



The Crane

Alachua Audubon Society

Volume 49 Number 4 February-March 2008

February and March Field Trips

Saturday, February 16, 8:00 AM

Chapman's Pond/Urban Ponds Circuit

Meet Bob Carroll in the Chapman's Pond parking lot to commence a morning tour of the urban pond circuit. Gainesville's patchwork of ponds and retention areas can host a fair diversity of waterfowl. Recently, several Common Goldeneye have been seen at Chapman's Pond. If conditions are good for ducks at the 441 overlook, you'll also stop there. Difficulty: 1

Saturday, March 9, 7:00 AM

Emeralda Marsh

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. At the time of publication, a Lazuli Bunting is being seen on the Wildlife Drive. If time permits, explore some very special sparrow habitat in the area. Meet trip leader Bubba Scales at Sweetbay/FL Bookstore II at 2002 SW 34th St. Bring a lunch and prepare for a full day in the field. Difficulty: 2

Saturday, March 22, 8:00 AM

SPECIAL EVENT—Butterflies at San Felasco

North American Butterfly Association chapter president Kathy Malone and AAS president Mike Meisenberg co-lead this early-season butterfly intensive outing. Meet at San Felasco Hammock parking lot on Millhopper Road. Don't forget the \$2/vehicle park entry fee. Difficulty: 3

Conservation Lands Educational Field Trips

The Conservation Lands Educational Field Trip program (CLEFT) is a new direction in community outreach for AAS. 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.

Saturday, February 23, 9:00 AM

Lake Tusawilla Preserve

In 2006, Alachua Conservation Trust acquired this 379 acre tract of land beside Tusawilla Prairie near Micanopy. Meet ACT board member John Winn and AAS guide Adam Kent in the Sweetbay parking lot (2003 SW 34th St.) for an interpretive tour of this historic property. Difficulty: 2

Saturday, March 29, 9:00 AM

Loblolly Woods

Meet Nature Operations Habitat Specialist Geoff Parks at the Westside Park playground parking lot near NW 34th St. and NW 8th Ave. The floodplains around the confluence of Hogtown and Possum Creeks are accessible by a system of boardwalks, trails, and observation platform. Difficulty: 1

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 pro-
mote sustainable use of natural
resources.*

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The Crane is printed on recycled paper.

**Deadline for
Apr-May Crane:
Feb 15th**

**Around
The County...**
By Mike Manetz

Early winter is one of my favorite times of the year for birdwatching. The first real cold snaps of December bring expectations of stray western flycatchers, rare sparrows, and prized boreal species slipping south of their normal winter range. By late winter most of the unexpected and unusual birds have been uncovered and we all settle in and wait for spring. It is early winter

that pulses with excitement and possibilities.

Bob Wallace kicked off winter with a great sighting and a fabulous sighting. He spotted and photographed a **Western Kingbird** on a neighbor's fence near Alachua on November 25. The fabulous sighting was December 2 when he found a **Swainson's Hawk** soaring above his house long enough to provide an excellent photo opportunity. This is only the second report of Swainson's Hawk in the county, the first coming also from Bob several years ago in the Alachua area.

On December 1 Bubba Scales found an amazing six **Golden-crowned Kinglets** at San Felasco County Park. Bob Carroll and Becky Enneis found another January 1 at the Progress Center. Golden-crowns tend to appear only sporadically, and in some years not at all. One of my favorite local rarities is **Brown Creeper**, and Pat Burns discovered one December 31 along the River Trail at O'Leno State Park, which is where she found one a couple of winters ago. Another good winter bird is **Dark-eyed Junco**; John Hitermister spooked one off the shoulder of Wacahoota Road while scouting for the Christmas Count. **Pine Siskins** made a show this winter. Robert Norton noted three on the Christmas Count: the following day Bob Holt reported a remarkable flock of twenty siskins near the intersection of NW 13th Street and 10th Avenue. On January 4 the flock made a second appearance at that same location. Bob Carroll had a lone individual in his yard on the first of January, but within a few days his count was up to eleven. On the eighth of the month John Martin had a flock of fourteen in his yard. The last time siskins were here in those kinds of numbers was in the late 'eighties.

The Christmas Count revealed some other great birds. Among the 148 species counted were two **White-fronted Geese**, a record three **Ash-throated Flycatchers**, and an astonishing twenty-one **Henslow's Sparrows**. Payne's Prairie was nearly dry but we still eked out seventeen species of ducks, including a **Common Goldeneye** and four **American Black Ducks**. Rex Rowan, who found the White-fronted Geese plus a white Snow Goose on count day, spotted a blue-phase Snow Goose January 1 while standing on the 441 platform on the prairie. A stunning drake Common Goldeneye, along with two hens, settled at Chapman's pond and were reported by several birders in

the days following the count.

There were several interesting reports of out-of-season tanagers this early winter. A group of birders heard a **Summer Tanager** calling repeatedly at the entrance of Camp Ranch Road the weekend before Thanksgiving. Bubba Scales had one in Westside Park on December 27, and on January 8 Rex Rowan also note one. Peter Colverson sent in a good description of what he assumed was a **Western Tanager**, and Bob Carroll had a tanager in his yard he felt might be a Scarlet. Needless to say, any tanager in winter is something of a rarity here.

Thanks to those who shared their sightings through January 14, 2008

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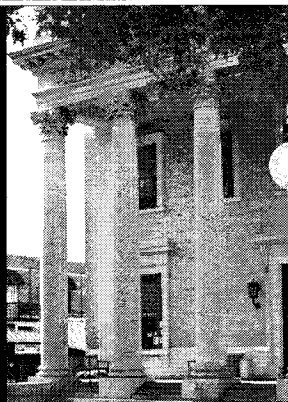
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BIRDING TO THE END

Sometimes an urge comes over one to keep going to the end. Such an urge likely explains why so many summer visitors pile into Homer, Alaska. They've no more serious reason to be there except Homer is what lies at the end of the road, and they have to check it out – that plus the fact that in Homer you can get a really tasty halibut dinner.

We can identify with these folks. The urge came over us recently to travel to the southern end of South America. Such a journey wasn't required, but we thought it would be a neat thing to do, and it did offer the possibility of finding some birds we'd never seen and gaining an appreciation for the places they call home. It wouldn't be careless overstatement to say both the birds we saw and the habitats they live in were stunning.

It was springtime (October), and we were headed north from Punta Arenas, Chile. Normally, you can't get to the southern end of a continent by heading north, but north of Punta Arenas lies Torres del Paine

National Park, a place we'd been told is a must see for naturalists of all interests. The journey took us across 150 miles of Patagonian steppes, an enormous expanse of bunch grass prairie, looking very much like eastern Colorado, but with birds that would meet anyone's definition of exciting. Many of the alkaline lakes in this area host flocks of Chilean Flamingos, foraging actively on the teeming populations of lake invertebrates. On the drier uplands Lesser Rheas, smaller cousins of the Ostrich, meander, looking for the odd meal. The power and speed this bird can summon when it wants to get away would inspire envy in any human sprinter. Sharing the uplands with the Rheas are Bandurrias, arguably the most stunningly plumaged ibis in all of the Americas. But more unexpected was to come. Geese! Lots of geese, Upland and Ashy-headed, broadcast all over the place. Maybe we haven't birded long enough, but finding geese living in a dry grassland requires some getting use to.

Torres del Paine National Park is gorgeous. We were fortunate enough to be able to spend a few days birding and botanizing in this special place. There were two birds in particular that impressed us, both denizens of the southern beech forests. The first was the White-throated Treerunner, a marvelous confection in brown and white that combines features of a piculet and a nuthatch. In fact, the bird is related to neither. And then there was the little Thorn-tailed Rayadito, as fidgety as a gnatcatcher with garish colors and a long, raised tail. The outer feathers of the tail have either lost or never develop vanes toward the distal end, leaving naked quills ("thorns") sticking out on either side. It's hard to see how such a feature would aid the bird in flying, so perhaps this is sexual selection at work. It wouldn't be the first time that one sex' preferences drove the other in rather weird evolutionary directions.

But now it was time to press southward. We had a boat to catch and, if weather permitted, an island to explore. Our objective was Horn Island, the southernmost bit of land in the Western Hemisphere. We hoped to spot the Striated Caracara which calls this island home. It is one of the world's rarer raptors. Fortunately, the weather and the seas were kind and we made it – even found the bird we'd come to see. Our island adventure ended with a hike to the sculpture of the albatross which is found at the island's high point. This bird, it is said, stands vigil over the watery graves

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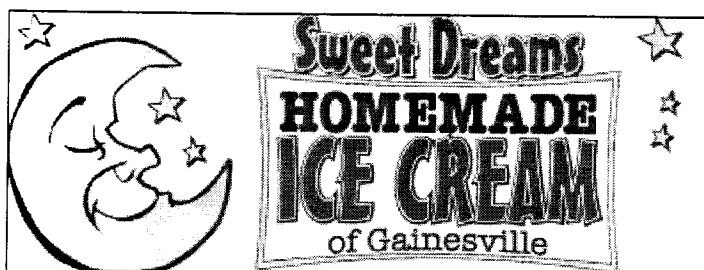
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of the many mariners who have perished in these parts.

And now it is the albatross itself that we must grieve for. According to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (rspb.org.uk), some 100,000 albatrosses die each year, caught on the baited hooks of long liners. This is an unacceptable cost just to put fish on our table. No one, birder or not, marveling at the aerial mastery of the albatross, can imagine a world without such a bird. We should do whatever it takes to prevent their extinction.

Dana & Nancy Griffin



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Community Calendar

- Feb 2 Sierra Club Ardisia pull – San Felasco Hammock, 9:00
- Feb 3-9 Cedar Key Star Party
- Feb 9 Native Plant Society Ardisia removal – Dudley Farm, 10-12
- Feb 12 Native Plant Society program meeting, 7:30
- Feb 15-17 Rally for the River – Palatka
- Feb 16 Paynes Prairie Geology and Sinkhole Walk, 9:00
- March 1 Sierra Club Ardisia pull – San Felasco Hammock, 9:00
- March 11 Native Plant Society program meeting, 7:30
- March 22 Paynes Prairie by Bike

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

Cedar Key Star Party

<http://www.upstateastro.org/stars/cedarkey.html>

Florida Native Plant Society Gainesville Chapter

<http://www.fnps.org/pages/chapters/chapterpg.php?keyword=PaynesPrairie>

Friends of Paynes Prairie

<http://www.prairiefriends.org/>

Rally for the River

http://pccweb.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=68&Itemid=75

Sierra Club, Suwannee-St. Johns Chapter

<http://florida.sierraclub.org/ssj/>

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The Crane

February-March 2008

Put this on your refrigerator NOW! AAS Talks you won't want to miss:

February 23 – Bob Bonde

Bob Bonde will give us the latest on the Florida Manatee. Are populations of this gentle animal increasing? Decreasing? Handle artifacts and ask questions.

April 19 – Frank Chapman

Frank Chapman will tell us more about those amazing “jumpin” sturgeon that are damaging boats on the Suwannee.

May 24 – Tom Frazer

Tom Frazer explores what is happening to our springs and spring runs in Florida. What are recently observed changes and what are the potential causes and consequences of these changes?

Sponsored by Alachua Audubon, all of these talks will take place at 2:00 p.m. at the Millhopper Library meeting room. Address is 3145 NW 43rd Street.

Join Audubon!

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

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