

# The Crane

*Alachua Audubon Society*

*Volume 43 Number 6 March/April 2002*

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## SPRING FIELD TRIPS

**Saturday, March 9, 8:00 A.M.**

**Camps Canal and Cones Dike**

Meet in the parking lot of the Bolen Bluff Trail, on US-441 just south of the Paynes Prairie basin (4.3 miles south of SR-331). Rex Rowan will lead this walk along the canal that was dug in the late 1930's to drain Paynes Prairie. Then, by special permission, we will be allowed to continue out the Cones Dike Trail, which runs along another canal. We ought to see Wood Ducks, several species of sparrows, and a good number of hawks. Early warblers such as Northern Parulas and Yellow-throated Warblers should be singing, and with any luck we could find a Louisiana Waterthrush. We should be finished by lunchtime.

**Saturday, April 6, 7:00 A.M.**

**Ocala National Forest**

Meet trip leader Michael Meisenberg at the Kash 'N Karry at 2002 SW 34<sup>th</sup> St. We'll spend part of our time looking for Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, Florida Scrub-Jays, and Bachman's Sparrows, and some spring migrants, as we explore parts of the forest's sandhill and scrub habitats. It may be past lunchtime by the time we return to Gainesville, so either bring a snack or plan on stopping somewhere on the way home.

**Saturday, April 13<sup>th</sup>, 6:30 AM**

**Cedar Key**

Meet in the parking lot of the Target store on Archer Road just east of I-75. John Winn will lead this trip to North-Central Florida's spring migration hotspot. Warblers, tanagers, thrushes, and swallows should be moving though. We'll also look for locally resident birds we don't see in Gainesville such as the Gray Kingbird and Seaside Sparrow. You may want to consider staying over

for lunch in Cedar Key.

**Saturday, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 7:30 AM**

**Palm Point**

In many years Palm Point is the closest thing we have to a migrant trap here in Alachua County. We'll continue to look for migrants this weekend at Palm Point and walking up and down the adjoining road. Meet at Palm Point Park (from SR-20 north on Lakeshore Drive 1.5 miles) at 7:30. This trip will be over by lunchtime.

**Saturday, April 27<sup>th</sup>, 8:00 AM**

**Ft. Desoto County Park**

Meet leader John Hintermeister at the Ft. Desoto County Park visitor center on the Gulf Coast near St. Petersburg. To reach the visitor center, go south on I-275, west on Hwy #682, and then south on #679. Ft. Desoto has a variety of habitats so you never know what may show up here. In recent years it has been host to rarities such as Heerman's Gull and Lazuli Bunting. We'll look and listen for migrants in their beautiful spring colors and song. Definitely bring lunch. There are often some concessions open within the park but they are not totally reliable.

**Saturday, May 4<sup>th</sup>, 8:00 AM**

**Bolen Bluff**

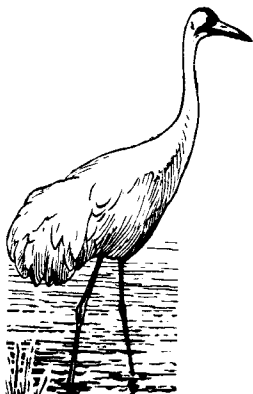
Michael Meisenberg will lead this trip on the Bolen Bluff trail, so meet him at the parking lot on US-441 just south of the Paynes Prairie basin (4.3 miles south of SR-331). We may catch some late migrants and will also search for some nesting birds such as Blue Grosbeaks, Indigo Buntings, Orchard Orioles, and Yellow-breasted Chats. The walk on this trail is an easy 2-3 miles. We'll be done by lunchtime.

# Around the County

by Mike Manetz

All the bird-signs say that spring is upon us. Those of you who get outside at first light have undoubtedly noticed our year-round resident Carolina Wrens and Northern Cardinals singing with increasing ardor. By early March watch for normally secretive Brown Thrashers to emerge from hiding to sing upon high unconcealed perches. Our neotropical summer residents have been returning in good order. First were the Purple Martins in late January followed by Northern Parulas at the middle of February. By the time you receive this copy of *The Crane* folks will be anticipating the arrival of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds at their feeders, and it might be possible to catch a glimpse of a migrant Louisiana Waterthrush at places like Gumroot Swamp. But first, some winter sightings to catch up on.

We had a flurry of Whooping Crane excitement January 26. The Alachua Audubon birding class encountered one at Chapman's Pond (second sighting there this winter) but unfortunately it flew off. It was later located among the flocks of Sandhill Cranes at the Animal Science farm (Williston Road and SW 23<sup>rd</sup> Terrace) by Linda Terry. The bird took flight again but was spotted by Don Goodman at Kanapaha Botanical Gardens. Let's hope there will be more Whooping Crane sightings in our area next



winter.

I don't know if we have ever recorded two Black-chinned Hummingbirds in a single winter, but we may have a pair now. The male Black-chinned previously reported at Sunny Bynum's yard off NW 16<sup>th</sup> Boulevard was still present into the middle of February. Add to that an immature archilochus hummer Bob Simons found in his

yard February 19 and has since determined to be a Black-chinned based on the shape of the wing and the bird's tail-bobbing behavior while feeding. There have been few hummingbirds reported from Kanapaha Gardens this winter, but not due to lack of effort. Linda Terry has been maintaining the feeders there since the departure of Bryant Roberts. Keeping those feeders filled and keeping the faith is a demanding job. Thanks to Linda for doing both.

John Hintermister had a great sparrow day at LaChua trail on February 1, with seven species including three White-crowned and two Lincoln's Sparrows. Adam Kent and I birded Cone's Dike of February 4 and found a nice red Fox Sparrow very near the spot where Andy Kratter saw one last winter. John H. visited Lakeshore Drive February 22 and found a Yellow-breasted Chat, which is very rare here in winter. That, he declared, made twenty-nine species of warblers he has seen in the vicinity of Lakeshore Drive/Palm Point!

Almost as rare as an Ivory-billed Woodpecker here in the county is the Hairy Woodpecker. Most years we manage to eke out a sighting or two. This year Ron Robinson encountered one February 16 along Highway 241 near San Felasco Hammock. Finally, Grace Kiltie reported seeing a White Pelican at Lake Wauberg February 20.



The numbers and variety of ducks at Chapman's Pond has been relatively poor this winter, but the shorebird concentration there has been better than usual, and water levels look good for spring migration if things stay the same. Much of the vegetation has been cut back and a path along the north side of the pond has made viewing from that side more accessible. It might be worth a look come early April.

Thanks to those who shared their sightings through February 23, 2002.

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AAS field trips and programs:**

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**Visit AAS Web Site:**

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*The Crane* is published bimonthly throughout the year. Content of *The Crane* is the sole responsibility of the editor and fulfils stated objectives and goals of Alachua Audubon Society. Annual subscription to *The Crane* is included in AAS dues. Non-Audubon members may subscribe to *The Crane* for \$8 annually. All checks for subscriptions or changes of address should be mailed to Paul Moler, Membership Chairman; see back page for address. Submissions to *The Crane* are welcomed. Please limit each article to no more than two pages.

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# FEATHER QUESTING IN TEXAS

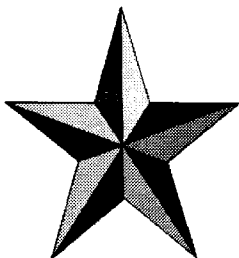
In the wee hours of the morning of January 19, 2002, a group of enthusiastic Gainesville birders gathered to begin a birding adventure organized by Howard Adams. He had dubbed the ten of us "Feather Questers." By 4:18 A.M. Howard Adams, Pat Burns, John Hintermister, Mary Landsman, Barbara Mollison, Craig Parenteau, and Bob Simons were loaded into two minivans and headed for the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. Don Morrow was waiting for us in Tallahassee. Lloyd Davis and Greg McDermott were flying into Houston and would meet us there. Over nine days we logged 3,276 miles and found 192 species of birds, including 142 life birds for the group; everyone had at least one lifer. We found all but four of our 20 target birds and saw 25 of the 29 "Key Species" for the Rio Grande Valley listed in *Birdfinder: A Birder's Guide to Planning North American Trips*.

Houston was our goal on Day One. As we passed through Tallahassee we picked up Don Morrow, engaged "warp" drive and headed west on I-10. There was rain most of the way and we saw quite a number of accidents, some very bad. We were thankful for our drivers (Howard, Barbara, John, Greg and Don) who were to take us safely through the entire trip. We crossed into Texas about 4:00 P.M. and a stop at the newly built Texas Welcome Center produced our first Texas bird, Great-tailed Grackles (a lifer for Bob and Barbara). A brief stop at Anahuac NWR's Rice Unit provided views of a Merlin flying low over the fields and trees at sunset. After an unimaginably bad dinner at a Black-Eyed Pea Restaurant we arrived at our motel somewhat fed and definitely disgruntled and tired, but happy to find Greg and Lloyd.

Day Two began at 6:20 A.M. with a trip to Brazoria NWR where we found the recently reported Trumpeter Swan. In addition to a good variety of the more common ducks we found a pair of Cinnamon Teal, some waders and shorebirds, and our first look at White-faced Ibis. A flock of Horned Larks was lovely in their bright plumage and our first White-tailed Hawk gave us stunning looks both in flight and perched. Late in the morning our caravan, which now included Lloyd and Greg in a car, headed south. We stopped to scan the many flocks of Snow Geese in the fields and some of us were successful in spotting a

Ross's Goose. The rest had to be satisfied with the Greater White-fronted Geese, which were easier to see. We stopped at Aransas NWR to see the Whooping Cranes and also enjoyed the sight of a White-tailed Kite and its acrobatic flight. American Avocets and a Reddish Egret were on the flats. We spent the night in Harlingen.

Howard had arranged for us to spend a half-day at El Canelo Ranch, which caters to dove hunters and birders, an interesting mix. An early start enabled us to begin Day Three at the ranch at dawn. John spotted our first Harris' Hawk and Don a Great Horned Owl. In the yard surrounding the main buildings we watched a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl catching its breakfast. Under the roof of a pavilion Cave Swallows were nesting and a flock of Brewer's Blackbirds were feeding in the corral. We roamed around the ranch looking for sparrows and other thicket birds. We were well pleased with a resident flock of Wild Turkeys and a variety of sparrows which included Lark, Clay-colored, Savannah, Vesper, Grasshopper, Olive, and Lincoln. The frequent and prolonged looks we had at Lincoln Sparrows were a special treat. Birds that we were to see daily we saw first on the



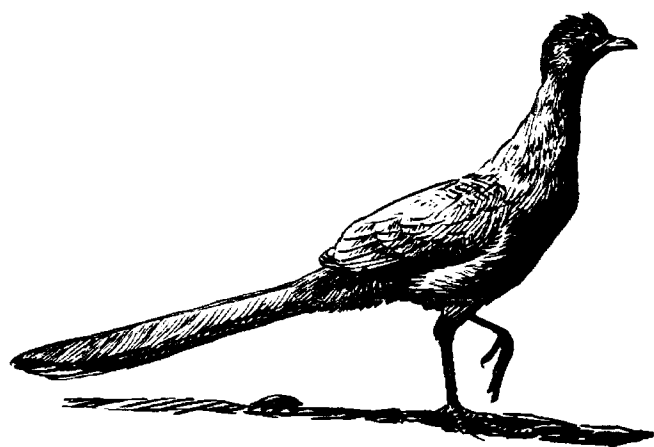
## TEXAS BIRDING

### *The Adventures of Local Birders in the Lone Star State*

Ranch: Golden-fronted and Ladderback Woodpeckers, Verdin, Bewick and Cactus Wrens, Inca Doves, Pyrrhuloxias, Great Kiskadees, Crested Caracaras, and Couch's Kingbirds. While we were crashing about trying to get everyone looks at the Bewick's Wren and Ladderback Woodpecker we flushed a trio of Common Paraques. Two of them settled again under a nearby bush and through the scopes they were stunning—a favorite bird for Pat, Lloyd and Mary. Hiking through the many fields produced Green-tailed Towhee, Sprague's Pipits, and a group of bathing Long-billed Curlews. The Curlews were a magical sight. We stopped for lunch in Raymondsville where John had promised us a Vermillion Flycatcher. Believe it or not, here it was—a beautiful male. Laguna Atascosa NWR was our next stop. We had fleeting looks at a Bell's Vireo and our first White-tipped Doves, Plain Chachalacas, Green Jays (Barbara's favorite bird), and Long-billed Thrasher. We spent that night in Brownsville.

Day Four began at Sable Palm Sanctuary,

where we saw our first Altamira Oriole. From the blind we had excellent views of several Least Grebes and a nice feeding flock included Black-throated Green, Orange-crowned, and Wilson's Warblers. Next we visited the Brownsville Dump—a decided disappointment, lacking in garbage (because of the long weekend) and birds. We did find a pair of Chihuahuan Ravens and Pat spotted a Peregrine Falcon on the ground, surrounded by vultures. It had caught a gull and when one of the vultures tried to steal a bite the Peregrine put on quite a show chasing away all the vultures. From the Dump we drove to McAllen, where we were to spend the next three nights. We stopped at Bentsen State Park where we added Black-throated Gray Warbler and Eastern Screech-Owl to the trip list and saw our first Neotropical Cormorants. Bob had his best experience of the trip standing on



the trail while the Plain Chachalacas came to roost and hearing them "purr" and call. Late afternoon found us at the spot where a Hook-billed Kite was reported to appear daily around 4 P.M. We staked out the spot, but no Kite appeared. We did get directions for finding a Blue Mockingbird at the Cemetery in nearby Weslaco. Then, as we were leaving the spot a Hook-billed Kite flew low across the road in front of the last van and that group all had definitive looks at the bird. That night in McAllen we had great meals at Joe's Crab Shack, where Howard liked the redfish and the coconut shrimp were superb.

Blue Mockingbird would be a lifer for everyone so dawn on Day Five found all of us but Bob, who seemed to have come down with the flu, in the Weslaco Cemetery. White-tipped Doves, a small flock of Lesser Goldfinches, and a cruising Cooper's Hawk kept us amused but there was no mockingbird. We motored on to Santa Ana NWR in search of more cooperative birds. A bobcat walking across the road surprised part of our

group when it stopped, sat down, and licked one of its front legs. After inspecting us carefully it sauntered off into the brush leaving us in awe. Another part of the group had an encounter with an indigo snake, which slithered across the trail just in front of them. The drought in the Valley was much in evidence at Santa Ana NWR. Only a few ponds had water enough to attract birds. We were glad to have better looks at the Cinnamon Teal as well as Long-billed Dowitchers, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, and Black-necked Stilts. Three Roseate Spoonbills worked their way around the edge of the largest pond. Our best bird was a Clay-colored Robin, which Greg spotted deep in the tangled brush. It was cooperative and everyone had a chance to see it through the scopes. A Tropical Parula was spotted by John and the Visitor Center's feeders provided great looks at a male Buff-bellied Hummingbird. Late afternoon we were again at Bentsen SP watching for the Hook-billed Kite. We had to be satisfied with a Gray Hawk.

Early on Day Six (again without Bob) we were back in the cemetery, stalking the mockingbird. We had been there only a short time when Don spotted movement in the undergrowth behind the fence. Eureka? Yes! It was the Blue Mockingbird deep in the tangle of vines and shrubs, foraging on the ground. As it moved around we caught glimpses of its tail, its head, and its blue color. It flew into a thick bush and started to sing—a lovely song, lower and more melodic than a Northern Mockingbird. Then it flew onto the top of the fence, up into a tree, and then disappeared into the thicket. It was THE favorite bird of the trip and we were a very happy group. At the Nature Conservancy's Chihuahua Woods we had excellent views of Curve-billed Thrasher and Cactus Wren and at Anzalduas County Park we added American Pipit, Western Meadowlark, and Northern Rough-winged Swallow to our trip list. At Bentsen SP we made a final unsuccessful attempt for the kite. Back at the motel we found that Bob was much improved after a visit to a doctor.

Day Seven found us in Salineño. We arrived at dawn. Soon Howard spied two dark birds atop a tall tree. They proved to be Red-billed Pigeons, a life bird for Howard and Craig. We enjoyed watching a Ringed Kingfisher hovering over the River and at Pat and Gayle DeWinn's feeders we saw Audubon's Oriole. At Falcon State Park we found our only Black-throated Sparrows of the trip. At Chapeño we missed Brown Jay but found Green Kingfisher. After a fruitless trip to San Ygnacio for White-collared Seedeater we spent the night in Zapata. We said "good-by" to Lloyd,

who left for Houston and his flight home. On Day Eight part of the group visited the Zapata Library, where they easily spotted the White-collared Seed-eater sitting on a fence. It was the favorite bird of the trip for John, Don, and Greg. Mid-morning we headed home, going north out of Zapata with all eyes searching for one final Texas specialty. John spotted it—a Greater Roadrunner, an “exquisite experience” for Pat. It was the last lifer of our trip.

We dropped Greg in Houston for his flight back to Washington, D.C. and stopped for the night at the Louisiana state line. Day Nine we drove through rain (again), left Don in Tallahassee, and arrived back in Gainesville at 8 P.M., a contented group of birders, already talking about where the next Feather Quest would take us.

—Mary Landsman with help from Howard Adams, Pat Burns and John Hintermister

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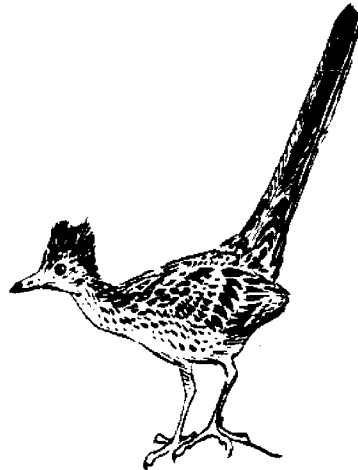
## WINTER BIRDING IN NORTH TEXAS

Two days’ drive west of Gainesville is a special place. For birders Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge might even be called a magical place. A holiday trip to visit relatives brought us within a few miles of the refuge, so we took off a couple of days from visitations and donned our binoculars. What an experience this was!

Located on the south shore of gigantic Lake Texoma, Hagerman NWR draws a wide assortment of wintering birdlife. As we passed over the cattleguard at the south gate, a Greater Road Runner popped out of the roadside shrubbery and started down the caliche track, staying just ahead of the car. At some point the bird evidently tired of the chase and dived into the brush. We stopped and pished

a bit, only to have half a dozen species of birds answer and investigate. The most notable were Harris’ Sparrows, handsome big sparrows sporting pink bills and garish black bibs. This is a sparrow, rather much like the White-throated, that continues to vocalize all through the year, even in the dead of winter. We soon learned to recognize its voice, and throughout our visit to Hagerman we picked up this sound coming from brush piles and especially Osage Orange trees.

This area also hosts an unusual variety of Red-tailed Hawks. With help from Matt White, a local authority, we were able to identify on the wing three subspecies: the typical type, familiar to



north Florida birders, the dark form known as Harlan’s Hawk, and a light, almost white, form called Krider’s Hawk. Matt explained that there are possibly upwards of 2,000 color morphs, varieties and molts of the Red-tailed Hawk, most of these found in the western part of the bird’s range.

But the big winter show at Hagerman NWR features the waterfowl. At mid morning when we arrived, the various ponds and marshes were filled with shorebirds, grebes, ducks and geese. The geese alone are worth a trip to this place. We saw hundreds of Greater White-fronted, Canadas and Snowy Geese. A few Ross’s Geese were on hand but had to be searched for. The Snow Geese came in a variety of plumages from the common all white type with black wing tips to various forms of the “Blue Goose,” some with dark heads and white bodies to others with white heads and dark bodies or, occasionally, with all dark bodies. Why all these birds show up at the refuge at this time of year can be found in the brochure available at refuge headquarters.

Hagerman is managed in a way to provide abundant winter browse for ducks, geese and the like. The wetlands are drained in late spring to encourage the growth of herbaceous plants. Come fall, when the plants are loaded with seed, the wetlands are reflooded, providing ideal habitat for the birds. All right, it’s another government handout! But we have no objections to our tax dollars being used for this kind of program. Most birders would probably agree.

The winter bird show will go on until early March. We hope to return. If you should like to go, here is how to get in touch and receive a useful packet of information:

Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge  
6465 Refuge Road  
Sherman, TX 75092-5817  
903/786-282h

<http://southwest.fws.gov>

—Dana & Nancy Griffin

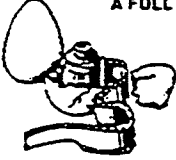
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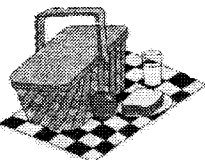
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## **Annual Meeting & Picnic**

# **Y'all Come!!**



This year's annual election and picnic will be held on Wednesday, April 24, at 6:00 P.M. at Kanapaha Park (Veterans' Memorial Park). The park is on the corner of Tower Road (SW 75<sup>th</sup> Street) and SW 41<sup>st</sup> Place. All Audubon members and guests are welcome. Please bring a covered dish or dessert to share; Alachua Audubon provides drinks, plates, and utensils. The park has a covered pavilion, so the picnic takes place, rain or shine. Chapman's Pond, a good birding spot, is just a short walk away, so bring your binoculars.

All current officers have been renominated and the nominees for board terms expiring in 2005 are Howard Adams, Kathy Haines, Bob Simons, Leslie Straub, and Earll "Bubba" Scales. Members may make additional nominations from the floor.

### **Spring Migration Count**

## **HELP WANTED**

This year's North American Spring Migration Count is scheduled for May 11. The question is: Will Alachua County birders be able to participate? We need someone to serve as the compiler/co-ordinator, without which the count can't take place locally. Interested? Call Barbara Muschlitz at 372-4638 for the details on what's involved. You don't necessarily have to be a hot shot at birding field identification for this job!

## **AUDUBON ADVOCATE**

Did you know that you can get Audubon of Florida's *Advocate* by e-mail? Go to the website at [www.audubonofflorida.org](http://www.audubonofflorida.org) and click on "Publications." You can also have it mailed to you (call 1-800-753-5499), but that is less timely and costs Audubon of Florida more (printing and postage). The *Advocate* gives up-to-date news on what the Florida Legislature is doing on conservation issues, such as Rodman Dam, Everglades restoration, and growth management.

## ***Dry Tortugas beckon...***

Tropical Audubon Society is offering a trip to this tiny cluster of islands on April 10-13 (Wednesday-Sunday), 2002. After a champagne ice-breaker aboard the *Yankee Freedom*, the trip departs Key West Wednesday evening and arrives the next morning at Garden Key, surrounded by thousands of raucous Sooty Terns and Brown Noddies. Well-named Magnificent Frigatebirds by the dozen will criss-cross the sky, as if providing air cover. And with a little luck, the island will be swarming with warblers and other migrants grateful to find a spot of land to light upon.

Other islands in the Tortugas can also be visited. Loggerhead Key, the largest, is a good place to find migrant land birds. Hospital Key is home to a small breeding colony of Masked Boobies. Buoys and channel markers among the isles attract Brown Boobies. The boat will make the rounds in search of these birds, with a hopeful eye out for their rare cousins, Red-footed Boobies. The return to Key West is via the Florida current. This trajectory provides good pelagic birding, including Roseate Tern, Audubon's Shearwater, and other oceanic species.

Guides are all Tortugas veterans and are comfortable helping birders from the level of utter novice to jaded 700-clubbers. Cost for the trip is \$635 which includes meals and lodging on the boat. For more info, visit [tropicalaudubon.org](http://tropicalaudubon.org), email [tortugas@tropicalaudubon.org](mailto:tortugas@tropicalaudubon.org) or call 305-666-5111.

## **Swallow-tailed Kites**



The Florida Crackers Chapter of the Florida Trail Association has invited Alachua Audubon members to attend its May chapter meeting which will include a program on the Swallow-tailed Kites. The presentation will be by Dr. Ken Meyer of the Avian Research and Conservation Institute. The meeting is scheduled for Thursday, May 16, at 7:00 P.M. at the Southwest United Methodist Church, 2400 SW Williston Road, Gainesville (one mile west of US 441). For more information, contact Elizabeth vanMierop at 378-4207

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# **This is the last issue of *The Crane* until August. Have a Good Summer!!!**

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**P. O. Box 140464**  
**Gainesville, Florida 32614-0464**

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*March/April 2002*

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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

Please enclose your check payable to:

**National Audubon Society**

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

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