

# The Crane

*Alachua Audubon Society*

*Volume 44 Number 6 April-May 2003*

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## **SPRING FIELD TRIPS**

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

**Ocala National Forest**

Meet trip leader Bob Simons at the Kash 'N Karry at 2002 SW 34<sup>th</sup> 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.

**Sunday, April 20, 8:00 A.M.**

**Palm Point (Western Section Great Florida Birding Trail #18)**

Meet trip leader John Winn at 8:00 in the parking lot at Powers Park on Hawthorne Road (SR-20), 4.4 miles east of Waldo Road. After checking out Powers Park, we will move over to Palm Point. We never know what migrants may show up on this little peninsula. We'll walk the trail in the park and also wander up and down the adjacent road in search of these little beauties. Trip difficulty: 1.

**Saturday, April 26, 6:30 A.M.**

**Cedar Key (Western Section Great Florida Birding Trail #31-34)**

Meet in the parking lot of the Target store on Archer Road just east of I-75. Rex Rowan 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. Trip difficulty: 1

**Saturday, May 3, 6:30 A.M.**

**Hamilton County Mines (Western Section Great Florida Birding Trail #6)**

Meet at the Tag Agency on NW 34<sup>th</sup> St. (SR-121) just south of US-441. This is the first time in a number of years that we have scheduled a spring trip to the mines instead of one focused on waterfowl in the winter. This Great Florida Birding Trail site is not open to the public very often, so jump on this opportunity to visit it. Trip difficulty: 2.

**Saturday, May 10, 8:00 A.M.**

**Ft. DeSoto County Park (Western Section Great Florida Birding Trail #91)**

Meet leader John Hintermister at the Ft. Desoto County Park visitor center on the Gulf Coast. 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 Heermann's Gull and Lazuli Bunting. We scheduled this trip to target late migrants. Usually one or two Connecticut Warblers show up at Ft. DeSoto every year and if the bird gods shine upon us, we could luck into seeing one. Definitely bring lunch. There are often some concessions open within the park, but they are not totally reliable. 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

## AROUND THE COUNTY...

by Bubba Scales

It's quite conceivable, albeit improbable, that a Western Tanager would visit a park or forested yard in north central Florida, especially in winter. But if an observer reports having seen one taking seed from a feeder, an additional measure of skepticism is understandably applied.

Rare bird reports are often met with a measure of skepticism. Certainly, a few gently probing questions from a diplomatic and cordial "devil's advocate" should foster improvement and care among birders about their observations. And though it is very difficult to disprove a careful account of a bird as conspicuous as an adult male Western Tanager, some doubts must have persisted regarding Wade Davidson's uncorroborated February 6 report of an adult male Western Tanager taking seed from a feeder in his NW Gainesville yard.

Whether Wade ever cared or not, those doubts evaporated when the same thing happened to Linda Hensley on March 7 and 8. This time it was a sub-adult male and it was seen by a couple dozen area birders who simply stood in her dining room and watched the feeder for a few minutes.

Many of the same birders were able to observe a Purple Finch at a feeder in Rex Rowan's yard. Rex first observed the bird on March 2. It has not been seen since March 10. Birders and birdfeeding enthusiasts are encouraged to spend a bit of energy memorizing the differences between the Purple Finch and the increasingly common House Finch. Next winter we may be able to turn up a few more reports of this increasingly uncommon bird.

Spring migration continues to gain momentum as birders anticipate the upcoming peak in northerly bird movement. Ruby-throated Hummingbirds have been trickling through since early February. Marcy Jones and Lloyd Davis each reported a Ruby-throated on March 5 and Wild Birds Unlimited customers have been offering reports almost daily since the first week of March. Several people who reported wintering *Selasphorus* hummingbirds still had activity since the last edition of *Around the County*.

A Solitary Sandpiper and a Spotted Sandpiper were seen occasionally throughout the winter at the Hague Dairy lagoon, most recently on March 23 by Pat Burns. Continuing reports of Indigo Buntings and at least one more mid-March report of two Painted Buntings blur the distinction between overwintering birds and pe-

### May Board Meeting

The final meeting for this activity year of the Alachua Audubon Society Board of Directors will be May 14 at 6:30 P.M. All members are welcome to attend. Meetings this year are at the clubhouse for Mill Pond, 401 NW 48th Boulevard, across from Gainesville Health & Fitness Center on Newberry Road.

renial spring migrants. The issue was further complicated by a very early Summer Tanager reported on March 11 by Martha King. But on the same day, Marcy Jones reported having heard the first Chuck-Will's-widows of the year.

Since then, many more firsts for 2003 have been registered including: A Purple Gallinule along the La Chua Trail on the 14<sup>th</sup> (Howard Adams); two Northern Rough-winged Swallows at the UF Fisheries Department on the 14<sup>th</sup> (Michael Meisenburg); a Prothonotary Warbler, a Prairie Warbler, and a Red-eyed Vireo in Andy Kratter's yard on the 15<sup>th</sup>; a Hooded Warbler in San Felasco Hammock on the 18<sup>th</sup> (Karl Miller); a probable Chimney Swift over Rex Rowan's house on the 20<sup>th</sup>; a Great Crested Flycatcher on the 21<sup>st</sup> (Pat Burns); and an Eastern Kingbird in Alachua on the 24<sup>th</sup> (Chuck Graham).

Around the County will take a break until the next Audubon season begins in August. For updates on what is going on around the county until then, please keep up with your email alerts or call me at Wild Birds Unlimited.

Thank you to all who submitted reports through March 26.

## Small's "Surprise"

In May, 1917, John Kunkel Small, head curator of the Museums and Herbariums of the New York Botanical Garden, W. Stanley Hanson, a bird inspector with the U.S. Biological Survey, and two others crossed the southern portion of the state of Florida from Miami to Fort Pierce to

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The Crane is printed on recycled paper.



### *April Program Meeting*

## FROGS of FLORIDA

Reptile and amphibian expert Paul Moler, a long-time Alachua Audubon member and a biologist with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, will present a program on "Frogs of Florida" on April 19 at 2:00 P.M. in the meeting room of the Millhopper Branch Library, 3145 NW 43<sup>rd</sup> Street.

Florida is home to 27 native and three well established exotic species of frogs. This program will give you an introduction to the lives and habits of these interesting but largely unseen creatures. In addition to information about their natural history, each species will be given an opportunity to sing a few words on its own behalf.

Fort Myers. Among the many astonishing descriptions of south Florida at that time was this particular item:

Perhaps the most interesting creature on these prairies was the burrowing owl. This bird had honeycombed the prairie in many places with its burrows. These tunnels, often six to eight feet long, are about a foot beneath the surface of the sand. At one end is an opening approximately six inches in diameter, while at the other end is a nest. The old owls were so tame that one could almost pick them up, and often they would sit perfectly quiet while the automobiles passed them at a distance of not more than two feet.

Out of curiosity we decided to dig into one of the burrows. Starting at the opening, we began by lifting the sand out very carefully. Of a sudden we were startled by the rattle of a rattlesnake. After proceeding a few inches farther we heard two rattlesnakes; before going much farther into the burrow a third rattlesnake began to rattle. The digging became more exciting as we worked farther in and as the snakes rattled more loudly. When we neared the end of the burrow we cautioned one another to be careful not to get our hands too close to the snakes.

This seemed to be an excellent opportunity to get good photographs of living rattlesnakes. Consequently the camera was set up and everything prepared for the opening of the end of the burrow. As there was no woody growth on the prairie the question of getting sticks with which

to fight the snakes arose. After considerable search several surveyor's stakes were found, and with these we prepared nooses for capturing the serpents alive. With extreme caution we approached the end of the burrow; the snakes began to rattle more viciously. Finally the sand was removed from the top of the end of the burrow, and to our surprise we found four young owls, three large and one small, but — no snakes!

It was the three larger owls that were making the noise of a rattlesnake, and imitating it so well that all of us who had had personal experience with rattlesnakes were deceived. We decided that this experience proved that the stories we used to hear of owls, prairie dogs, and rattlesnakes living peacefully together in the same burrow were fantastic. Of course, a rattlesnake might enter an owl's burrow, either to seek shelter or food; but it is a difficult matter for any one well acquainted with the habits of rattlesnakes to believe that a husky rattler would be considerate and restrain his appetite, with such a tempting morsel as a young owl or young prairie dog lying about in his den. After photographing owls instead of rattlesnakes, we replaced them in their nest and rebuilt their burrow, as well as we could, by making a roof of brush over which we replaced the sand."

Excerpted from "A Botanical Excursion to the Big Cypress" by John Kunkel Small, *Natural History*, Vol. 20, No. 4, pp. 488-500 (1920)

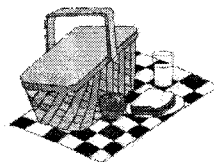
—submitted by Karen Brown

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

## Annual Meeting & Picnic

# Y'all Come!!



This year's annual election and picnic will be held on Wednesday, April 23, at 6:00 P.M. at the clubhouse for Mill Pond, 401 NW 48th Boulevard, across from Gainesville Health & Fitness Center on Newberry Road. This is the same location where monthly Board meetings are held. All Audubon members and guests are welcome. Please bring a covered dish or dessert to share; Alachua Audubon provides drinks, plates, and utensils. The clubhouse has an outdoor grill. There is a swimming pool which will be open for us.

The business meeting portion will consist of the annual election of officers, board members, and the nominating committee. The current president, Scott Flamand, and secretary, David Wahl, have agreed to be renominated. The nominee for vice president is Rex Rowan. Barbara Mollison has been nominated as treasurer. The nominees for board terms expiring in 2006 are Emily Schwartz, Martha King, Michael Meisenburg, Craig Parenteau, and Peter L. Ames. Additional nominations may be made from the floor. The nominating committee consists of Howard Adams, Paul Moler, and Griselda Forbes.

### Help Wanted

## SWAINSON'S WARBLER

Stefanie Nagid from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, in cooperation with Jay Anderson from the Suwannee River Water Management District, is conducting a survey of Swainson's Warblers on the District owned Steinhatchee Conservation Area in late May and early June. She is looking for volunteers to help conduct the survey in order to cover the maximum amount of potential habitat on the property. This survey will likely last for three weekdays, consisting of four morning hours per day. Volunteers will be provided with a map of the property, a survey station location, a tape of a singing male, a tape player, and instructions for data collection. For more information and to sign up please call Stefanie or Jay at 386-362-1001.

## At Morningside in April Native Plant Sale

The annual Spring Native Plant Sale at Morningside Nature Center, 3540 East University Avenue, will be Saturday, April 11, from 8:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M. There will be a wildflower walk, educational displays, and children's activities. For sale, in addition to plants, are birdhouses, birdseed, discounted University Press books, coffee, snacks, and lunches. Plants are provided by local native plant growers. Payment is by check or cash only, no credit cards. The sale is cosponsored by the Friends of Morningside, the Paynes Prairie Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society, and the Gainesville Division of Nature Operations, and 25% of the proceeds will benefit educational programs at Gainesville's nature parks. On Friday, April 11, there is a private sale of plants only for members of the sponsoring organizations from 5:30-7:00 P.M., but non-members may join at the gate.

### Farm & Forest Festival

The quarter century celebration Farm and Forest Festival is scheduled for Saturday and Sunday, April 24 and 25, from 10:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. at Morningside Nature Center, 3540 East University Avenue. The 1890's Farm will have costumed interpreters. Some of the many demonstrations at the farm will include barrel making, basket making, spinning and weaving, soap making, and woodworking. There will be a quilt show, live old-breed farm animal babies, and horse-drawn wagon rides. Old-style southern food and drink will be available. There will be environmental and historical displays, nature exhibits, and naturalist-led walks. Admission is \$5 for adults, \$3 for children 3-12 years, and babies free. For more information, visit [www.natureoperations.org](http://www.natureoperations.org).

## AUDUBON ADVOCATE

Did you know that you can get Audubon of Florida's *Advocate* by e-mail? Go to the website at

*Alachua Audubon Society Website*

**[www.flmnh.ufl.edu/aud](http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/aud)**

Add it to your list of favorites and visit us for all the latest updates and/or changes for field trips and programs, as well as information on good birding spots in the area.

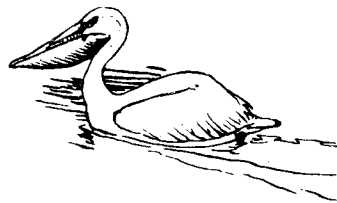
www.audubonofflorida.org and click on "Publications." You can also have it mailed to you (call 1-800-753-5499), but that is less timely and costs Audubon of Florida more (printing and postage).

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.

## Birding Coastal North Carolina

Didn't someone once remark that one man's trash might be another's treasure? A thought similar to that came to us recently as we birded along Lake Mattamuskeet's five mile causeway. It was mid-November and several thousand Tundra Swans had ensconced themselves for the season on this 50,000 acre water body. Lake Mattamuskeet is situated in the northern coastal plain of North Carolina. We'd come to see these birds plus anything else in feathers that might choose to show up.

We were not alone. A van load of North Carolina birders was ahead of us. They'd stopped at one of the better pull outs and already had their spotting scopes unsheathed and focused on something out on the lake. "What a tremendous flock of swans," I commented to one of their number. "Swans?," he replied, "Oh yeah, they're here every winter." "Isn't that what you're looking at?," I asked. "Heavens, no," the scoper snorted. "I'm checking out the 12 White Pelicans mixed in." White Pelicans, it turns out, are a really big deal in the Tarheel State. Twelve White Pelicans at Mattamuskeet was sear-



ing the RBA hotline. One White Pelican will draw a serious North Carolina birder across several county lines —maybe across the entire state—for a glimpse, whereas 15,000 Tundra Swans elicit something resembling an enormous yawn. As they say, it's all relative.

Following a suggestion offered by one of our Mattamuskeet contacts, we decamped for the Outer Banks and the Nags Head fishing pier. Pier birding is a good substitute for a stomach churning pelagic trip. It's a whale of a lot cheaper and one's insides wind up in about the same position coming and going. The Nag's Head pier is a good 750 feet long. When we arrived, Northern Gannets were soaring past, occasionally dive bombing onto unseen prey. Skeens of Black Scoters raced past, heading south. Great Black Backed Gulls and Forster's Terns stuck closer by, perhaps hoping to pick up a tid bit from the pier.

Further down the Outer Banks, we came to Pea Island NWR, a great birding spot in migration. Here we saw Horned Grebes, Marbled Godwits, a Duke's mixture of ducks and more Tundra Swans. Coastal North Carolina is one of those special places, possibly a must see place for birders.

—Dana and Nancy Griffin

## The Business Birder Goes Coastal

*Editor's note: John Ennis, a full time healthcare consultant and part time birder, who wishes that it were the other way around, is a former resident of Gainesville and a long-time Alachua Audubon supporter. He now lives near Wilmington, North Carolina, but travels extensively on business, submitting periodic reports. The following is an account of a fall trip he took near his home.*

Hello, my name is John and I'm a Birder. I have spent more time in Texas since March 2001 than in North Carolina. Wonder if I could register to vote there? I love Texas, but this travel stuff has gotten ridiculous! Nuts! Nuts! Nuts! I am going coastal!

I had put off buying a scope for about 10 years, waiting until I was a good enough birder to deserve one, but I gave up and bought one anyway. The "shakedown cruise" for my new scope was a trip to Lake Mattamuskeet and the Outer Banks.

Ten days after that, I was fortunate to go birding on Cape Cod, as a byproduct of a business trip. Have there ever been better reasons to go coastal and to buy a scope? Life could be good again!

The shakedown cruise began at Fort Caswell and Topsail Island. The first day I got great looks at a Kestrel and a Peregrine Falcon. The following day I visited Topsail Island and observed: Northern Gannett, Common Loon, Sanderling, Black-bellied Plover, Yellow-rumped Warbler, House Finch, Mallard, Clapper Rail, Henslow's Sparrow, Common Snipe, Redhead, and many others of the normal beach fare.

The scope was a big success. Having the snipe and rail in the scope at the same time at approximately 60X, as the rail walked past the snipe, was priceless. I also filled the scope with the Henslow's Sparrow, only 40 plus feet away. Life is good!

My next outing was with Lower Cape Fear Bird Club at Lake Mattamuskeet, about 200 miles from Wilmington. Birds observed included: Pied-billed Grebe, Tundra Swan, Canada Goose, American Black Duck, Northern Pintail, American Wigeon, Ring-necked Duck, Ruddy Duck, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, Merlin, Long-billed Dowitcher, Great Horned Owl, Long-eared Owl, Belted Kingfisher, Eastern Phoebe, Tree Swallow, Carolina Chickadee, Golden-crowned, Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Palm Warbler, Eastern Towhee, Red-winged Blackbird, and Eastern Meadowlark.

As we drove up NC 94, which traverses a dike that splits the lake, a large bird appeared on my left, flying parallel to the road. I caught up with it and drove along side for a few seconds. It was an eagle, possibly a Golden Eagle. I knew that if I stopped, it would fly away; however, I finally had to pull over and stop to use my binoculars. Of course, the bird banked left and took off. I saw some white on top of its wings. Only our leader and I saw the bird. We called it a Golden Eagle, but further review was inconclusive, so I will not count it because it was probably an immature Bald Eagle.

Next we went on to Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge and Oregon Inlet on the Outer Banks. We added: American Bittern, Snowy Egret, Tricolored Heron, White Ibis, Snow Goose (Blue Goose also), Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, Lesser Scaup, Hooded Merganser, Northern Harrier, American Coot, Semipalmated Plover, American Avocet, Greater Yellowlegs, Ring-billed Gull, Herring Gull, Greater Black-backed Gull, Tropical Kingbird, Marsh Wren, Prairie Warbler, Northern Cardinal, Song Sparrow, and Boat-tailed Grackle. A Peregrine Falcon was perched on the nesting platform close to the visitor center, giving us the best possible view.

Chasing rare bird alerts is fun. We found the Tropical Kingbird at a dike between the New Field Pond and the South Pond at Pea Island, just where it had been reported for days. (Unfortunately, these chases are not always successful. In Texas I missed a Green-breasted Mango Hummingbird in McAllen; however, I still have one chigger as a souvenir from sitting on a front lawn watching for him to appear. Wonder if all of those other birders sitting with me still have "souvenirs"?)

The Pea Island observation I enjoyed most was watching the opportunistic ducks follow and feed behind swans which were stirring up the

bottom of the shallow impoundments. The scene, repeated for each of the dozen or so swans in view, was like a battleship being followed by eight to 10 small gunboats. One Lesser Scaup repeatedly dove under its swan and came up in front of it. Really!

Another fun observation at Pea Island occurred upon leaving. There were at least two other convoys of cars parked in the fairly small parking lot. A large group from the Nature Conservancy tried to line up their cars and leave the parking lot at the same time we did. The scene was much like the Japanese evacuating Tokyo in the path of Godzilla.

Early Sunday, six of us that got up at 4:30 A.M. to see the Leonid meteor shower before our next birding stop. Two smart members of the group (not me) brought blankets and the smartest even brought a pillow. Thank goodness they shared the blankets, so all six of us were able to lie on the ground and watch from the shoulder of a dark side road of the national seashore. Can you imagine the sight of six adults lying on their backs staring into the pre-dawn darkness? It was great, well worth getting up for. Seeing the meteors I mean. We also saw two satellites; I think they were both drakes.

Later Sunday, we covered Hatteras Island, Salvo, and Ocracoke Island, on our trip back to Wilmington via the Ocracoke Cedar Island ferry. Species recorded included: Black-crowned Night Heron, Bufflehead, Osprey, King Rail, Willet, Red Knot, Dunlin, Laughing Gull, Lesser Black-back Gull, Royal Tern, Forster's Tern, and Northern Flicker. The ferry trip was unproductive except that we probably saw at least 90 some percent of the free world's Double-crested Cormorants.

While I cannot count the Golden Eagle, I have no problem counting the Brant decoy observed on Hatteras Island. I was close enough to touch it, leaving no doubt to its identification. I would have rather had the eagle.

What a wonderful trip! Going with a group is always therapeutic. I was, however, incessantly teased about my new scope and there was much speculation about its cost. Scope envy is not a pretty thing. Eventually, I returned their fire by referring to it as the Hubble Telescope and revealing that it cost about the same as the Gross National Product of several small countries.

Seriously, they all seemed to enjoy having the scope with us. As far as I am concerned, it has already paid for itself. Having a scope full of Henslow's Sparrow, Great Horned Owl, Long-eared Owl, and Peregrine Falcon, already justifies the cost! Life is great again!

--John Ennis



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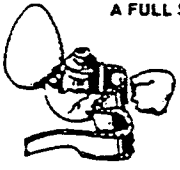
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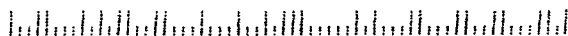
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Chapter E-18

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