



The Crane

Alachua Audubon Society

Volume 49 Number 3 December 2007–January 2008

December & January Events & Field Trips

Alachua Audubon Holiday Social Friday, December 7, 7:00– 9:00 pm at Wild Birds Unlimited

Mark your calendars and plan to join the gathering of Alachua Audubon members for our Second Annual Holiday Social! We will be gathering at Wild Birds Unlimited at the Millhopper Shopping Center, 4215 NW 16th Blvd from 7-9 pm on Friday, December 7.

There will be light appetizers, snacks, beverages to feed the body; music to soothe the soul, and socializing with like minded people to feed the spirit. We will have a silent auction fund raiser featuring numerous goods and services donated by local businesses and talented, crafty individuals. This will be a great opportunity to buy gifts for family, friends, or to just treat yourself.



Wild Birds Unlimited will be open for business during the event. 10% of proceeds generated by sales during the event will be donated to AAS.

If you have a business or service item that you can donate to our silent auction, please call Helen Warren, 214-7755 to discuss how you can contribute to our fund raiser.

Conservation Lands Educational Field Trips

AAS' Conservation Lands Educational Field Trip program (CLEFT) is a new direction in community outreach. CLEFT programs are designed to bring attention to local land conservation efforts. These trips are conducted on properties purchased to protect natural resources and will be co-led by a representative from the agency or organization that owns the land. CLEFT trips are designed to be educational experiences, so the emphasis will be on much more than birding.

Saturday, December 29, 9:00 AM Split Rock

This most recent addition to the city's Parks and Recreation Department is a critical link in a greenway connecting several protected areas including Sugarfoot Prairie, Lake Kanapaha, and Kanapaha Botanical Gardens. Join Habitat Specialist Geoff Parks and ecologist Bob Simons in front of Sweetbay grocery and Florida Bookstore II at 2002 SW 34th St. Trip difficulty: 2

Saturday, January 26, 9:00 AM Sanders Tract/Prairie Creek

A new Alachua Conservation Trust (ACT) property providing a trail of about two miles through a beautiful hardwood forest in the floodplain of Prairie Creek near Rochelle and the Gainesville-Hawthorne Trail on the Southeast side of Gainesville. Join ACT board member John Winn at Powers Park on Newnan's Lake on SR 20 (Hawthorne Road) east of Gainesville. Trip difficulty: 2

Standard trip descriptions on page 5 ⇒

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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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
Dec-Jan Crane:
Jan 15th**



Birders who languished through one of the slowest fall migrations in memory were rewarded by a flood of migrants that broke loose the weekend of October 20-21. Judy Bryan heralded the coming turn-around by reporting a locally-rare **Philadelphia**

Vireo on October 20. By the following day, birds were falling from the sky nearly everywhere. Adam Kent called from San Felasco Hammock to report 15-20 **Bay Breasted Warblers** along with ten other warbler species, plus many individual warblers that went unidentified due foggy conditions. Two locally-rare **Nashville Warblers** were reported, one by Rex Rowan at Palm Point and another by Shane Runyon from Bolen Bluff. The following day Geoff Parks found eleven warbler species plus three **Gray-cheeked Thrushes** at Loblolly. At Tumblin' Creek Park Rex found the first of what would be an astounding three **Philadelphia Vireos**, and Bubba Scales picked out a rare-in-fall **Cape May Warbler** in his yard. Warblers continued to stream through the rest of the week, with many people continuing to report **Bay-breasted and Black-throated Green Warblers**, both of which are normally in the hard-to-find category.

Winter visitors began arriving hand-in-hand with fall migrants even before the above-mentioned surge. Linda Terry found a **Wilson's Warbler** October 14 at Kanapaha Botanical Gardens. The bird was in a bamboo stand near the vinery, the exact same place a Wilson's has wintered the past two years. Steve Nesbitt spotted an early **Dark-eyed Junco** October 24 in his driveway. Hopefully this bird will spend the winter at some local back-yard bird feeder. The area around LaChua trailhead was a hot place to be in early November. John Hintermister visited on November 8 and found several returning sparrow species plus a beautiful male **Vermilion Flycatcher** in the vicinity of the horse pasture. This is the second year in a row a Vermilion has shown up there. Out-of-town birder Andy Bankert reported an **Ash-throated Flycatcher** November 9 at the Rail Trail overlook that looks over the same pasture. This is the seventh year in a row that an Ash-throated has visited that general area. The following day Rex Rowan relocated the Vermilion, this time at Alachua sink, and added a **Grasshopper Sparrow**. On November 11, also near the sink, Stefan Rayer, along with Mary Landsman, Barbara Mollison, and Linda Hensley observed a locally-rare **Lark Sparrow**.

Chapman's Pond is often the best place in the county to observe ducks when water level there is accommodating. Mark and Sarah Barnett visited November 3 and found several **Ring-necked Ducks**

and a pair on **Northern Shovelers**. Other places worth checking for ducks include the farther reaches of La Chua trail, the prairie basin along Highway 441, and some of the retention ponds around Newberry Road and I-75, such as the ones across from Home Depot and Mr. Han.

The dairy was poor for blackbirds last winter, and this year may be more of the same. I checked several weekends in a row during late October and early November and couldn't find any large concentrations. Rex reported a mass of five-hundred cowbirds November 4, but that seems to have been a high point. The dairy planted sorghum as a late-fall fodder crop the past several years in a row. This year they planted most of the fields in corn, so there may be less spilled grain available for both blackbirds and sparrows. Still, the dairy is always an interesting place to visit in winter.

Thanks to those who shared their sightings through November 12, 2007.

We want you...

to send us items for the Crane! We are looking to add some new elements to the Crane and we need you to help us. We are looking for bird related pictures just for show or maybe for a quiz. Remember these will be printed in black and white. We are also looking for articles that highlight some local great birding spots/ experiences, birding id skills or random, cool bird facts. We want the Crane to be fun and informative to read, so please help out with your contributions and ideas! Send them my way, neznarfi@hotmail.com.

Ingrid Scales

We have returned to College Park, our old neighborhood. We're an easy walk from the University and have good parking, thanks to St. Augustine Catholic Church.

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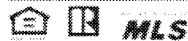
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The Big Five-Oh

This year's Christmas Bird Count will be Gainesville's 50th. The half-century mark is a good time to look back.

The Count started with Frank Chapman of the American Museum of Natural History. Chapman was an energetic and multitalented man; an associate once said of him, "Throw him penniless on Broadway, and in ten years he would own both sides of the street." In 1899 Chapman founded a magazine, *Bird-Lore: An Illustrated Bi-Monthly Magazine Devoted to the Study and Protection of Birds* (it now bears a simpler name: *Audubon*). It was in his words "a popular journal of ornithology addressed to observers rather than to collectors of birds," and its motto was, "A Bird in the Bush is Worth Two in the Hand."

In *Bird-Lore* for December 1900 there appeared a brief article entitled "A Christmas Bird-Census" in which Chapman wrote, "It is not many years ago that sportsmen were accustomed to meet on Christmas Day, 'choose sides,' and then, as representatives of the two bands resulting, hie them to the fields and woods on the cheerful mission of killing practically everything in fur or feathers that crossed their path – if they could."

Acknowledging that these "side-hunts" were mostly a thing of the past, he continued, "Now *Bird-Lore* proposes a new kind of Christmas side-hunt, in the form of a Christmas bird-census, and we hope that all our readers who have the opportunity will aid us in making it a success by spending a portion of Christmas Day with the birds and sending a report of their 'hunt' to *Bird-Lore* before they retire that night. Such reports should be headed by the locality, hour of starting and of returning, character of the weather, direction and

force of the wind, and the temperature; the latter taken when starting. The birds observed should then be added, following the order in which they are given in the A.O.U. 'Check-List,' with, if possible, the exact or approximate numbers of individuals of each species observed."

The next issue (February 1901) carried the results of Chapman's proposal: 25 counts, all but a handful in the northeast. The number of species tallied ranged from three in Keene, New Hampshire, to 36 in Pacific Grove, California. Chapman himself spent four hours in the field at Englewood, New Jersey, enjoying "exceptionally fine weather," and reported 18 species.

Participation increased rapidly. The following year 34 counts were reported, and the year after that, 53. The 78 counts conducted in 1903 included the first from Florida (Miami). The first from North Florida came in 1907: the Rev. Walter I. Eck of Melrose went out from 7 to 11 a.m., counting 35 species and 1,145 birds. His most remarkable sightings, from my vantage a century later, were 27 Common Ground-Doves and three Hairy Woodpeckers.

The next counts done in this area were done in Gainesville in 1924, 1927, and 1949, which admittedly gives the lie to the first sentence of this article. However, each was done by a single husband-and-wife team, so they weren't quite the same as later ones:

On December 27, 1924, Dayton and Lillian Stoner walked nine miles between 8:25 a.m. and 5 p.m., visiting Colclough Pond and Paynes Prairie, among other sites. They recorded 48 species and 964 individual birds. It's interesting that they tallied 23 House Wrens but only one Carolina Wren, no waterfowl, no hawks but a single Northern Harrier, and neither grackle species.

On December 22, 1927 the Stoners (I'm trying to keep from saying that stoners did a lot of the counts in the 60s and 70s, but I can't help myself) walked eight miles and drove 30 between 7:50 a.m. and 5:50 p.m., visiting Paynes Prairie and "several ponds and wooded areas." They found 50 species and 5,040 birds. Their list included 13 Red-headed Woodpeckers but only one Red-bellied, and 10 Common Ground-Doves but only six Mourning Doves.

On December 29, 1949 "Mr. and Mrs. Steve Fickett, Jr. and son (age 1½)" walked two miles – pretty good, considering the toddler – and drove 22 between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m., visiting Paynes Prairie and "marsh, hard-

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Standard Field Trips

Saturday, December 1, 8:00 AM

San Felasco—Progress Park

Don't forget the **\$2/vehicle entry fee**. Meet Adam Kent at the Progress Park entrance to San Felasco Hammock along Hwy. 441 near Alachua for a sparrow intensive trip. Adam has spent years honing his sparrow identification techniques and has been sharing them with aspiring sparrow specialists in recent years. Trip difficulty: 2

Saturday, December 8, 8:00 AM

Hague Dairy

Meet Mike Manetz at the Tag Agency on NW 34 St. near Hwy. 441 and bird one of the area's best spots for sparrows. Scan the crops, fencelines, and weed patches for a chance at Yellow-headed Blackbird and other tough-to-predict rarities such as Wilson's Warbler. Trip difficulty: 1

Sunday, December 16, All Day

Christmas Bird Count

This is Gainesville's 50th CBC! Call John Hintermister [386.462.1109] to discuss details if interested in participating. Experience is a prerequisite. The CBC is a lot of fun but it is a lot of work and not usually the best environment for first-time birders but please inquire.

Saturday, December 22, 8:00 AM

Chapman's Pond

Meet Ron Robinson in the Home Depot parking lot for a tour of Chapman's Pond and other local retention areas where ducks and wading birds often overwinter in large numbers. Difficulty: 1

Saturday, January 5, 7:00 AM

Matanzas Inlet

Meet trip leader Bubba Scales at Powers Park on SR 20. Study flocks of gulls and terns to expand your comfort with a difficult group of birds at the wildest tidal inlet on Florida's East Coast. Scan the horizon for glimpses of pelagics. Limestone outcroppings and the bridge rip-rap occasionally host Purple Sandpiper. Trip difficulty: 3

Saturday/Sunday, January 12-13, 8:00 AM

St. Marks NWR

Limit 20 people. **Call Wild Birds Unlimited [352-381-1997] to register.** Meet John Hintermister 8:00 AM at the St. Marks visitor center for a trip to one of Florida's premier winter birding spots. Difficulty: 3

Saturday, January 19, 8:00 AM

Alligator Lake

Meet Jerry Krummrich at the Alligator Lake Park parking lot (enter from SE Country Club Rd. in Lake City) for one of the field trip season's newest highlights. Alligator Lake has already turned out a number of unusual winter visitors this season including White-faced Ibis and Sprague's Pipit. Difficulty: 3

Christmas Tree and Wreath Pick-up

This year's organic Christmas tree fundraiser was a great success. AAS organizers are ready to hit the road with truck and trailer to haul our organically grown trees and wreaths back from Virginia. If you ordered a tree or wreath you should already have heard from Bob Carroll about the pick-up location and time but as a reminder, trees and wreaths will be available for pick up at Greenery Square (Newberry Rd. and NW 55th St.) from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm on Saturday, December 2.

For more details, please email Bob Carroll at gatorbob23@yahoo.com

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wood hammock, fields, lake region." They saw 83 species and 2,246 birds. Best sightings were four Hairy Woodpeckers, a Magnolia Warbler ("observed with 6x binoculars at 25 ft.; fairly dark above, a great deal of yellow below, a few rather light bands along flanks, and broad white band on tail"), and a Great White Heron ("in same area where seen for past few months; quite some distance from its normal range").

The first modern, organized Gainesville CBC took place precisely eight years later, on December 29, 1957. The complete list of participants: "Mrs. L.E. Cisne, Nick Lanni, Charles E. Mounts, Mrs. Ralph Nauss, L.T. Nieland, Mrs. Mary Sherwood (compiler)." The count area was described as a "15 mile diameter circle, including Alice Lake, Eastern Airlines Airport, Sperry area, edge of Payne's Prairie, Millhopper Road." Though the starting and stopping times were listed as 7 a.m. and 6 p.m., the three parties totalled only 16 hours in the field. They saw 74 species (less than half our 2006 tally), including a Yellow-headed Blackbird, four Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, three Purple Finches, 10 Bachman's Sparrows (!), and, perhaps most remarkable, only 150 Yellow-rumped Warblers.

For some reason there was no Count in 1958, but in 1959 compiler Mary Sherwood was back with a dozen participants. It's been an annual event ever since.

Oliver Austin, Jr., the museum's curator of birds, took over as compiler in 1962. The Count was not especially arduous during the Austin years: birders went out after sunrise (no "owling hours" were recorded until 1980) and called it off at lunchtime, meeting for the compilation at Archie Carr's house in Micanopy. Party hours ranged from a low of 12 in 1962 to a high of 57 in 1963. Species counts were also comparatively low, from 94 in 1962 to 123 in 1966. Nor were territories assigned:

Dr. David Johnston's field notes for the 1964 CBC give his route as "Seagle Bldg., through Univ. campus to Lake Alice; borrow pits + broomsedge fields beside I-75; Stardust Ranch and edge of Levy Lake; G'ville country club; Hwy 441 across Payne's Prairie; Lake Kanapaha; agriculture farm of Univ; dump; Sunnyland [now Tacachale]." This route involved areas that are now in five different territories.

In 1971 Austin gave up his position as compiler and passed the baton to Al Stickley, a Fish and Wildlife Service biologist. Stickley handed it on to John Hintermister the following year. John made a few changes. He'd read in Roger Tory Peterson's *Birds Over America* about the methodical way in which the Bronx CBC was conducted, and he sought to emulate it. He instituted dark-to-dark counts. He cut up a topographic map of the Count circle to make territories, and then went over each territory with a fine-tooth comb, appointing team leaders and assigning them important birds to find in their tracts. Under his leadership participation grew: after 1975 the number of birders enlisted never fell below 42. Birders spent more time in the field (party hours ranged

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from 76 to 183) and found more birds (from a low of 131 in 1973 to a high of 148 in 1977). In fact, Gainesville's was the highest inland count in Florida from 1974 to 1976.

Incidentally, John was also responsible for the fact that Gainesville's CBC is always on a Sunday; he was at the time manager of the Sears men's department, and couldn't get Saturdays off.

In 1982 John turned the compiler's job over to Barbara Muschlitz and Craig Parenteau. During their tenure, the Count thrived, with more participation than ever, and became the tradition that it is today. They handed it back over to John and co-compiler Howard Adams in 2002 after twenty-one years.

As I looked at that one-page article in the December 1900 issue of *BirdLife*, I couldn't help wondering what Chapman expected from it. Did he imagine in his wildest dreams that his "new kind of Christmas side-hunt" would still be going strong 107 years later, or that it would spread to more than two thousand locations?

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Community Calendar

- Dec 1 Sierra Club *Ardisia* pull, San Felasco Hammock
- Dec 11 FL Native Plant Society local meeting, 7:30
- Jan 5 Sierra Club *Ardisia* pull, San Felasco Hammock
- Jan 8 FL Native Plant Society local meeting, 7:30
- Jan 18-20 Southwest Florida Birding & Wildlife Festival, Naples
- Jan 23-27 Space Coast Birding & Wildlife Festival, Titusville
- Jan 25-27 Big O Birding Festival, Lake Okeechobee
- Jan 26 Great Air Potato Roundup
- Jan 26 Stargazing at the Prairie, 6:30
- Feb 3-9 Cedar Key Star Party

Additional details may be found at the web sites of the organizations mentioned:

Big O Birding Festival

www.bigobirdingfestival.com/

Cedar Key Star Party

www.upstateastro.org/stars/cedarkey.html

Florida Native Plant Society Gainesville Chapter

www.fnps.org/pages/chapters/chapterpg.php?keyword=PaynesPrairie

Great Air Potato Roundup

www.cityofgainesville.org/no/cepr.aspx

Sierra Club, Suwannee-St. Johns Chapter

florida.sierraclub.org/ssj/

Southwest Florida Birding & Wildlife Festival

www.rookerybay.org/Bird-Festival-2008.html

Space Coast Birding & Wildlife Festival

nbbd.com/fly/

Stargazing at the Prairie

www.prairiefriends.org/star.html

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The Crane

December 2007-January 2008

AAS Program - The Florida Manatee

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**Saturday, February 23, 2:00 p.m.
Millhopper Library**

Learn about the Florida Manatee. Are populations of Florida Manatee declining? Increasing? The answer may surprise you. Listen to Robert K. Bonde, a biologist with the U.S. Geological Survey (Sirenia Project) summarize the latest on the gentle Florida Manatee. Handle artifacts and ask questions. Sponsored by Alachua Audubon Society.

Join Audubon!

To join Audubon on 3 levels (National, Florida, and Alachua), fill in application and mail to:

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