hutson
Josh Jett	Richard Keller
Carolyn Kieruber	Suzanne Lealty
Eunice MacDonald	Harold Nugent
Otto Olsen	Patricia Read
Robert Watson	Walter Welsch

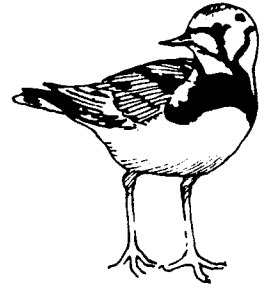
The next Alachua Audubon Society board meeting will be held on Wednesday, August 16, at 6:30 at Buchholz High School; all members and the public are invited to attend.

# Around the County...

by Mike Manetz



The three basic rules of birding are: location, location, and location. Over the last few months the best three locations without a doubt have been Newnans, Newnans, and Newnans. As the lake continued to dry up, the resulting beaches and mudflats attracted an astounding and unprecedented parade of birds, the likes of which have never been seen in the county before. From January to early May, five new species were added to the county list, along with perhaps a dozen more species that would normally be considered very rare in any given year; migrant species typically present in only token numbers were tallied by the score.



Until the middle of April, it was assumed that most of the interesting birds at Newnans were to be found along a sandy strip about a mile south from Powers Park. This was where the first large shorebird concentration was found in January, featuring the Ruff and, for a day, the Black-headed Gull. Acting on a mid-April report of **Roseate Spoonbills** by Marcy Jones, indefatigable birders Lloyd Davis and Bob Simons began investigating the north end of the lake accessed through Gum Root Swamp. From there Lloyd discovered another large concentration of shorebirds, and Bob rediscovered the long-missing **Black-headed Gull** as well as a first county record **Sanderling**. Now there were two productive spots at Newnans. A great relief that was, with Gum Root being a shorter and more pleasant walk than the south end, which by April was commonly referred to as the "Death March" with its treacherous muck, snags, driftwood, and cypress knees hidden by emerging vegetation. The north end became the place to be, with hundreds of peeps and Lesser Yellowlegs, a few locally rare **White-rumped Sandpipers**, over a hundred **Dowitchers**, a smattering of gulls and terns, and four **Roseate Spoonbills**. Rex Rowan took some folks from the *Gainesville Sun* out to see the spectacle May 1 and found the county's first ever **Ruddy Turnstone**. (The trip resulted in a wonderful article that made the *Sun's* front page, complete with a photo of the Black-headed Gull.) Because numbers and compositions of these flocks were constantly changing, it was clear that the birds were moving back and forth between the north and south ends, so the Death March from Powers Park remained vital to finding birds at Newnans. I trudged to the south end April 17 and was astonished to find three **Whimbrels**, another county first record, sitting serenely on the shore. They were not seen again until several days later, when Lloyd reported five of them at the north end of the lake. Were these new birds, or was there yet another part of the lake for shorebirds to hide from us? David Auth reported April 20 that from Windsor boat ramp he could see shorebirds on the east side of the lake. Rex investigated and found that one could walk a great distance north and south of Windsor, and that, yes, there were shorebirds. And the walking

was even more congenial than Gum Root. John Hintermister and I located a **Sanderling** April 29 among the many peeps north of the Windsor boat ramp, and got to see a **Peregrine Falcon** chase a **Lesser Yellowlegs** out over the lake. When I walked to the extreme northeast corner of the lake May 6, I counted no less than 800 peeps, overwhelmingly **Least** and **Semipalmated Sandpipers**, and over 80 **Semipalmated Plovers**. (Remember, any other year we would be excited about one **Semipalmated Sandpiper** or **Plover**). The following day Rex, Lloyd, Judy Bryan, and Alan Keitt fanned out from Windsor along the entire east side of the lake and uncovered a wide array of birds including a **Willet**, several **Caspian Terns** and **Whimbrels**, five **Brown Pelicans**, (all very rare here), and most exciting of all, Judy found a **Red-necked Phalarope**. This was only the fourth report of that species ever in the county. Then, on May 9, John Hintermister did a tour of the Windsor side about a mile south of the boat ramp where he found the first of two **Great White Herons**. Currently, **Great Whites** are classified as a color morph of **Great Blue Heron**, but research may show it to be a separate species. They breed mainly in the Keys, and the last one reported here was in 1926!

Elsewhere, a **Shiny Cowbird**, became yet another first record for the county. It was captured April 4 south of Micanopy by Eric Tillman of the National Wildlife Research Center. Eric was trapping blackbirds for a study when the Shiny showed up in his trap. The species is native to the West Indies and has been slowly colonizing coastal areas of south Florida. There have been one or two other inland reports of **Shiny Cowbirds** this spring, which may be an indication that the species is continuing to expand its range.

Overshadowed by events at Newnans Lake, the spring passerine migration did not go totally unnoticed. There were plenty of sightings of **Cape May**, **Blackpoll**, and **Black-throated Blue Warblers**. **Northern Waterthrushes** seemed plentiful, especially around Lake Alice, and there were at least two sightings of **Black-throated Green Warblers**. Michael Meisenburg reported a **Swainson's Warbler** April 12 near the Vet School, but the bird could not be relocated. There were

more thrush reports than is usual for spring. Andy Kratter found two species in his yard, **Gray-cheeked Thrush** and **Veery**; both are much more typical here in fall. Also of interest was the large number of **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** sightings. There were at least twelve reports, most of them from backyard feeders.

Normally the period after spring migration and prior to fall migration, roughly corresponding to May 15-July 30, is relatively dull for local birding. That's the time active birders catch up with chores, become reacquainted with

their families, or pick up their binoculars and head north or west. This year, however, locals will have their hands full at Newnans Lake. The potential for coastal post-breeding wanderers showing up is tremendous. Least Terns, Black Skimmers, and even Reddish Egret are possible, and with hurricane season approaching...

Thanks to those who shared their sightings through May 10, 2000.



# **NORTH AMERICAN SPRING MIGRATION COUNT: FLORIDA, ALACHUA CO. 13 MAY 2000**

**Observers:** Team leaders in bold face - Craig Parenteau, Barbara Muschlitz, Dale Henderson, Linda Hensley, John Winn, Mary Lou Winn, John Hintermister, Chuck & Paul Graham, Alan Keitt, Grace Kiltie, Richard Kiltie, Alice Farkash, Mary Hart, Tom Hctor, Andy Kratter, Judy Bryan, **Bryant Roberts**, Terry Taylor, Linda Terry, Tom Webber, Tom Workman, Bob Simons, **Rex Rowan**, Howard Adams, Michael Meisenberg, David Wahl, Paul Sindelar, **Dave Beatty**, John Morton, Kat Smith, Mike Manetz, Lenny Santisteban, Gordon Gottlieb.

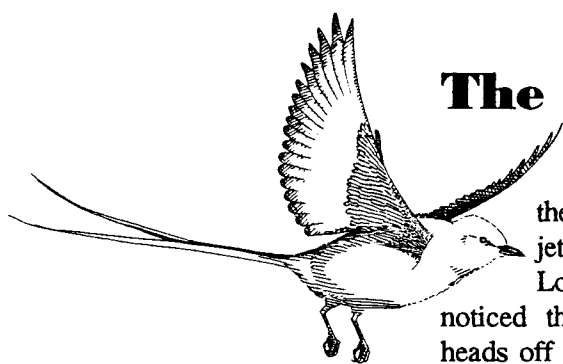
Bold-faced species are new to the count. Bold-faced numbers are new maxima.

A T indicates tie with previous maximum.

<b>American White Pelican</b>	<b>35</b>	Solitary Sandpiper	1	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	81
Brown Pelican	1T	Spotted Sandpiper	16	Eastern Bluebird	79
Dbl-cr Cormorant	124	<b>Whimbrel</b>	1	Wood Thrush	2
Anhinga	28	<b>Sanderling</b>	3	Gray Catbird	5
Least Bittern	2	Semipalmated Sandpiper	350	Northern Mockingbird	233
Great Blue Heron	372	<b>Western Sandpiper</b>	1	Brown Thrasher	64
"Great White Heron"	2	Least Sandpiper	266	Cedar Waxwing	1
Great Egret	230	<b>White-rumped Sandpiper</b>	3	Loggerhead Shrike	22
Snowy Egret	82	<b>Pectoral Sandpiper</b>	1	European Starling	73
Little Blue Heron	77	Calidris, sp.	25	White-eyed Vireo	207
Tricolored Heron	17	Laughing Gull	3	Ylw-throated Vireo	37
Cattle Egret	1079	<b>Bonaparte's Gull</b>	1	Red-eyed Vireo	125
Green Heron	54	Ring-billed Gull	5	Northern Parula	380
Blk-cr Night-Heron	7	Gull, sp.	8	Magnolia Warbler	1
White Ibis	77	Rock Dove	58	Cape May Warbler	1
Glossy Ibis	21	Eurasian Collared Dove	24	Blk-thr Blue Warbler	3
<b>Roseate Spoonbill</b>	7	Mourning Dove	320	Ylw-rumped Warbler	2
Wood Stork	427	Common Ground Dove	16T	Ylw-throated Warbler	72
Blk-bellied Whstlg Duck	12T	Ylw-billed Cuckoo	37	Pine Warbler	72
Wood Duck	91	Eastern Screech Owl	5	Palm Warbler (western)	1
Mottled Duck	22	Great Horned Owl	3	Blackpoll Warbler	1
Blue-winged Teal	2	Burrowing Owl	3	Black&White Warbler	6
<b>Gadwall</b>	1	Barred Owl	23	American Redstart	17
<b>Red-breasted Merganser</b>	1	Common Nighthawk	15	Prothonotary Warbler	49
Black Vulture	529	Chuck-Will's-widow	19	Ovenbird	3
Turkey Vulture	249	Chimney Swift	154	No. Waterthrush	1
Osprey	82	Ruby-throated H'bird	18	Common Yellowthroat	68
Swallow-tailed Kite	2	Belted Kingfisher	1	Hooded Warbler	13
Mississippi Kite	11	Red-headed Woodp.	44	Ylw-breasted Chat	4
Bald Eagle	17	Red-bellied Woodp.	186	Summer Tanager	106
Northern Harrier	1	Downy Woodpecker	82	Northern Cardinal	477
Cooper's Hawk	3	Northern Flicker	10	Blue Grosbeak	24
Red-shouldered Hawk	64	Pileated Woodpecker	50	Indigo Bunting	39
Red-tailed Hawk	17	Eastern Wood Pewee	11	Eastern Towhee	111
American Kestrel	8	Acadian Flycatcher	44	Bachman's Sparrow	3
<b>Peregrine Falcon</b>	1	Gt Crested Flycatcher	241	Bobolink	74
Wild Turkey	14	Eastern Kingbird	8	Red-winged Blackbird	441
Northern Bobwhite	26	Purple Martin	59	Eastern Meadowlark	26
King Rail	2	N Rough-wngd Swallow	22	Boat-tailed Grackle	458
Purple Gallinule	2	Barn Swallow	35	Common Grackle	178
Common Moorhen	74	Blue Jay	182	Brown-headed Cowbird	73
American Coot	4	American Crow	308	Orchard Oriole	39
Limpkin	2	Fish Crow	51	House Finch	89
Sandhill Crane	18	Crow, sp.	128	American Goldfinch	2
Semipalmated Plover	81	Carolina Chickadee	80	House Sparrow	136
Killdeer	34	Tufted Titmouse	295		
Black-necked Stilt	1	Brwn-headed Nuthatch	15	Number of Species	138
Greater Yellowlegs	8	Carolina Wren	358	Number of Individuals	11515
Lesser Yellowlegs	6				

# The Business Birder Does High Island

by John Ennis



Not long after the small regional jet took off from Love Field, I noticed the tall thunder heads off the left side of the plane. They were between Dallas and Houston, a line of thunderstorms preceding a strong, fast-moving cold front – the same front that I hoped would produce a fallout of migrating birds like no one had ever seen before.

When your job requires you to be a road warrior, you squeeze in birding trips when you can. I arrived in Dallas, where I was to attend a conference the following week, and used frequent-traveler points for a flight, car, and hotel to position myself at Beaumont on Friday night, April 7<sup>th</sup>. Then an all-day Saturday adventure along the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail, from the Texas Ornithological Society's Sabine Woods sanctuary to the Houston Audubon sanctuaries at High Island to the shorebird-flats sanctuary at the tip of the Bolivar Peninsula. I fantasized members of the Houston Audubon Society talking about the "Big High Island Fallout of April '00" for years to come, and I would know I had been there.

The pilot came on the intercom. Due to the storm, we were being re-routed west to Abilene for fuel and would then fly around the storm, coming close to San Antonio and approaching Houston from the southwest. At Abilene, they let us off the plane to buy drinks and visit the facilities. The chemical toilet on the plane was not working well. You do not want to know more.

While walking into the terminal, I spotted several birds flying in and out of a mesquite tree. They were fairly large thanks to their long divided tails. I went back to the plane and retrieved my binoculars for a look. Sure enough, Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, a new life bird for me! The ground maintenance man told me that these birds were highly accurate weather forecasters. Once they appear, farmers know that the last annual frost is history.

In the midst of my fellow passengers' groans and cries for free drinks (duh, not soft either), the flight attendant announced my new bird, adding that I might be the only one who was happy about the detour. For a while I could feel the hate dripping from the other passengers. Eventually they got their free drinks and forgot about me.

I left Beaumont early Saturday morning for Sabine Woods. Trans-gulf migrants are generally expected to reach High Island around noon. However, today the birds faced a 20-30 mph headwind out of the north. I figured I had plenty of time to get to High Island.

I found a couple of good birding sites on the lee side of Sabine Woods. Several friendly and helpful birders from all over Texas joined me. Among the birds sighted: White-

throated Sparrow, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Tree Swallow, Barn Swallow, Purple Martin, Great Crested Flycatcher, Orchard Oriole, Indigo Bunting, Painted Bunting, White-eyed Vireo, Common Yellowthroat, Yellow Warbler, Northern Parula, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Blue-winged Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, and Yellow-breasted Chat. There were a couple of sightings of a Cerulean Warbler but unfortunately not by me.

Between Sabine Woods and High Island, part of Texas 87 is closed, requiring a 63-mile detour. My total one-way trip would require another 38 miles to the Bolivar Flats.

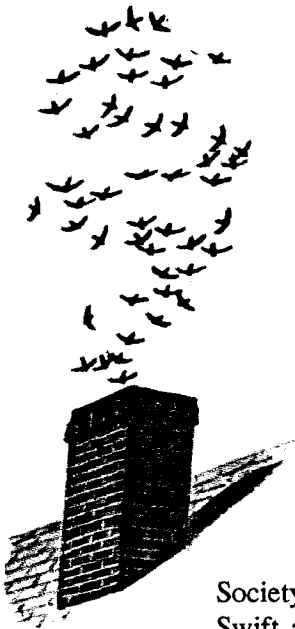
Crossing the high-rise bridge into Galveston County, I was treated to the sight of three Scarlet Ibises and two Black-necked Stilts on the High Island side of the bridge. I watched the ibises land in the marsh and disappear behind the sawgrass. I never saw them again. Although several drivers blew their horns at me, the birds did not flush.

There was no fallout at High Island that day. Unless you count birders. I rotated visits to the Audubon sanctuaries from 1 pm to 8 pm, with side trips back to the bridge and to the Bolivar Flats. My best guess is that most of the birds that left the Yucatan Peninsula the evening before were caught up in the strong southwest winds preceding the front and ended up visiting Florida.

In all, it was still a great trip! Birds noted at High Island included Eastern Kingbird, Painted Bunting (female), Blue-winged Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Summer Tanager. Bolivar Peninsula birds included Roseate Spoonbill, American Oystercatcher, Willet, Sora, Blue-winged Teal, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, and White-tailed Kite. In total, I checked off 59 species for the day. I had expected more. I had to make myself not count the plastic flamingo spotted at a beach cottage's mailbox.

In preparing for the trip, friends at Texas Children's Hospital in Houston pointed me in the right direction and I did some Web research. Should you go, I suggest starting with the websites of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department ([www.tpwd.state.tx.us](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us)), Houston Audubon ([www.houstonaudubon.org](http://www.houstonaudubon.org)), and Texas Ornithological Society Sanctuaries ([www.io.com/~pdhulce/tos/sanc.htm](http://www.io.com/~pdhulce/tos/sanc.htm)). The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Texas Department of Transportation have recently published, in three sections, an excellent map for the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail. For this trip, order the Upper Texas Coast section of the map from the Parks and Wildlife website.

*The author, John Ennis, is a full-time health care consultant and a part-time birder, who wishes it were the other way around. A former AAS member, he now lives in Johnson City, Tennessee.*



## Keeping Pace with Chimney Swifts

by Leslie E. Straub

Spring is officially here and so is the busy activity of nesting birds. Chimney Swifts are one of those unique species attempting to find suitable sites to raise their young. Breeding activity is restricted to the SE United States where they are finding fewer of these sites because of habitat loss and reduced access to masonry chimneys. Florida Wildlife Care (FWC) and Alachua Audubon

Society have been monitoring Chimney Swift activity in Alachua County and its

neighboring counties for 3 years through the Chimney Registration Program. Registering active or potentially active chimneys officially began in 1997 with a database of 12 sites. Since then, 56 registered chimneys, 55 of which are active, are now being monitored and provide surrogate families for orphaned swifts that cannot be placed back in their original nest.

In 1999, June 10 was the earliest call FWC received to rescue fallen babies. The last call of the year was August 3. During this time 78 baby swifts were rescued, 2/3 of which were returned to the original chimney and 1/3 adopted into foster chimneys.

Sweetwater Branch Inn has the record for the most active chimneys on one property. They have massive masonry fireplaces in the beautifully restored historic homes now run as a bed and breakfast on University Avenue. Initially, they had the greatest number of rescue calls, but now that the chimneys are properly closed off from the fireplaces, future swifts have a safe place to call home. The owners and staff at the Inn have been very cooperative and most tolerant. Even when their guests were complaining about the strange noises emanating from the multiple chimneys, they allowed us to put the little noisemakers back where they belonged.

Calls through the FWC 24-hour helpline also include individuals with questions and concerns over these noises coming from their chimneys. The last call of 1999 was from a woman with swifts still in her chimney on October 28. She was concerned that they hadn't migrated yet and that they had never stayed that long, but they soon took off for their long trip to South America.

This year has started off with extra energy and excitement. New brochures, certificates and public service announcements have been designed and produced thanks to Cadette Girl Scout Troop 994 from Alachua. Working with the Chimney Registration Program has been the community service portion of the Silver Award which they

are working to complete. Troop leader Donna Hammond supervised the work done by High School freshmen Katie Hammond and Amy Skelton. They have put a lot of ideas, enthusiasm and hard work into this project, and we are grateful for their interest and willingness to get involved helping our local wildlife.

This project is supported by donations that cover the cost of materials, maintaining the database and providing education to the community. Your tax deductible contribution can be given through FWC or Alachua Audubon Society.

The FWC 24-hour helpline number is (352) 371-4400.

## May Day and Other Reminiscences

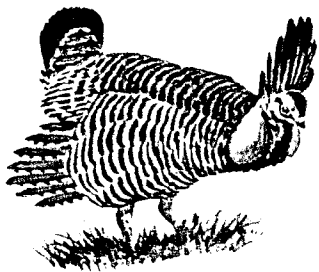
by Alan Keitt, President, AAS

As an intermittently active member of Alachua Audubon Society for more than 30 years, I have watched with pleasure the growth in quality of its offerings in recent years. Programs, field trips and *The Crane* have all stimulated my interest. My acceptance of the Presidency of AAS for the coming year is in part an appreciation of the work that a large number of officers, editors and very competent field birders have done on behalf of the membership and, of course, for the birds of our area.

I come to this job as an amateur (root: "love") birder. Although I have a professional ornithologist in the family (my youngest son Brad), my choice was medicine and hematology. I often wonder how many hours I have stared through binoculars in my life - birds, bone marrows and blood smears are probably about equally represented. For the past 2 years, I have combined these interests by volunteering on the Whooping Crane Release team. In addition to trips to the release site, I get to do the hematology work on the birds which is part of the release protocol. I have enjoyed working with Marilyn Spalding, who is the wildlife vet and pathologist on this project.

I was extremely fortunate to have birding mentors as a youngster. In fact there was a network of family friends on my way to elementary school in Madison, Wisconsin, where I would be given glasses and told where the birds were and what to look for. With these kindly prods and a gift from my parents of a pair of Navy surplus 6X30 Universal binoculars, which arrived when I was in 7th grade, I essentially taught myself how to bird. I spent hours with the "new" Peterson guide of 1947 which was our bible. In fact, I recall that my study of the real bible in my confirmation class languished at the time. In those days the final judgement was still occasionally settled by rifle. The most contentious issue among birders was not feral cats, but the shooting of rare specimens for collection by those with the license to do so. Lots of feathers and fur

flew over that one.



One of my mentors was the late John Emlen, chair of Ornithology at UW Madison. I was invited to go with his graduate students on their annual trips to central Wisconsin to help record the courtship behavior on the booming grounds of the Greater Prairie Chicken. Frederick and Frances Hamerstrom, who were early graduate students of Aldo Leopold, spent more than 30 years studying prairie chickens until their habitat needs were secured by the State based on their recommendations. They entertained all comers in their cavernous unpainted 19th century house on the prairie complete with a ball room but no running water. This remains one of the singular birding experiences of my life - there is nothing that I know that can compare with the droll behaviors of these feathered toreadors, racing, stamping and booming around their bored hens.

The May Day census was the peak of the birding year in Wisconsin. Just for fun I got out a dusty box of memorabilia and dug out an old issue of the *Passenger Pigeon*, the Bulletin of the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology. It contains an account of my first May Day Census that I wrote over 50 years ago. I have asked Evelyn Perry, *The Crane* editor, to reproduce it, not because of any great literary or scientific merit, but rather to recapture a trace of the excitement which I felt on that day in May long ago.

Those of you who have birded in the upper Midwest will certainly remember the intensity of the experience of the spring migration. It is not something you can go to see like a vagrant bird. Rather it is like the rising of the sap, a primal force of nature. I believe it is necessary to experience the interminable winter (I remember Christmas counts with 12 species) and the long cold prodromal spring to fully set the stage. Once begun, those hordes of birds funneled up the great Mississippi flyway spilling over into every wood and wetland in a giant rush toward procreation. On good days there were warbler trees with dozens of individuals of a dozen species hanging on the just-budding leaf clusters in full view - like the Big Rock Candy Mountain. It was possible to hear 20 bird species from the open study hall windows at West High School.

The numbers were truly astonishing. I am told that we may have lost half or more of our neotropical migrant population since my first May Day. The selected census day usually fell before the leaves were fully out so that birds were much easier to see. Also, as they were nearer their nesting grounds, they were regularly singing. Not that we worked any less hard - but it was easier to put together a good list. Nina Bradley, who has collected and extended her dad's (Aldo Leopold's) phenological observations at Baraboo over a span of 60 years, tells me that the

migration there was on average about 10 days later than at present.

In contrast, the fall migration was much less noted - perhaps because of the very hardships that we take for granted here in the spring: hot weather, full foliage, and minimal singing of migrants. We were spoiled by the ease of the May Day count. Maybe we just needed some Florida birders to lead the way.

Now our patch of Florida has its own avian excitement - witness the near Serengeti conditions on Payne's Prairie last year and the many spectacular birds of this winter season. But alas May Day in north central Florida is most often a bit like groundhog day - an ill-timed Yankee invention. Of course in the rare event of a weather-related bird fallout, there is plenty of excitement, but in mid-May that is about as likely as the winning lottery ticket. I will say, however, that perhaps because of the difficult conditions here, the ambient level of birding competence is extremely high. So hats off to those with the eyes, ears, flexible necks and speed to catch some of our sneaky transitory neotropical migrants in their May passage. And if we don't get'em on the way up, we're sure to see'em in the fall.

*The following article, written by Alan Keitt, the youngest participant in the May Day Count, is reprinted from The Passenger Pigeon, July 1948, Vol. X, No. 3.*

### **The May Day Census** by Alan Keitt



R-r-r-ring!! no response.

R-r-r-ring!!! Finally I turned a very weary eye toward the alarm clock, which of course was out of order, because it said five after three a.m. Then with sudden reality, I remembered that I was being called for to go on the annual May Day Census sponsored by the Kumlien Club of Madison. After eating a rather sparse breakfast to fortify myself, I heard Mr. Barger's car outside. When we had picked up several other members of our party, which numbered six, we started on our venture.

Our first stop was somewhere east of Madison on Highway 30. We walked back to a certain lake (I have no idea of its name) and saw two upland plover.

After this, we wandered about on some country roads until we came to a small, flooded cornfield. Here we saw some red-backed sandpipers, semi-palmated plovers, and a bird which, after some controversy, we decided was a least sandpiper.

By now, I was completely lost, so I will not try to describe our location.

After some more driving, we flushed two Hungarian partridge along the road. We stopped here and walked back to some woods and bottoms. Golden-winged warblers and Wilson's warblers were in abundance here. On the way back to the car, we saw several indigo buntings and my first bobolink of the year.

Our next stop was at Crystal Lake. On the lower side of the lake there is a thick stretch of woods which is very good for warblers. After we had hiked for some time, we found a blue-gray gnatcatcher. On the way back, we got an exceptionally



good view of a prothonotary warbler, one of our best finds.

Next we started to the place where several contingents of the Kumlien Club had planned to eat lunch. On the way, we saw a semi-palmated sandpiper.

After lunch, which was eaten in the rain just outside of Sauk City, we started on along the banks of the Wisconsin River. We stopped on the river-bank across from Ferry Bluff, where we saw two orchard orioles. We left our car here and were driven by another member of the club to Mazomanie, about seven or eight miles away.

The land around this part of the Wisconsin River is divided into three levels. The first is the natural farmland, then some steep bluffs (being on the south side of the river, the bluffs were not so extreme), and third is the vast bottom country.

When we were left at Mazomanie, it was about three in the afternoon. Here we started the six or seven mile hike to the car. On one edge of Mazomanie, we found a blackpoll warbler, which was the only new bird we saw on the farmland level.

The distance from Mazomanie to the bluffs is about three miles. There was a rather stiff wind blowing, and to add to our discomfort, intermittent showers. At the bottom of these bluffs was a small stream bordered by a thick band of woods which was fairly good for warblers.

Since this stream was not fordable, we had to make a detour to a road which crossed the stream. We had followed this road but a short distance when we heard a Bewick's wren; however, we did not find it because of the shortage of time. In order to keep on our course, we then left the road. In some rather open woods, we made two of our best finds, a pileated woodpecker and a bay-breasted warbler.

Next we came into the bottom lands, which were about the most rugged I have ever walked through. It is a level stretch of grass, water, and mud.

We had hiked about a mile and a half when we came to a small river which we could not get across. We now had a choice of two alternatives to walk down the stream and try to find a fallen tree, or make a detour of several miles. To save time, we chose the former.

Animal signs were in abundance along this stream. We found an otter slide, deer and raccoon tracks, and several partial beaver dams. We finally got across the stream on a beaver dam, which stretched about a third of the way across. The remaining distance was too far to jump or wade, so we rigged up a very makeshift bridge, consisting of two poles and some sticks to balance ourselves with.

At this point we noticed a large dark mass in the distance which filled the air, reminding one of grasshopper swarms. It was a huge migratory flock of swallows made up of all species, although bank swallows were prominent. They flew about us so thickly and at such close range, it seemed, that we could have captured many with very little effort.

By this time the water was nearly up to our knees. On the last quarter mile back to the car, we saw another orchard oriole. When we finally got to the car, it was after 7:30. We stayed a few minutes to listen for a whip-poor-will but did not hear it, so we started for home. This ended about the most eventful day of my life. Our total list was 121 or 122, with 26 new ones for me, raising my year's total to 156 species.



## Planning for 2000-2001 Field Trips

First, AAS needs a Field Trip Coordinator for the year. Over the summer, Rex Rowan, Alan Keitt, and others will be putting together a schedule for the year. The coordinator, if you're interested in taking on the job, is very welcome to help with that. But if you can't arrange to help during the summer, all you'll need to do from August-April is be sure there's a guide for each trip, make any changes during the year that may become necessary, and each month supply the editor of *The Crane* with information about the upcoming trips (birds that may be seen, etc.). If you would like to volunteer to be coordinator or lead any field trips, please call Alan Keitt (495-9938) or e-mail [askeitt@gnv.fdt.net](mailto:askeitt@gnv.fdt.net).

Next, in an effort to keep the trips most popular with members and to add new trips that you would enjoy, please take a few minutes and complete the following poll, simply placing a checkmark beside those trips you especially like. In the space below, write in trips you would like to see added.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Florida Caverns State Park              | <input type="checkbox"/> Tallahassee   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> St. George Island State Park            | <input type="checkbox"/> Ft. Clinch    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge      | <input type="checkbox"/> Cedar Point   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hamilton County phosphate mines         | <input type="checkbox"/> Hagens Cove   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ichetucknee Springs State Park          | <input type="checkbox"/> Shired Island |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Little Talbot Island                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Huguenot Park |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ft. George Island                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Hague Dairy   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Guana River State Park                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Zellwood      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chapmans Pond                           | <input type="checkbox"/> La Chua Trail |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Palm Point/Lakeshore Drive              | <input type="checkbox"/> Cedar Key     |
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Please clip this column (or reproduce) and mail your response to Alan Keitt, 16020 SW 75th Street, Archer, FL 32608. You may sign your name if you like and make any additional suggestions about AAS trips. Thanks very much for your time and interest!



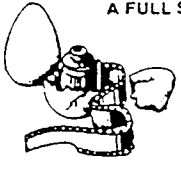
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May 2000



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