



The Crane

Alachua Audubon Society

Volume 48 Number 4 February – March 2007

February, March & early April Field Trips

Saturday, February 3, 7:00AM

Matanzas Inlet

Meet trip leader Bubba Scales at Powers Park on Hawthorne Road/SR 20. Study flocks of gulls and terns to expand your comfort with a difficult group of birds. Scan the skies for birds of prey and the nearshore waters for pelagics. Limestone outcroppings occasionally host Purple Sandpiper. Trip difficulty: 3

Saturday, February 10, 8:00 AM

Persimmon Point

Call Wild Birds Unlimited [352-381-1997] to make a reservation. Trip is already nearly full. Persimmon Point is a jewel for sparrow enthusiasts and access is strictly limited.

Sunday, February 18, 7:00 AM

Emeralda Marsh Conservation Area

The Wildlife Drive begins in a patchwork of old fields and hardwood hammocks and ends in a marsh heaving with coots. Among them is usually a good diversity of ducks and wading birds. If time permits, explore some very special sparrow habitat in the area. Meet trip leader Bubba Scales at Kash n Karry at 2002 SW 34th St. Bring a lunch and prepare for a full day in the field. Trip difficulty: 2

Sunday, March 4, 5:30 AM

Lake Toho/Florida specialties

Meet Rex Rowan in the Target parking lot

(Archer Rd and I-75). We'll be in St. Cloud by sunup looking for Snail Kites, Limpkins, and Purple Gallinules at East Lake Tohopekaliga. We'll then proceed south on Canoe Creek Rd to Joe Overstreet Landing keeping a lookout for Crested Caracaras, Wild Turkeys, and Whooping Cranes. Our last stop of the day will be Three Lakes WMA where we'll hope to find Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, Brown-headed Nuthatches, Bachman's and Florida Grasshopper Sparrows, and if we're really *really* lucky, a White-tailed Kite. This is an all-day trip so bring a lot of food and drink. Trip difficulty: 1

Saturday, April 7, 8:00 AM

Bolen Bluff Trail

Meet at the Bolen Bluff trailhead and canvas the canopy of one of Gainesville's perennial best migratory birding spots. Bruce Christensen will lead this early-season trip to Bolen Bluff for evidence of passerine migration. Look for late-season sparrows on the prairie spur. Trip difficulty: 1

Sunday, April 8, 8:00 AM

Longleaf Flatwoods Reserve

Join field trip leader Rex Rowan at Powers Park to caravan to Longleaf where you'll explore one of the county's best spots for pine-woods species such as Bachman's Sparrows, Brown-headed Nuthatches, and Red-headed Woodpeckers. Longleaf's variety of habitats should provide excellent opportunities to observe migrants. Trip difficulty: 3

Trip Difficulty 1: Trip within easy access to the vehicle and/or level terrain one mile or less **2:** May involve uneven terrain one to two miles **3:** May involve elevation change, uneven terrain, and/or greater than two miles

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AAS Website www.flmnh.ufl.edu/aud

The Alachua Audubon Society's mission is to foster appreciation and knowledge of birds and other native wildlife, to protect and restore wildlife populations and their habitats, and to promote sustainable use of natural resources.

Content of *The Crane* is the sole responsibility of the editor and fulfills stated objectives and goals of Alachua Audubon Society. Annual subscription to *The Crane* is included in AAS dues. Non-Audubon members may subscribe to *The Crane* for \$8 annually. All checks for subscriptions or changes of address should be mailed to Paul Moler, Membership Chairman: see back page for address. Submissions to *The Crane* are welcomed. *The Crane* is printed on recycled paper.

**Deadline for
Apr-May Crane:
Mar. 15th**



Following what could best be described as an “average” fall migration, the transition to winter was pretty fabulous. First up was a video-documented **Black-headed Gros-**

beak that visited the yard John and Jean Metheny the 23-24 of October. John Hintermister broke a nasty **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** jinx in the county by spotting one on a wire along CR 241 north of Gainesville on Nov. 8. A couple of **Vermillion Flycatchers** settled in for the winter along the path leading west from the horse corral at the beginning of LaChua Trail. There were also sporadic sightings of **Ash-throated** and **Least Flycatchers** in the same vicinity.

It was an extraordinary winter for sparrows, especially of the genus *ammodramus*. Adam Kent, Chris Burney, and John DeLuca, birding near the entrance San Felasco Progress Center November 15, found one **Henslow's** and over 15 **Grasshopper Sparrows**. Christmas Count teams tallied an astonishing 16 Henslow's (most at Persimmon Point) and two lovely **LeConte's Sparrows**. There were a number of **Fox Sparrow** sightings, one at LaChua trail found by Bubba Scales, one from San Felasco County Park, nicely photographed by Jim and Debbie Powell, one found by me while scouting a restricted part of the basin, and another by Rex Rowan and Greg McDermott at Progress Center. Bob Simons visited there on November 19 and reported a **Lark Sparrow** and a **Purple Finch**. **Lincoln's Sparrows** have been scarce this winter, so Michael Meisenburg and I were lucky to view one at the dairy December 29. The only **Dark-eyed Junco** report was one from the yard of Bob Wallace near Alachua.

We had one of the biggest invasions of **Golden-crowned Kinglets** in recent memory. While birding three different parks Thanksgiving weekend Pat Burns tallied 15. The Christmas Count teams reported a record 30, which is remarkable considering that in some years none are found in the county. Pat visited San Felasco County Park November 17 and found a **Brown Creeper** which remained in the vicinity for most of the winter. Birders trying for the bird uncovered a **Fox Sparrow** (mentioned above) and a **Painted Bunting** (Bryant Roberts). Many also got their first looks at Golden-crowned Kinglets in the park, where they were unusually easy to see.

Continued on pages 3

Bryant also picked out a **Western Tanager** December 2 along the Rail Trail near Sweet-water overlook.


Bubba Scales helped put Gainesville on the birding map by reporting a **Common Nighthawk** calling near his store the evening of December 20. Common Nighthawks are generally not believed to winter here. In fact, there is only one previously documented winter sighting in the entire state. Bubba actually saw the bird the following evening, prompting Rex Rowan and Scott Flamand get a sound recording, and so Alachua County goes down in the record books. More sightings of birds not usually present in winter included a **Yellow Warbler** at the new Depot Park (Main and Depot Road) photographed by Jim Powell, and a **Summer Tanager** spotted by Ingrid Scales in her yard on the day of the Christmas Count.

Waterfowl were a little disappointing this year with many favorite ponds drying up and ducks tending to concentrate at Newnans Lake and on the prairie basin where viewing can be difficult. Variety seemed to be down, too, as several species were no-shows the day of the Christmas Count. Newnans did have a few goodies. The count team there found a locally rare **Franklin's Gull**, (photographed by Bob Wallace), and six **Horned Grebes**. John Hintermister visited a few days after Christmas and found several **Red-breasted Mergansers**. But the real Newnans blockbuster was a **Brant** spotted by Andy Kratter on December 30. Brants are extremely rare in Florida, and the fact that the few records come from coastal areas makes Andy's bird a real windfall.

By the time you receive this copy of the Crane we will have settled in for the quieter half of winter. Still, it's a good time for studying sparrows at places like the Hague Dairy and La Chua trail, or getting to know some of the lesser birded sites in the county. Winter will be far from over, but by the middle of January the dawn chorus of local breeding birds will be building, and usually by the last week of Janu-

ary the first returning Purple Martins of spring are reported. The wheel keeps turning.


Thanks to those who shared their sightings through January 10, 2007




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President's Report

In December, Alachua Audubon Society conducted two fundraisers—something, as far as I know, had never had done before. Bruce Christensen was the guiding force behind the fundraisers despite initially sluggish support from the AAS officers and board of directors. With a perseverance that would have made Dick Cheney proud, the officers and the board eventually relented to the pressure from our own Vice-President. It took a lot of work to pull these events off and no one worked harder than Bruce. However, the reward was worth the effort as the fundraisers were a big success. We now have the financial resources to support projects that previously lacked funding and have begun discussing several community outreach projects.

Bruce's position as the Vice-President of AAS will be short as he plans to leave the area this summer when his wife graduates from the College of Veterinary Medicine. It is a bit ironic that while Bruce did most of the work for the fundraisers, he may not be around to help spend the all of the money. What Bruce did for AAS cannot be overstated. Alachua Audubon teaches birding to many people through our classes and field trips, and many go on to become avid birders and AAS board members. Bruce has done the same to the AAS board. He changed people's beliefs and instilled an idea—one that I think will continue long after his class is over.

Michael Meisenburg

Holiday Social was a Blast!

Our Holiday Social at Goering's Bookstore was a great success! The Silent Auction fund raiser brought in over \$2000 to our chapter. Many individuals and businesses contributed merchandise or services. **Please keep the following businesses and individuals in focus throughout the year and let them know that you appreciate their support to AAS:**

Adventure Outpost, Blue Highway Pizzeria, Book Lover's Cafe, Brasingtons, Adventure Outfitters, Busch Gardens, Butterfly Rainforest, Bill Cervone, Creative Workshop, Crevasse's Regency Florist, Dragonfly, Alison Dvorcik, Earth Pets, Emiliano's, Floating Island, Gainesville Community Playhouse, Goering's Bookstore, Harmony Gardens, Harold's Fine Frames, Harrys' Seafood Bar Grille, Helen Suit, Burt Herrera, Hippodrome State Theater, Jim Wilson Wildlife Drawings, John Hintermister, Ron Jones, Kanapaha Botanical Gardens, Art Lamay, LT Kids & Grown Ups Too, Dominick Martino, John Moran, Nature Nook, Olive You Catering, Leslie Peebles, Leecia Price, Ann Ramsden, Sandpiper Condo in Ceder Key, Herb Schwartz, 2nd Street Bakery, Mike Segal, Bob Simons, Erick Smith, Somewhere Glassworks, John and Susan Somerville, Sweet Dreams, The Great Frame Up, The Pontiac Tavern, The Topp, Thornebrook Gallery, Tidewater Tours in Ceder Key, and Wild Birds Unlimited.

Finally, thanks to all of the members and guest who attended this event.

Helen Warren

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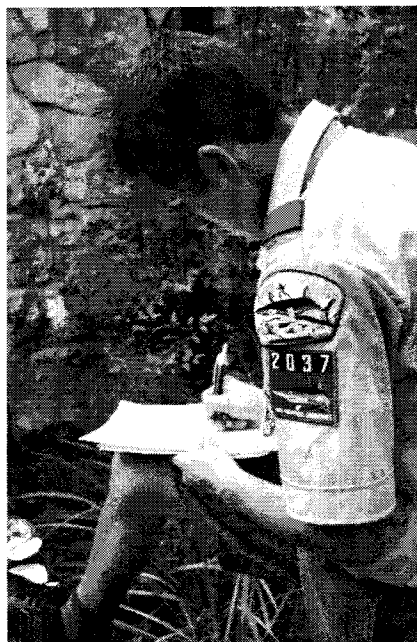
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Eagle Scouts Receives Support from AAS

Alachua Audubon Society congratulates two of Gainesville's newest Eagle Scouts. Bruce Brimley and Jonathan Driaza of Troop 841 each recently completed the requirements for the Eagle rank. As part of their journey, both scouts also earned the Bird Study merit badge with assistance from AAS' own merit badge counselors. As part of the requirements for the Eagle rank, Bruce and Jonathan were each required to conduct a community service project.



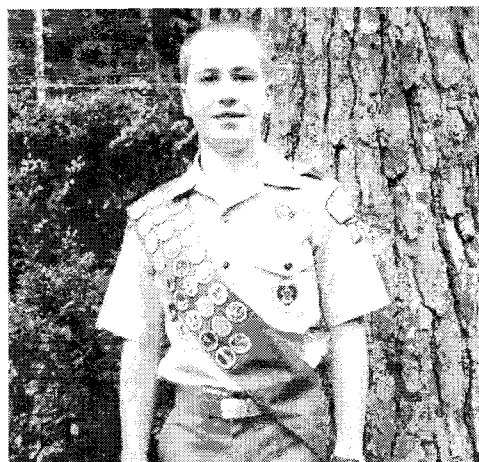
Kestrel nesting box project



Jonathan Driaza

Bruce organized a clean-up of Colclough Pond, a 38-acre nature sanctuary in Southeast Gainesville owned by Audubon of Florida and managed by AAS.

Jonathan worked closely with the AAS conservation committee, chaired by Bob Simons, and led his troop in building 100 American Kestrel nesting boxes which AAS will begin placing in appropriate habitat in the near future. AAS is excited to include these hatchling birders as two of its newest members!



Bruce Brimley

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Book Review: Pete Dunne's Essential Field Guide Companion

By Pete Dunne

Houghton Mifflin, 2006, 710 pp, \$29.95

Reviewed by Bruce Christensen

Note first that this is a field guide *companion* and makes no pretense of being a field guide. In fact, Dunne's *Companion* contains no illustrations in 700+ pages of solid text. It's about GISS birding - General Impression of Size and Structure. You know when an experienced birder identifies a bird that failed to give anyone a good look? You might ask how they could have known that was a Semipalmated and not a Western Sandpiper. They shrug and say that it had the "giss" (pronounced "jizz") of a Semipalm'. This intuition encompasses more than just size and structure; it includes knowledge of distribution, behavior, and flight. It is the *gestalt*, the *essence*, of the bird. While the rest of us are struggling to grasp the shade of white on the sandpiper's breast, the experienced birder noted the blunt bill, comparative size, and overall ratty appearance in the context of the season. As Dunne puts it, "Inexperienced birders commonly use field marks to jump-start an identification. Experienced birders use field marks to confirm it."

Of course nothing replaces experience, but consulting this book after encountering bird identification problems will accelerate your ascent up the learning curve. Entries are included for 691 regularly occurring North American spe-

cies and subspecies. Dunne uses concepts such as status and distribution, habitat, cohabitants, and likelihood to wander as a filter to help determine the veracity of an observation. After passing that filter, Dunne gives more guidance re-

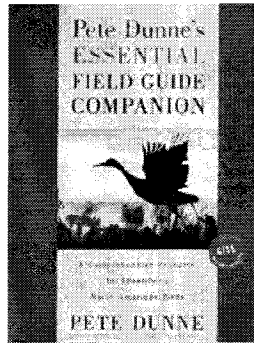
garding size, shape, structure, plumage, behavior, flight pattern, and vocalizations. Finally, particular distinguishing characters are highlighted, including those that help to distinguish among similar species.

Illustrated maps are lacking, but after reading multiple accounts, the "textual maps" ceased to be cumbersome. I struggled with descriptions of vocalizations, but this is nothing new from other references.

It doesn't matter if someone tells me whether the White-eyed Vireo is saying "Check for the beer, please" or "Spit. And see if I care. Spit;" I'm not going to recognize it until I hear it for myself and only then might one of those descriptions may help.

The text is readable and entertaining. Dunne adds his own descriptive common names to each species which in many cases seem more appropriate than the accepted name (e.g. *Common Yellowthroat*: Masked Wren-Warbler; *Mississippi Kite*: Colonial Kite; *American Robin*: Lawn Plover; and *Barred Owl*: Maniacal Forest Owl). He describes the Black-bellied Whistling-Duck as a "gooselike duck with an overpainted harlotlike face." The Black-billed Magpie is described as: "Unmistakable. A large, showy, black-and-white corvid with the head of a crow, the body of a jay, and an extra-extra long tail that is all magpie." And after more in-depth comparison of southern crow species, he summarizes thus: "When all the parts are compounded, the slighter, slimmer, shinier Fish Crow is an obvious crow, but a crow with grackle sympathies. The larger, bulkier, shaggier, heavier-billed, and heavier-legged American Crow is more raven-like."

The book is not all-inclusive but it's a phenomenal start. As Pete Dunne himself puts it, this text is for "serious birders who strive to be more accomplished birders."



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"Vulture"

by Robinson Jeffers from *Robinson Jeffers*
Selected Poems © Stanford University Press.
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I had walked since dawn and lay down to rest on a bare
 hillside
 Above the ocean. I saw through half-shut eyelids a vul-
 ture wheeling high up in heaven,
 And presently it passed again, but lower and nearer, its
 orbit narrowing, I understood then
 That I was under inspection, I lay death-still and heard
 the flight-feathers
 Whistle above me and make their circle and come
 nearer.
 I could see the naked red head between the great wings
 Bear downward staring. I said, "My dear bird, we are
 wasting time here.
 These old bones will still work; they are not for you."
 But how beautiful he looked, gliding down
 On those great sails; how beautiful he looked, veering
 away in the sea-light over the precipice. I tell you
 solemnly
 That I was sorry to have disappointed him. To be eaten
 by that beak and become part of him, to share those
 wings and those eyes—
 What a sublime end of one's body, what an enskyment;
 What a life after death.

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The Crane

February - March 2007

Upcoming Audubon Programs!

Save these dates for two programs, both conducted in the meeting room of the Millhopper Public Library at 4135 NW 43rd Ave.

Saturday, February 24 at 2:00 p.m.

Bob Montanaro of Osprey Watch at Pelican Island will show a great movie that he made in which he follows the nesting attempts of a pair of Ospreys. Montanaro spent over 100 days filming at the Refuge to chronicle the lives of the Ospreys.

Saturday, March 24 at 2:00 p.m.

Steve Nesbitt, crane expert, will share his knowledge of the magnificent **Whooping Crane**. This is a talk that you will not want to miss. There have been exciting developments in the Whooping Crane population lately.

Bring a friend that you want to introduce to the wonders of the bird world!

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