

# The Crane

*Alachua Audubon Society*  
Volume 45 Number 6 April-May 2004

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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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**Saturday, April 3, 7:00 AM**

**Ocala National Forest**

Meet trip leader Bob Simons for this locally legendary field trip to the Ocala National Forest. Bob presents the natural features of the Ocala National Forest from a broad ecological perspective. Expect to learn as much about plants and mammals as you do about birds. Avian highlights in the Ocala National Forest include Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, Bachman's Sparrow, and the Florida Scrub-Jay. Pack water, a snack, and dress for exposure. Trip difficulty: 3

**Saturday, April 10, 8:00 AM**

**Mill Nature Preserve Creek**

Join us for this exploration of Mill Creek Nature Preserve, the first property bought under the Alachua County Forever program. Located in northern Alachua County, Mill Creek's rare slope forest contains the southern-most extent of American beech trees in North America. Also there is the state-endangered pondspice, and two more rare natural communities of Alachua County: pondpine flatwoods and beaver ponds. While much of this trip will be spent exploring the preserve's natural communities, this site should be very good for spring migrants. Meet at the Tag Agency on NW 34th Street just south of US 441 (across from ABC Liquors) to carpool to the site. Trip difficulty: 3

**Sunday, April 18, 8:00 AM**

**Ft. Desoto County Park (Pinellas County)**

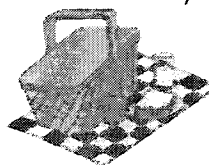
Meet trip leader John Hintermister at the park's

visitor center at the southern tip of Pinellas County. To reach the visitor center, go south on I-275, west on Highway 682, and then south on 679. Once you are in the park, follow the signs. Ft. Desoto is one of Florida's premier birding destinations during migration because it is a prominent land feature for birds returning from the south over the Gulf of Mexico. In recent years, birders have come from all over the state to see a Heerman's Gull and an Elegant Tern. Bring a lunch, water, and dress for maximum exposure. Trip difficulty: 2

**Wednesday, April 21, 6:00 PM**

**Alachua Audubon Society Picnic**

This year's annual meeting will be held at Earl P. Powers Park. (See additional information elsewhere in this *Crane*.) The 10-acre park is situated just



west of Prairie Creek along the south shore of Newnans Lake. Facilities include covered picnic shelters, grills, modern rest rooms, playground, boat ramp and an observation deck. Bring

your favorite covered dish creation to share with others. Alachua Audubon Society will provide refreshments, plates, and eating utensils. There will be a brief meeting for the election of board members and officers, but most of the time will be spent talking about birds and feasting on a wide range of Epicurean delights! Everyone is welcome, members and non-members alike! **Directions to Powers Park:** from downtown Gainesville travel east on University Avenue for 1 mile (S.R. 26),

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.

bear right onto Hawthorne Road (S.R. 20), travel 3 miles to the park entrance on the left (5910 SE Hawthorne Road). Do not forget to bring your binoculars.

#### **Saturday, April 24, 6:30 AM**

##### **Cedar Key**

Meet trip leader Rex Rowan in the parking lot of the Target store on Archer Road just east of I-75. Cedar Key is a quintessential Florida birding destination where birders can often view flocks of shorebirds over one shoulder and flocks of songbirds over the other. Last year's field trip participants encountered a classic migratory fallout of warblers, thrushes, tanagers, and orioles. Could it happen two years in a row? Participants may want to stay in Cedar Key for lunch. Trip difficulty: 2

#### **Saturday, May 1, 8:00 AM**

##### **Lake Alice**

Join field trip leader Bubba Scales in the Lake Alice parking lot on Museum Road on the UF campus. Make close observations of nesting wading birds from the lake margin, watch Purple Martins forage for flying insects just above the surface of the lake, stroll through the swampy lowlands looking for passerine migrants, and canvas the thick vegetation at the end of the boardwalk. This is the last field trip of a very successful field trip season. Trip difficulty: 1

##### **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*

For someone whose life is dedicated to bringing marginally interested people into the fold of recreational birding, there is no better bird than a "crossover" bird. A crossover bird is a bird that, when observed by a non-birder, elicits the same visceral excitement that a birder feels when viewing a Henslow's Sparrow, for instance. Ruby-throated Hummingbirds and Pileated Woodpeckers are great examples of crossover birds in Alachua County, but this season's hardest working crossover bird was the Sandhill Crane. On February 20, hundreds of people around the county stopped in their tracks to observe a massive flight of Sandhill Cranes and at least two Whooping Cranes. Ivan Samuels estimated that

there were at least 2,000 Sandhills in the air over the University of Florida campus that morning and Martha Walsh-McGehee reported a deafening chorus of bugling cranes over her yard in Alachua some time before noon.

Despite the rather dramatic departure of Sandhill Cranes and an early influx of spring migrants, some area birders refused to let winter go. On February 22, the same morning he heard two singing Yellow-throated Warblers, Adam Kent and a group of very fortunate Alachua Audubon field trip participants observed two Fox Sparrows on Cone's Dike. On the 28<sup>th</sup>, the same day that John Martin observed a very early Swallow-tailed Kite near Devil's Millhopper, Rex Rowan spent a blissful morning observing Bonaparte's Gulls at Newnan's Lake. At Newnan's Lake on the 29<sup>th</sup>, Lloyd Davis and John Hintermister observed a flock of more than 100 Bonaparte's Gulls and at least 3000 Tree Swallows. On the next day, Pat Burns reported the spring's first Great Crested Flycatcher in Alachua.

In Alachua County, a springtime trip list containing Black-throated Green and Tennessee Warblers would suggest an April or May outing. However, Dottie Robbins was birding near her High Springs yard on March 2 when she found a female Black-throated Green, Alachua County's earliest by almost a month. Then on March 6, Dottie observed a Tennessee in the same area. A day later, Rex Rowan observed an Indigo Bunting in his northeast Gainesville yard and saw a Barn Swallow flying over County Road 231 near the Santa Fe River swallow colony.

Birders are finding new migratory arrivals almost daily now. On March 20, Mike Manetz observed two Solitary Sandpipers at Lee Pond, the season's first. Reports of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds are coming in by the dozens and Chuck-will's-widows can be heard singing on the outskirts of town each evening. Red-eyed Vireos are reclaiming territories in woodlots all over the



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county and several more birders have reported Great Crested Flycatchers.

Thanks to all who submitted reports through March 21.

### **DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOU ARE?**

In the context of a discussion on bioregionalism, the following questions were published in *Sierra* (Sep/Oct 1997). Bioregionalists believe that a sustainable society should have political and social boundaries that follow the boundaries of the natural world: watersheds, mountain ranges, plant zones, soil types, etc. Perhaps its most articulate spokesman is the poet and essayist Gary Snyder. Regardless of the pros and cons of the subject, the list should be of interest to all of us who are concerned with the natural world, its survival, and our place in it.

1. Trace the water you drink from precipitation to tap.
2. How many days till the moon is full? (Slack of two days allowed.)
3. What soil series are you standing on?
4. What was the total rainfall in your area last year (July through June)? (Slack: 1 inch for every 20 inches.)
5. When was the last time a fire burned in your area?
6. What were the primary subsistence techniques of the culture that lived in your area before you?
7. Name five edible native plants in your region and their season(s) of availability.
8. From what directions do winter storms generally come?
9. Where does your garbage go?
10. How long is the growing season where you live?
11. On what day of the year are the shadows the shortest?
12. When do the deer rut, and when are the young born?
13. Name five grasses in your area. Are any of them native?
14. Name five resident and five migratory birds in your area.
15. What is the land-use history of where you live?
16. What primary geological event/process influenced the landform where you live? (Bonus special: what's the evidence?)
17. What species have become extinct in your area?
18. What are the major plant communities in your region?
19. From where you are reading this, point

north.

20. What spring wildflower is consistently among the first to bloom where you live?

(Compiled by Leonard Charles, Jim Dodge, Lynn Milliman, and Victoria Stockley.)

### **The Listing Ethic - a Slippery Slope**

One October found us on the Grand Canyon's south rim listening to park naturalist, Randy Waltrip. Randy was entertaining a crowd, explaining the goals of the California Condor reintroduction program. As we know, the California Condor ranged widely over North America in centuries past (Condors in New York? Yes, indeed). Their present range in a few mountains north of Los Angeles is but a remnant of their more glorious past. As of October (2002), 31 birds had been released into the Grand Canyon. The jury is still out on whether a self sustaining population can make it here. Somebody in the audience asked Randy what the chances were of seeing at least one of the 31 birds. "Well," he said (hand sweeping from horizon to horizon), "you may have noticed that this is a pretty big place, but if you hang around until dusk, a bird might just show up." He allowed as how several of the birds had taken to roosting on a rock right below Bright Angel Lodge. Most of the crowd drifted away, but we decided to follow the suggestion. We hung around. Dusk arrived and no condors had appeared. We edged closer to the rim and, necks extended, peered into the abyss. Sure enough, 50 or so feet below a rock projected out from the cliff providing a perfect roost for the birds. The rock was generously white washed in condor guano. Darkness forced us sadly to the conclusion that at least on this trip this was as close as we would come to sighting North America's largest vulture ... and yet? For a brief moment we stewed in an ethical dilemma. Could we, in clear conscience, add the condor to our life list? After all, we had seen a part, so to speak, of the condor. But then the cold truth seeped back in. All of these birds, all 31 of them, were raised by humans somewhere else. They couldn't be listed even if the entire flock had returned and landed in our laps. Drats!

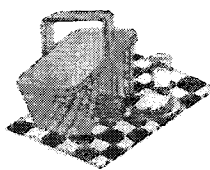
-- Dana & Nancy Griffin

### **Monthly Board Meetings**

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

## **Annual Meeting & Picnic**

# **Y'all Come!!**



This year's annual election and picnic will be held on Wednesday, April 21, at 6:00 P.M. at Earl P. Powers Park. (Directions to the park can be found on page one of this *Crane*.) All Audubon members and guests are welcome. Please bring a covered dish or dessert to share; Alachua Audubon provides drinks, plates, and utensils.

The business meeting portion will consist of the annual election of officers, board members, and the nominating committee. The current officers have agreed to be renominated. These are Scott Flamand, president; Rex Rowan, vice president; David Wahl, secretary; and Barbara Mollison, treasurer. The nominees for board terms expiring in 2007 are Marcy Jones, Alice Tyler, Joni Ellis, Steve Collins, and Annie Collins. The nominating committee consists of Howard Adams, Paul Moler, and Griselda Forbes. Additional nominations may be made from the floor.

This year's nominating committee has had a difficult task of recruiting prospective candidates as board members and has tried to enlist "new blood" into the organization. Many thanks go to those board members with terms expiring this year that have served the organization faithfully and now are taking a well-deserved rest from the board: Carol Wooley, Karen Johnson, and Susan Sommerville. Over the years they have given a little of their time to help steer the organization, help educate the community-at-large and, provide a voice for the protection of birds, habitats, and the quality of life in the community.

--Howard Adams

## ***Eagles & Stamps***

Since 1979 the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey in Maitland has treated over 12,000 injured or orphaned birds, releasing more than 40% of these former patients back to the wild. The Center handles the largest volume of eagles, owls, falcons, hawks, and kites for any such treatment center east of the Mississippi River, averaging over 675 admissions of birds each year. It is a leader in the care and rehabilitation of eagles, for which the cost of a single bird averages over \$3,000. Contributions of any amount are to help with bird care are welcome. A small thing small thing which you can do (without having to write a check) is to save any foreign or commemorative stamps

(not regular stamps, such as the ones with flags) and send them to the Center which sells them to collectors. Tear the stamps off the envelope, and without removing the stamps from the paper, mail them to Center for Birds of Prey, 1101 Audubon Way, Maitland, FL 32751

## **At Morningside in April Native Plant Sale**

The 5th annual Spring Native Plant Sale at Morningside Nature Center, 3540 East University Avenue, will be Saturday, April 3, from 8:30 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, books, and snacks. Plants and plant information are provided by more than a dozen local native plant growers. Plants offered include native trees, shrubs, vines, ferns, grasses, and flowers. Payment is by check or cash only; no credit cards, please. 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 2, there is a private sale of plants only for members of the sponsoring organizations from 5:00-6:30 P.M., but non-members may join at the gate. For more information, call Morningside at 334-2170.

## **Farm & Forest Festival**

This year's Farm and Forest Festival runs from Thursday, April 29, to Sunday, May 2. Events on Thursday and Friday are scheduled from 9:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M. and those for Saturday and Sunday from 10:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. 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 children two and under are free.

## **Deadline for the next *Crane* is July 23**

# The Mystery of Oscar Baynard

Oscar Baynard was either a liar or he was one of the finest field naturalists ever to work in Alachua County --or he was both.

Born in Delaware in 1881, he came to Tampa in 1903 and moved to Micanopy around 1906. In those days, before binoculars were readily available, young people with an interest in birds often expressed that interest through oölogy: they plundered the eggs of wild birds and displayed them in wooden cabinets. That's what Baynard did. He roamed southern Alachua County, exploring swamps and climbing trees in his search for nests.

It was perfectly legal. The general mind-set of the times was "consumptive" in regard to wild-

life. Sportsmen shot birds of all varieties--sand-pipers and robins along with ducks and quail. Each fall, men climbed Hawk Mountain and killed migrating raptors by the thousands. Plume hunters blasted herons and egrets off their nests for



the sake of their feathers, bales of which were shipped to the millinery industry as decorations for ladies' hats.

And why not? What earthly use were these birds to anyone? Why did we need them? How did they justify their existence?

I think these questions are the key to the mystery of Baynard--which I guess I'd better explain to you at this point.

By the turn of the century plume hunters had devastated wading bird populations all across the southeast. The Snowy Egret was actually facing extinction. But Baynard found thousands of White Ibises and a lesser number of herons nesting on Bird Island in Orange Lake, about a quarter mile out from what is now Heagy-Burry Park. He contacted T. Gilbert Pearson, president of a newly formed bird conservation group, the National Association of Audubon Societies. Pearson came, he saw, he talked the NAAS into buying it. Baynard was appointed warden. He did his job well. Pearson later wrote, "This island was not raided, and the magnificent sight of these thousands of birds was a great inspiration to some of us who visited the region. It stood out in our imagination more than any other heron colony of which we then had

any knowledge ... and while throughout the rest of Florida every egret that appeared seemed to be watched by a gunner, here these charming birds were enjoying peace and contentment."

Baynard took advantage of his position to do a little research. He conducted a study of the food items brought to nestling waders by their parents. He made a detailed study of Glossy Ibises, which had never been recorded nesting in North America until Baynard found them at Orange Lake in 1909 ("Mere words cannot begin to describe the feelings I experienced as I saw this beautiful graceful bird spring up from her nest fifteen feet up in a willow tree and take wing. The bright sun glistening on her beautiful iridescent [sic] plumage was a sight that I will always remember with joy"). And he wrote a paper listing the breeding birds of Alachua County.

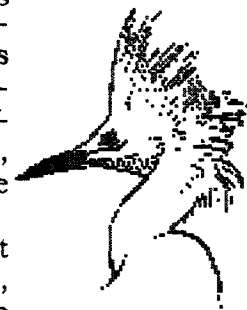
Here's the mystery: In all three cases Baynard made claims that conflict, often spectacularly, with other sources of information.

Take "Food of herons and ibises," published in the *Wilson Bulletin* in 1912. Baynard induced the young of several species of wading birds to disgorge food immediately after their parents brought it to them; he did this with 50 nestlings of each species.

His findings provided powerful ammunition for bird protectionists: by far the greatest proportion of the prey items being fed to the nestlings were crop-destroying grasshoppers and cutworms. Baynard also reported that the birds ate significant quantities of crayfish, which were then believed to eat the eggs of game fish, and quite a few snakes to boot. Thus wading birds were revealed to be mankind's immensely useful allies on several fronts. Baynard's findings were a conservationist's dream. It was a perfect outcome.

Perhaps a little too perfect. In 1961 a student named Donald Jenni studied the diet of Lake Alice's wading birds using a technique similar to Baynard's--he collected regurgitated pellets from 50 nestlings per species--and came up with such different results that, he wrote, the inconsistencies "cannot be explained."

By Baynard's account the birds ate chiefly insects, which made up 84% of the Snowy Egrets' diet, 92% of the Little Blue Herons', and 97% of the Tricolored Herons'. But Jenni found insects in almost negligible numbers, less than 5%



in all three species.

Baynard wrote that fish constituted only 12% of the Snowy Egrets' diet, and that Little Blue and Tricolored Herons ate no fish at all. Jenni found that fish made up 76% of the Snowy Egrets' diet, 24% of the Little Blues', and 81% of the Tricoloreds'.

In the same paper, Baynard described the diet of Orange Lake's White Ibises as 51% grasshoppers and caterpillars, 46% crayfish, and 4% "small moccasins." But in a three-year study in South Florida, James and Marilyn Kushlan found that while crayfish did in fact make up half of a White Ibis's diet, grasshoppers constituted only 0.1%, and caterpillars and snakes less than 0.01% each.

The following year Baynard published "Home Life of the Glossy Ibis" in *Bird-Lore*. In this paper he enumerated the prey items fed to four nestlings over three weeks: 412 cutworms, 1,964 grasshoppers, 1,391 crayfish, and 147 snakes. He then calculated how many of these "vermin" each set of parents and young would eat during one nesting period (42,000), and extrapolated to the entire colony of 9,000 nests: "One can hardly conceive of the many millions of noxious insects and vermin of all kinds destroyed. The vast amount of good to any section of the country where this vast army of Ibis nests can hardly be reckoned in dollars. ... My observations show the Ibis with a clear record of doing 100 per cent of good, not a bad thing can be laid to his door, this fact in conjunction with its beauty makes it a bird that should be given the very strictest protection by all persons."

*The very strictest protection.* This, I think, is the key. It seems to me that the easiest way to account for the discrepancies between Baynard's studies and others is this: he fabricated his results to present the birds he loved in the best possible light. In a time when birds had to prove themselves useful to men, he produced conclusive evidence in their behalf. They ate injurious insects, benefiting the farmers. They ate crayfish, benefiting the anglers. They ate poisonous snakes, benefiting everyone. They weren't just beautiful--which was obviously justification enough for Baynard--they were useful. Preserving them was good sense. It was practical. It translated into dollars.

Did Baynard's studies help the cause of bird conservation? I don't know. But I can certainly understand his motivation in falsifying his results, if that's what he did.

There are other apparent lies, though, for which the motivation is not so easy to figure out.

In "Breeding Birds of Alachua County,"

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Florida," published in the *Auk* in 1913, he asserted that Reddish Egrets nested at Bird Island in great numbers: "Abundant during 1907 and 1908. Found about 1500 pairs on Bird Island and many straggling pairs in many other localities. One pair nested in 1911, and have only seen one pair this year." If that many Reddish Egrets were out and about, why was it 1938 before another nest was found in the state--and that one in Florida Bay at the southern tip of the peninsula? Why were no nests found anywhere away from Florida Bay and the Florida Keys until 1970? In 1996, after this formerly rare bird had staged a comeback, the state's total breeding population was figured at 400 pairs. And yet Baynard claimed to have found nearly four times that many at Orange Lake.

If Baynard lied in these instances, it throws everything he wrote into question. He reported the sole Alachua County breeding records for American Bittern, Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Black Rail, Belted Kingfisher, Ivory-billed Woodpecker, Prairie Warbler, and Grasshopper Sparrow. Did he truly find these nests and see these young? Or did he just make it all up? Was he a remarkable naturalist or a writer of fiction?

There's probably no way of knowing. Baynard soon moved back to Tampa and went on to a career in the Florida Park Service. After he died in 1971 his widow donated his papers to the Florida Museum of Natural History. Imagine what it must have been like to open the package in which they came. It should have been a treasure trove, a whiff of Old Florida. It was not. As collections manager Tom Webber commented, "He was a crappy data keeper." The papers threw no light on the mystery, and contained no information about Florida bird life. They mostly had to do with his private egg collection.

Baynard's contribution to bird conservation is unquestionable, but we'll never know whether he was also one of Alachua County's pioneering naturalists, because we'll never know whether any given assertion--the Ivory-billed Woodpecker nest, the family of Black Rails, the Cory's Least Bitterns "on two certain lakes"--was fact or fancy. While we applaud his efforts on the birds' behalf, we must regret that he damaged his credibility, and his reputation, by letting his zeal overpower his judgment.



--Rex Rowan

## Alachua Audubon Society Officers and Chairpersons of Standing Committees - 2003-2004

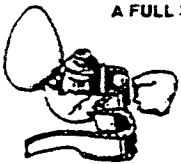
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April-May 2004

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