

The Crane

Alachua Audubon Society
Volume 44 Number 5 March 2003

Calendar of Events

Saturday, March 8, 2:00 P.M.

Program Meeting

Millhopper Branch Library, 3145 NW 43rd Street
"Backyard Wildlife Attractions" Ron Robinson will offer tips on how best to attract wildlife, including landscaping ideas and feed and water recommendations. Additionally, Ron will offer advice on squirrel-proofing and on how to avoid window strikes.

Saturday, March 15, 9:00 A.M.

Colclough Pond Air Potato Roundup

Meet at the Sanctuary parking area at the north end of First Way in the Colclough Hill neighborhood to help remove this exotic plant pest. Bring gloves and a backpack or something to carry the air potatoes in. We'll be finished by noon.

Saturday, March 22nd, 9:00 A.M.

"Botanize" your way to Cedar Key with Dana Griffin

Meet in the parking lot of the Target store on Archer Road just east of I-75. We'll take Archer Road down to Cedar Key, stopping along the way to look at wildflowers or anything else we find of interest. Although this trip will focus on plants, Dr. Griffin does permit binoculars as long as they are not too distracting! Any trip that Dana leads is always both fun and educational. Those who wish to will have a group lunch at one of the seafood restaurants on the Gulf. Trip difficulty: 1

Saturday, April 5, 7:00 A.M.

Ocala National Forest

Meet trip leader Bob Simons at the Kash 'N Karry at 2002 SW 34th Street. We'll spend part of our time looking for Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, Florida Scrub-Jays, and Bachman's Sparrows. We'll also rely on Bob's expertise to learn about the

plants and animals of the forest's sandhill and scrub habitats. It may be past lunchtime by the time we return to Gainesville. Trip difficulty: 2.

Sunday, April 13, 8:00 A.M.

Bolen Bluff (Western Section Great Florida Birding Trail #19)

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. In recent years this 2-3 mile trail has been a good spot for a variety of migrants, so we'll be hoping to see some of the season's early ones as they are passing through. We'll be done by lunchtime. Trip difficulty: 2.

TRIP DIFFICULTY

- 1=Most of trip is within easy access to the car and/or walking on level ground of one mile or less.
- 2=Trip may involve walking on uneven ground over distances of 1-2 miles.
- 3=Trip may involve elevation change, uneven ground, and/or distances of greater than 2 miles.

NOMINATIONS

It's time once again for nominations for Alachua Audubon board and officers. If you're willing to serve—or know someone who would be—please call one of the nominating committee members. They are Howard Adams (373-4270), Paul Moler (495-0419), and Grisleda Forbes (371-3124). All suggestions are welcome. Officers serve one-year terms and board members are elected for three years. The election will be at the Annual Meeting and Picnic in April.

To Our March 22 and 23 Visitors at KANPAHA GARDENS FESTIVAL:

Thanks for stopping by the Alachua Audubon Society display and visiting with us. We'd be glad to have you join us on one of our spring field trips. With spring migration reaching its height, there ought to be plenty of birds to see. But we look at other things, too—plants, insects, just about anything connected with our natural world. Our April program meeting will be about frogs, and you're very welcome to come to that. If you'd like to join Alachua Audubon—and membership also includes a subscription to the National Audubon Society magazine—send us the form on the back of this *Crane*. We look forward to seeing you again!

AROUND THE COUNTY...

by Bubba Scales

In his book, *Birders: Tales of a Tribe*, British twitcher Mark Cocker explains that most of his compatriot birders subscribe to at least one of two rare bird pager services. When a noteworthy bird is located, a primary observer makes a call to the service center and a page is subsequently sent to all subscribers giving summary information about the bird and its location. Such a service facilitates quick verification of rare birds and viewing opportunities for those who would travel to see it.

Similarly, Alachua County birders have long communicated their findings to Rex Rowan who, in turn, disseminates information more generally over a personal email service and, as often as possible, travels to verify reports and assist in identifying probable rarities. This winter, the steady flow of email from Rex was punctuated three times by reports of rare birds that revealed themselves to the first observer and were not seen again.

First, Wade Davidson reported a Western Tanager from his yard near Ward's Grocery on February 6. His description of the bird was convincing, but after much canvassing by several area birders, no further observations were made. Second, Grace Kiltie observed two extraordinarily unlikely (even darned near impossible) Southern Lapwings at the Hague Dairy on February 14. She made very careful observations of the birds' topography and behavior for some 15 minutes; enough time to banish concerns that she was observing any other species of shorebird. Despite much effort, the lapwings have not been relocated. Third, a bird believed to be a Lark Bunting was reported from a northwest Gainesville yard as recently as February 22. Granted, the observers are backyard hobbyists, but the details of their observation are compelling. Several birders spent a morning watching for the bird, but it has not been relocated.

The unprecedented number of winter hum-

mingbird reports grew slightly since the last Around the County, bringing the total number of individuals near 40. Record cold temperatures in late January, however, may have put an end to the counting. While many people reported seeing hummingbirds well after the cold snap, others reported that their wintering birds either moved on or did not survive. Any new reports, especially of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, are probably migratory birds. In fact, Paul Duey observed an apparent migrating Ruby-throated at his feeder on February 20. Assuming that this bird is migratory, it is the earliest ever reported in Alachua County by six days.

In the last issue, I reported a LeConte's Sparrow that was first observed at the San Felasco Progress Park Unit by two neophyte birders who elected to remain unnamed. On January 31, Grace Kiltie observed a LeConte's Sparrow in the same location allowing the original observers, Becky Enneis and Bob Carroll, to be credited. Ingrid Scales and I observed two Grasshopper Sparrows during an unsuccessful attempt to find the LeConte's just several days before.

On February 2, Ivan Samuels observed a singing Fox Sparrow on the north rim of Paynes Prairie. Those of you looking for practice identifying sparrows should probably set aside a few hours to peruse the Hague Dairy complex. On February 8, Mary Landsman reported seeing some 500 Chipping Sparrows strewn out along fence lines at the dairy. On February 21, Adam Kent and I sifted through flocks of Chipping, Savannah, Song, and Swamp Sparrows to finally observe a single Lincoln's Sparrow near the southwest cor-

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The Crane is printed on recycled paper.

Monthly Board Meetings

The Alachua Audubon Society Board of Directors meets at 6:30 P.M. on the second Wednesday of each month. All members are welcome to attend. Meetings this year will be at the clubhouse for Mill Pond, 401 NW 48th Boulevard, across from Gainesville Health & Fitness Center on Newberry Road.

ner of the lagoon. I refound the bird in the same spot on February 24.

Three reports of Painted Buntings were submitted in January. All three were male and all were visiting feeders. Two of the reports were accompanied by incontrovertible photographic evidence. Reports of Indigo Buntings continued to accumulate, with two birds from Judy Bryan's feeders on January 31. Mike Manetz and John Hintermister also observed one at a northwest Gainesville feeder on February 22.

Even more surprising, perhaps, was a Wood Thrush way out of season and a Brown Pelican way out of range. The Wood Thrush was found on January 28 near Carr Hall on campus by Dr. Doug Levey. It is Alachua County's second winter record. The pelican was first observed on Bivens Arm by Rex Rowan on February 8. It is Alachua County's 25th record.

The county's first-of-the-year Purple Martin report was submitted on January 29 by Don Maro of Alachua. Just three days later, Lynn Badger saw the second martin of the season at her house on Kanapaha Prairie.

The first movement of migratory Sandhill Cranes happened a little early this year. Rex Rowan observed a flock of nearly 100 cranes flying high and to the northwest over his northeast Gainesville home on February 3. Mary Landsman observed the most substantial departure of the season on February 15. From the eastern portion of Bivens Arm, Mary observed approximately 2765 cranes in just over one hour. Many of the birds

circled to find thermals, but all eventually flew out of sight to the north. Ria Leonard observed a less substantial but still impressive flight of some 905 birds on February 21 over the UF campus.

And, finally, Ivan Samuels observed a transient Louisiana Waterthrush on February 23 along Sweetwater Branch. Ivan's warbler was Alachua County's earliest Louisiana Waterthrush on record by five days. It's also the perfect way to sign off for this issue of *Around the County* because, if birders have their way this spring, I'll have many more warblers to write about in the next issue. You just have to get out there and find them.

Thank you to all who submitted reports through February 24.

Breeding Bird Atlas Now on the Web

The Florida Breeding Bird Atlas (BBA) is now available on the Internet. The atlas, documenting the breeding distributions of all bird species in Florida during 1986-1991, can be seen at www.wildflorida.org/bba/, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's website. The BBA shows that 196 species were confirmed breeding and another 19 species were found to be probable or possible breeders. It includes species accounts and lots of additional material, as well as maps. The maps are in some instances obsolete, since the survey was done over 10 years ago, and some species, such as House Finches and Eurasian Collared-Doves have expanded hugely since then. However the maps for most native species remain unchanged. This project was a collaborative effort of Audubon of Florida, the Florida Ornithological Society, and the FWC. Nearly 1,900 participants, most of them volunteers, were involved in conducting surveys and compiling data for the BBA. The FWC website is based on a final report by Herb Kale, Bill Pranty, Brad Stith, and Wes Biggs. This is the first time that the BBA data have become widely available to the public.

—Karl Miller

The Ocklawaha River: *Past, Present, and Future*

By Bob Simons

Fifty years ago, when I was ten, a neighbor, Mr. K. S. McMullen, took some of us boys fishing. Mr. McMullen was born and raised on a farm in Madison County, and was in charge the South Florida district of the University of Florida's agriculture extension service. He had fished the

Suwannee, Orange Lake, Fish-Eating Creek, and most of the other really good fishing spots in Florida, but he took us that time, and many times after, to his favorite fishing spot—the Ocklawaha River between Orange Springs and Eureka. We caught a mess of red-bellies in the clear water of late May.

What a wonderful place it was. Mature cypress, hardwood, and cabbage palm forest all along the sides of the river, deer, Wild Turkeys,

Deadline for the April-May Crane is March 22

The Crane 3

Pileated Woodpeckers, Belted Kingfishers, Limpkins, Prothonotary Warblers, Red-shouldered Hawks, Swallow-tailed Kites, and many other kinds of wildlife to see, and a beautiful wild river to fish in. There were many kinds of fish. In addition to the usual bass, bream, shellcrackers, stumpknockers, etc., there were migratory fish such as mullet, shad, striped bass, channel catfish, and American eels. There was even an occasional manatee. There were twenty clear springs along the river, some with spring runs flowing to the river. An occasional pleasure boat would cruise past, coming from Palatka, or even Jacksonville, on a trip up to Silver Springs and back, and there were bank fishermen and canoeists here and there along the river.

Today, this is a very different place. There is still fishing for bass, bream, and red-bellies, but no mature forest or clear springs or striped bass or swallow-tailed kites or manatees. All that made the Ocklawaha River a uniquely enjoyable place disappeared when Rodman Dam was built in the 1960's as part of the Cross Florida Barge Canal boondoggle. Today, there are drowned stumps of former trees, beds of hydrilla, and dying cypress trees. True, there is some wildlife: herons, egrets, Ospreys, ducks, coots, and an occasional Bald Eagle. But nothing compared to the former diversity and abundance of life that once flourished in and along the wild river.

And at what cost? The wild river came free of charge with no maintenance costs. It costs half a million dollars each year to maintain the reservoir, and periodic repair of the dam and locks, now years past due, will cost over two million each time. Several kinds of rare fish and the southern most population of striped bass have been eliminated from the river system. The reservoir wastes a huge amount of water through evaporation, and becomes so eutrophic and stagnant that there are periodic massive fish kills. During each of the most recent fish kills (in 1985, 1987, and 2000) millions of fish died and rotted. Manatees are no longer able to come up to the Silver River, and many have been killed by the dam or crushed in the lock.

The environmental, economic, and fiscal benefits of restoration are so compelling that Governor Bush and five previous governors, the Florida Cabinet, and every state and federal re-

source agency and every conservation group in the state supports restoring the river. The cost of restoration, estimated at \$13.9 million, is far less than the long term cost of maintaining the reservoir. Unfortunately, powerful politicians representing special interests have consistently rebuffed any attempts at restoration.

So, what does the future hold for the Ocklawaha?

The U.S. Forest Service is now in charge of managing land affected by Rodman Dam. They have supported its removal since the 1970's. Over a third of the dam is in Ocala National Forest and about a square mile of the forest is submerged beneath the reservoir waters. In a surprise move last year, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) declined to sign the special use permit that allows portions of Rodman Dam (also known as Kirkpatrick Dam) and Rodman Reservoir to continue to occupy Ocala National Forest land. "This action opens the door for the U.S. Forest Service to pursue restoration," FDEP Deputy Secretary Bob Ballard said in a letter regarding the decision.

In December 2001, the Forest Service released an official decision to restore the Ocklawaha River by removing Rodman Dam. Based on an in-depth Environmental Impact Statement, restoration is the only action that meets the federal agency's standards of land management.

Federal agencies need your support to pursue restoration. Write to your Congressmen and ask them to financially support the federal objective of restoration and copy the letter to Representative Corrine Brown, 101 East Union Street, Suite 202, Jacksonville, Florida 32202 (since redistricting, she now represents the reservoir area.) Surely, the time has come to replace the reservoir of death (dead trees, dead fish, dead manatees) with the river of vibrant life that used to flow there and can flow there once again.

COMING NEXT MONTH

April 19: Program Meeting "Frogs of Florida"
Reptile expert Paul Moler will describe the many and varied species of frogs which can be found across the state. Details in the April-May *Crane*.
And at Morningside Nature Center:

April 11 and 12: Native Plant Sale

April 24-26: Farm and Forest Festival

Alachua Audubon Society Website

www.flmnh.ufl.edu/aud

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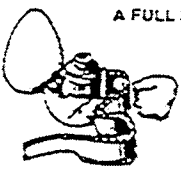
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