



The Crane

Volume 50 Number 3 December 2008 –January 2009

December and January field trips

Saturday, December 6, 8 am

La Chua Trail

Table your bias against sparrows and get a fresh start with Rex Rowan on the new LaChua trail. Meet at the trailhead on Camp Ranch Road. LaChua Trail in Paynes Prairie is one of the area's best spots for close study of a variety of sparrows. Also look for wintering flycatchers, raptors, and bison. Diff: 2

Sunday, December 14, SPECIAL EVENT

Christmas Bird Count

Call John Hintermister [386-462.1109] to discuss details if interested in participating.

Saturday, December 20, 8 am

Morningside Nature Center—CLEP

Gainesville's premier nature park and one of the last remaining examples of fire-dependent longleaf pine woodlands in the area. More than seven miles of trails wind through sandhills, flatwoods, cypress domes, and habitat restoration areas. Meet Geoff Parks, Habitat Naturalist with the City of Gainesville, in the Morning-side parking lot (approximately three miles east of downtown Gainesville on SR 26). Diff: 2

Saturday, January 3, 8 am

Sweetwater Preserve—CLEP

Less than a year ago, Alachua County Forever unveiled the new trail system in one of its newest properties adjacent to Paynes Prairie. Meet Alachua Co. senior planner Michael Drummond at Boulware Springs parking lot on SE 15th St. for a special tour of this mixed forest community along Sweetwater Branch. Diff: 2

Saturday-Sunday, January 10-11

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. Diff: 3

Saturday, January 17, 8 am

Gum Root Park—CLEP

Gum Root Park features trails through a variety of natural communities including blackwater stream, floodplain swamp, xeric hammock, and pine flatwoods. Meet Geoff Parks, Habitat Naturalist with the City of Gainesville, in the Powers Park parking lot (east of downtown Gainesville on SR 20). Diff: 3

Saturday, January 24, 8 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. Difficulty: 3

Sunday, February 1, 8 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.

— Alachua Trail Parking Lot

Continued on page 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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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
Feb-Mar Crane:
Jan 15th**

Around The County...

By Mike Manetz

The end of October is usually pretty good for a final burst of late migrants, but this year it was not to be. John Hintermister made a valiant effort by finding not one, but two **Philadelphia Vireos** the last week of October, and a pair of

Painted Buntings were reported from the Dairy the same week, but otherwise, the window of a fairly dull migration season quietly slammed shut.

Late fall is usually the best time for vagrant passerine species in our area but here too, was a distinct lack of fireworks. There were a few good reports, most notably a pair of **Dickcissels** found on the Prairie basin by Ted and Steven Goodman, and a **Clay-colored Sparrow** near the platform at La Chua reported by Darrell and Sue Hartman; but, as of this writing, vagrants were conspicuous by their absence. Perhaps by the time this issue of the Crane goes to print we will have uncovered a Yellow-headed Blackbird, an Ash-throated, Least, or Vermillion Flycatcher, or a Fox Sparrow.

Other, more expected sparrow species showed up in good order. Geoff Parks reported a very early **Lincoln's Sparrow** in his yard October 28. **Grasshopper** and **White-crowned Sparrows** were fairly easily found near the pasture area of La Chua and at the Hague Dairy. By early November, ten sparrow species had checked in. **Golden-crowned Kinglets** are always a welcome sight in early winter. Grace Kiltie found two of them October 29 along the Chacala Pond trail at Payne's Prairie.

In the duck department, Pat Burns dug up two **Northern Shovelers** October 23 at the Home Depot pond, and **John Hintermister** picked up a couple of **Redheads** at Lake Wauberg on October 27. While birding La Chua trail October 31, John, Linda Holt, and Beck Enneis added **Nothorn Pintail** and **Gadwall** to the list. By the end of the month **Hooded Mergansers** were being reported from various retention ponds around town.

A most intriguing shorebird report was of a **Semi-palmated Sandpiper** discovered October 27 by Rex Rowan at the Alachua Sink overlook. Semi-palms are extremely uncommon inland during fall and spring migrations, and while we usually get a few in each of those seasons, there are no records of them wintering in the state except in the keys. Not only was Rex's sighting an extremely late record for that species in the county, it stayed around at least until November 9, and may still be there. What a great bird that would be for the Christmas Count!

Thanks to those who shared their sightings through November 9, 2008

Conservation Lands Education Program (CLEP)

This year Alachua Audubon is sponsoring its second annual series of field trips that brings attention to local land conservation efforts. These trips highlight properties that protect plant and animal life. Each trip is co- led by a representative from the land management organization or agency and AAS representative and each will focus on that site's unique flora, fauna, and history. These field trips are designed to be educational experiences, so the emphasis will be on much more than birding.

- ♦ Sat, Dec. 20—Morningside Nature Center
Gainesville Nature Operations
- ♦ Sat, Jan. 3—Sweetwater Preserve
Alachua County Forever
- ♦ Sat, Jan. 17—Gum Root Park
Gainesville Nature Operations
- ♦ Sat, Feb. 28—Blues Creek
Alachua Conservation Trust
- ♦ Sat, Mar. 14—Prairie Creek
Alachua Conservation Trust
- ♦ Sat, Mar. 28—Hogtown Headwaters
Gainesville Nature Operations
- ♦ Sat, May 9—Watermelon Pond
Alachua County Forever

Community Calendar

- ♦ **Dec 6** Sierra Club /Ardisia/ pull, San Felasco Hammock, 9 am
- ♦ **Dec 16** Florida Native Plant Society local meeting, 7:30 pm
- ♦ **Jan 3** Sierra Club /Ardisia/ pull, San Felasco Hammock, 9 am
- ♦ **Jan 20** Florida Native Plant Society local meeting, 7:30 pm
- ♦ **Jan 21-26** Space Coast Birding & Wildlife Festival

Florida Native Plant Society, Paynes Prairie Chapter:
<http://www.fnps.org/pages/chapters/chapterpg.php?keyword=PaynesPrairie>

Sierra Club, Suwannee-St. Johns Chapter:
<http://florida.sierraclub.org/ssj/outings.htm>

Space Coast Birding & Wildlife Festival:
<http://www.nbbd.com/fly/>

AAS Lecture Series - Mark Your 2009 Calendar Now!

Saturday, Jan. 31, 2 pm at the Tower Road Library, hear Dr. Brian McNab tell about the beautiful bird-of-paradise of New Guinea with emphasis on its energy expenditure and how that relates to its ecology and distribution.

Saturday, Feb. 28. 2 pm at the Tower Road Library, popular speaker Dr. Michael Avery will explain the problem of overpopulation of invasive monk parakeets and how to humanely decrease their population.

Conservation News

Join Audubon's Action Network for greater say in national environmental policies. National Audubon has teamed up with the Alliance for Climate Protection to promote the campaign: "We Can Solve the Climate Crisis." You may have seen some TV commercials for the We Campaign promoting alternative energy development. The goal of this network is to give concerned members like you opportunities to act in favor of urgently needed solutions to the climate crisis. We have the solutions. What we need is a groundswell of support to implement them. To join, go to Audubon's electronic Climate Action Network by signing on at :
<http://audubonaction.org/florida/join>

Ardisia Pull at San Felasco

The next **Volunteer Ardisia Pull at San Felasco Hammock Preserve State Park** will be on **Saturday, December 6th, 2008**, from **9 am until 12 pm**. Volunteers will meet at the main parking area for the trailhead off Millhopper Road at 9 am,

Volunteer Ardisia Pulls usually occur on the first Saturday of the month from September through June. Barring inclement weather, the schedule through March 2009 is as follows:

Saturday, January 3rd, 2009

Saturday, February 7th, 2009

Saturday, March 7th, 2009

Big Bend Birding

With visions of Pyrrhuloxias and Mexican Jays dancing in our heads, we aimed the nose of the rental car westward, hoping, if all turned out well, to greet the Big Bend National Park at the height of the spring flower show and when spring migrants would be setting up shop for another season of musical brawling and some serious nest building.

And finally here we were, three long days out of Gainesville, surrounded by square miles of Chihuahuan desert flora. And what a let down! The desert is in the throws of a prolonged drought. This is a concept one struggles to get in one's head. A drought in the desert seems to be the perfect contradiction, but it isn't. Normally, at this time of year, the Big Bend would be hosting an incredible assortment of flowers. The persistent hum of pollinators would confirm that life is here in abundance.

Instead we come across hundreds of yuccas that are dead or dying. Even the ocotillo looks stressed. So, our aspirations for seeing some neat birds starts a free fall into gloom. But hold on! There, up ahead, sitting like a regal gargoyle on a weathered fence post, is a magnificent Swainson's Hawk. And half a mile further on we spotted another, similarly positioned. Our spirits edge upward. Maybe, just maybe, the birds will be here even though the flowers are not. A javalina saunters across the road in front of us. It shows not a bit of concern for the vehicle bearing down on it. It's probably seen all this before and knows exactly how fast to move to exit the road in time. Nonchalance in a pig is either refreshing or irritating. We can't decide which. Finally, we arrive at Chisos Basin where we are to spend the next three days. Our cottage perches high up on a hill

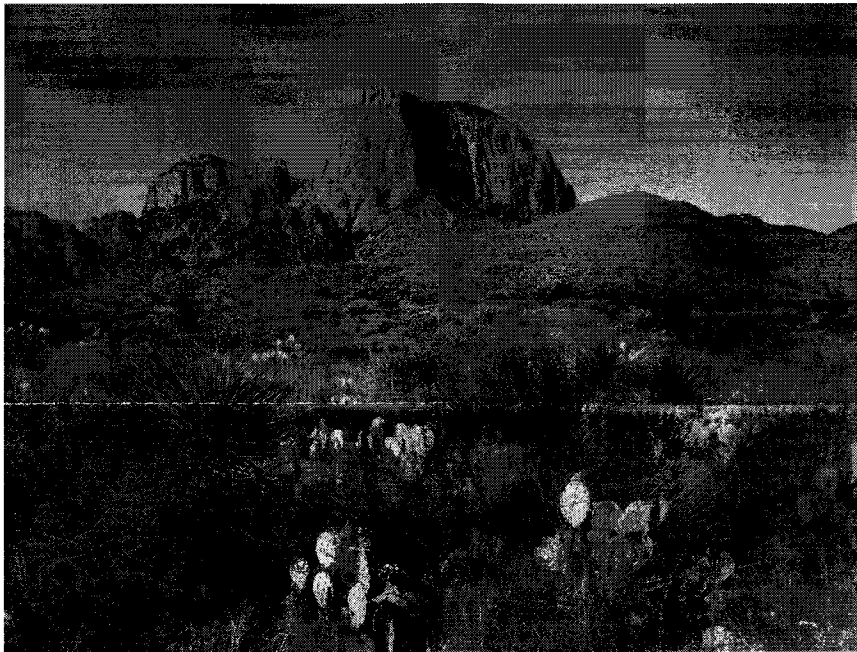
and requires some effort to reach. No matter. It's situated in a perfectly wonderful spot to observe the local birds. Some of the locals seem intent on your knowing they are here. A band of Mexican jays, as raucous as can be, moves through the alligator junipers like a teenage street gang. They almost drown out the cries of a couple of Acorn Woodpeckers that seem to give the jays a wide berth. Or maybe they're just into their own thing. Who can tell.

Our first morning in the Basin. We head out early, hoping to come across something of note. Here, as elsewhere, the early birder usually does get the

"worm." Off to the left of our lodging a trail leads to Mt. Emery, the tallest peak in the park. We pause in the parking lot to check survival gear, especially water. A familiar voice suddenly reaches us. The beautiful cascading notes of a Canyon Wren are coming from somewhere off to our right. Then, the bird appears on the roof of the next cottage. Head canted slightly back, it pumps out another series of

notes. We could listen to this feathered Carreras all day long, but this isn't getting any hiking done, so we leave our morning songster and head out. Canyon Towhees hop along the rocky trail out ahead of us. As we stop to watch their progress, a Ladderback Woodpecker sails into view. It makes a bee line for a pine tree and proceeds to examine every furrow with a probing bill. And then we see it. The sign. Anyone, trying to fathom the federal tax code, would be entirely within their rights to conclude the federal government is not capable of composing understandable English. But it's not true. This sign was perfectly clear (to English speakers). YOU ARE ENTERING LION COUNTRY. LIONS HAVE BEEN SEEN

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ALONG THIS TRAIL. SOME HAVE SHOWN AGGRESSION TOWARD HIKERS. So what does the park service suggest the hiker do in the event of an encounter with a mountain lion? Also, fairly clear. Do not turn and run (evidently all cats love chase games and the cat usually catches whatever it's chasing). Face the lion, raise your arms and look as big as you can. Growl if you think it will do any good. Good luck! (that last bit from the authors).

It's time to revisit priorities. There are lots of trails here, lots of real estate to be visited, hopefully, lots of interesting birds to be seen. We elect to redeploy to another area. Rio Grande Village, 20 miles distant, looks good, and along the way is a birdy spot called

winged Doves, Bullock's Orioles and Summer Tanagers. And in one tree we spot one of the birds we'd hoped to find, a Zone-tailed Hawk. This stealth hunter is said to "hide" among soaring vultures, swooping down on unsuspecting prey that cannot distinguish it from the carrion eaters. At the nearby campground a new song is heard. Buzzy, almost insect like, we think of a Grasshopper Sparrow, but that doesn't seem likely. It's time for some pishing. A few moments later we are rewarded with our first sighting of a male Black-tailed Gnatcatcher. What a great way to wind up a brief visit to Big Bend National Park. There's so much more to see and do, but that'll have to wait for another day.

Dana & Nancy Griffin



Dugout Wells. So, off we head. Dugout Wells, a small oasis in this very dry landscape, comes complete with a working windmill. It supports a robust stand of cottonwoods surrounded by a thicket of mesquite trees. And does it have birds! Our first sighting is of a lemon yellow and ebony black marvel, the Scott's Oriole, but a jumble of notes keeps reaching us from the mesquites. We back into the shade of a cottonwood and wait. Soon, the author of all this music makes his appearance. It's a Bell's Vireo. All right, the bird is plain as a mud fence, but it has a lovely voice, and we're thrilled to see and hear it. Now, we continue on to Rio Grande Village, and here our birding reaches a new plateau. We start behind the village store, walking a path along a canal. Cottonwoods and mulberry trees dot the canal banks. Scanning these trees we find Golden-fronted Woodpeckers, White-

Chimney Swift Roost

On August 24th at dusk, I discovered something that took my breath away. I came upon an enormous swirl of Chimney Swifts, chittering and chattering as they whirled over the tall chimney at Pleasant Hill Baptist Church on NW 5th Avenue. I estimated the flock at well over 700. The swifts swirled around the chimney countless times, then gradually began entering one at a time, slowly at first, probably 1 or 2 per minute, and then several per second as the sky got darker. During the next week I returned to the roost several times but never saw more than 225-250 on successive visits. Gina Zimmerman observed about 255 swifts entering the chimney on September 12th, and 120 on September 16th. Numbers declined until I returned on October 12th to find only 3 swifts quietly entering the chimney.

Given that Tropical Storm Fay blew through Gainesville on the day prior to my discovery, I couldn't help but wonder if the storm was partly responsible for the pulse of activity at the swift roost. Swift roosting and migratory behaviors are known to be influenced by large storms. The hurricanes of 2005, especially Hurricane Wilma, produced reports of Chimney Swifts perishing in chimneys from exhaustion after a long flight or being blown off course into the north Atlantic (*Chaetura* newsletter, volume 11, spring 2006).

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Santa Fe Audubon - Inaugural Meeting

Sixty people came to Santa Fe Audubon's inaugural meeting in Melrose on November 11, 2008 marking the beginning of the 44th Audubon chapter in Florida. Dr. Jeff Smith, local dentist, shared his exquisite photographs of birds and other wildlife with an enthusiastic audience. Twenty-four people signed on to become the chapter's founding members. The chapter needs 11 more new members to become a provisional chapter within National Audubon.

Jacqui Sulek, AOF Chapters Coordinator, and Monique Borboen, NE Florida Coordinator, were on hand to welcome the new chapter into the Audubon family. Jan and Bill Bolte, Jean Giesel, Jim Swarr, and Joyce King comprise the Steering Committee for the new chapter.


With an 18-year-old Christmas Bird Count founded by Bill and Jan Bolte of Melrose, the new chapter has a foundation of birders and supporters who will lend energy to the chapter's activities. The first field trip will be a walk-about birding class in downtown Melrose on Saturday, December 6. The CBC is scheduled for Thursday, December 18. Serving Putnam, Bradford, western Clay and the eastern edge of Alachua Counties, the chapter center is Melrose where the 4 counties converge. Alachua, Duval, and 4 Rivers Audubon members in the new Santa Fe Audubon area remain members of those chapters. New Audubon members who live within the Santa Fe Audubon area will be assigned to Santa Fe Audubon. Chapter assignments can be changed on request at the NAS website.

Published information suggests that Chimney Swifts leave roosting aggregations in the southeastern United States during the latter half of October. However, the more I dug into the literature, the more I realized how little we know about this bird's behavior and its ecology.

Chimney Swift populations are declining, as are populations of many other aerial insectivore species in the eastern United States. One wonders if our area provides enough nesting and roosting resources for swifts. I hope we can identify and protect some of the larger swift roosts in the coming years.

Visit the Driftwood Wildlife Association at <http://www.chimneyswifts.org/> for more information on Chimney Swifts, including how to provide nesting and roosting habitat.

Karl Miller



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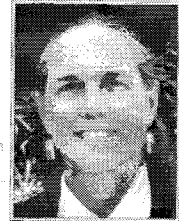
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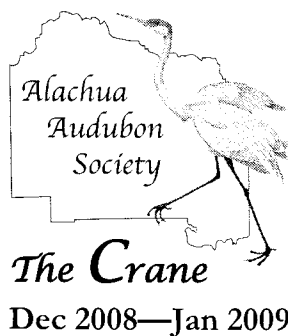
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Third Annual Holiday Social December 5, 6:30pm

Join us and your fellow Audubon friends for our Third Annual Holiday Social at Wild Birds Unlimited. Take time out from your busy schedule to have some fun, enjoy the music, food and festivities. This is our annual fund raiser so we will have some great items for the silent auction.

Bring a friend!
Join the Flock!

Where: Wild Birds Unlimited
When: Friday, December 5
Time: 6:30-9 pm

Join Audubon!

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

Paul Moler 7818 Highway 346 Archer, Florida 32618

Questions? Contact Paul 495-9419 or
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