



The Crane

Volume 50 Number 4 February –March 2009

February and March AAS field trips

Sunday, February 1, 8 am

Persimmon Point

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

Saturday/Sunday, February 7 & 8

Tall Timbers Research Station Sparrow Banding

Call Wild Birds Unlimited [352-381-1997] for details or to make a reservation. Overnight Saturday in TTRS' comfy bunkhouse and leave early the next morning for a day of in The Wade Tract, a 200-acre stand of old growth longleaf pine. Jim Cox and Adam Kent lead.

Sunday, February 15, 8 am

Kanapaha Prairie

Meet trip leader Rex Rowan in the Target parking lot at 8am. The Kanapaha Prairie is an 804-acre ex-pasture dotted with marshy ponds and ringed with huge live oaks. It is home to the county's second largest flock of Sandhill Cranes. Numerous other birds enjoy its open space as well, notably Eastern Meadowlark, Killdeer, and American Kestrels, as well as waterfowl and shore-birds. It is normally off limits to the public but AAS has special permission for this trip. Difficulty: 2

Sunday, February 22, 7 am

Emeralda Marsh

The Wildlife Drive weaves around a patchwork of hammocks and through freshwater marshes. Pick out ducks, wading birds, and more among the coots. Meet 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, February 28, 8 am

Blues Creek—CLEP

This heavily-wooded 163 acre preserve near Devil's Millhopper was acquired by Alachua Conservation Trust in 2002 is still not open to the public due to limited access. Meet ACT board member John Winn in the Hunter's Crossing Publix parking lot and carpool from there. Difficulty: 2

Saturday, March 14, 8 am

Prairie Creek —CLEP

Nearly two miles of trail course through a beautiful hardwood forest in the floodplain of Prairie Creek near Rochelle. Join Alachua Conservation Trust land manager Ivor Kincaide and board member John Winn at Powers Park. Difficulty: 2

Saturday, March 28, 8 am

Hogtown Headwaters Nature Park —CLEP

Meet trip leader Geoff Parks at the Tag Agency near 441 on NW 34th St. This park protects a variety of natural habitats from former pinelands and upland mixed forests to cypress domes, and contains part of the headwaters of Hogtown Creek. This field trip previews a park which will some day include nature trails, a playground, a picnic pavilion, an interpretive center, and other amenities. Difficulty: 2

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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 fulfils 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**

Around The County...

By Mike Manetz

Ok, I'll stop whining. In the last issue of the *Crane* I lamented how few vagrant and unusual species had been reported this early winter. As soon

as the ink had dried on that issue, rarities started popping up all over. On November 22 Linda Hensley reported a **Dark-eyed Junco** at her feeder. The following day I found a **Least Flycatcher** at the far end of Cone's Dike, and Stefan Rayer noted three **Whooping Cranes** at Kanapaha Botanical Gardens. After several trips to the newly opened Tusawilla Prairie, Rex Rowan spotted both **Lincon's** and **LeConte's Sparrows** among swarms of Savannah and Swamp Sparrows that have settled in there. The following day Pat Burns located two **Fox Sparrows** at San Felasco County Park, where one was seen last year. On the last day of the month John Hintermister reported a good selection of ducks and twelve **Snow Geese** along La Chua Trail. A week later three **Greater White-fronted Geese** were seen there as well. But the real blockbuster-bird of the winter was discovered December 6 by an Alachua Audubon field trip to LaChua Trail. As the group was sizing up sparrows in a brush pile near Little Alachua Sink, one participant, Ginny Rose, inquired about a large sparrow she noticed that had a black throat. Turns out that bird was a **Harris's Sparrow**. Extremely rare in the state, this was the first Harris's Sparrow reported in Alachua County since the 1970's. The strikingly beautiful bird remained at least through the middle of January, and became quite a local celebrity admired by birders from all over the state and the southeast. (By the way, the same field trip that found the Harris's Sparrow also came up with a locally-rare **White-faced Ibis**.) All these great sightings foreshadowed a spectacular Christmas Count: after all the tallying was finished December 14, Alachua County had broken all its previous Christmas Count records, with 160 species reported!

Perhaps even more significant than the Harris's Sparrow was the continued presence at Alachua Sink of the **Semi-palmated Sandpiper** first discovered in October. The wintering status of this species in Florida has been a subject of question for years due to the difficulty of identification and lack of verifiable (photographic) evidence. Except for a few reports

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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, 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

from extreme south Florida, most winter sight reports were simply discounted. Our bird, much photographed by the local birding paparazzi, and seen as recently as December 26, may represent the first clearly documented case of a wintering Semi-palmated Sandpiper in Florida north of the Keys.

This winter we were ready for huge **Pine Siskin** irruption, as large numbers were reported from states to the north, and scattered reports were coming in from all over Florida, including the southern part of the state. Things were slower to develop here. The Goodman family saw as many as eight at their feeders, and a few were seen regularly at the head of La Chua Trail, but there were no large outbreaks here. Perhaps later in the season when the Goldfinches really start piling up at feeders we will see more of them around. Maybe a little bit of whining is in order.

Thanks to those who shared their reports through January 11, 2009

Youth Christmas Bird Count

The first annual Youth Christmas Bird Count took place on Sunday morning, January 18th; Sam Mahon, Steve Goodman, Kaitlin Deutsch, and Sam Vanroy met at Lake Alice to start looking for birds. Led by Adam Kent with assistance from Hollie Greer, who supplied the group with binoculars, they headed to Paynes Prairie and split up: one team went to the La Chua Trail while the other team went to Lake Wauberg. After the count was over, everyone met up at the Mellow Mushroom to eat lunch and exchange sightings.



Combined, the birders saw an impressive 71 species, including several elusive and rare birds that were a treat to spot. Highlights of the day included a spectacular view of a Baltimore Oriole over Lake Alice, lit by the early morning sunshine, a river otter happily munching a fish at Lake Wauberg, two whooping cranes interspersed among thousands of sandhill cranes on the prairie, a pair of red-shouldered hawks assembling their nest before the birders' eyes at the 441 overlook, a remarkable count of 11 bald eagles, and the bold V across an Eastern Meadowlark's vivid yellow chest.

In short, the day was a great success, with an almost overwhelming number of birds and other sightings. Next year's Youth Christmas Bird Count has already been considered and discussed, and everyone looks forward to this event with much excitement.

Kaitlin Deutsch

Asian Woolly Hackberry Aphid

I identified my first sugarberry tree years ago while living in New Smyrna Beach. I was struck by its beautiful trunk; a motley mosaic of colorful lichens, and smooth, except for the warty knobs that curiously retain the tree's growth rings. The tree was growing on a bed of old shells, and while many other trees thrive on slightly acidic soils, plant a sugarberry near limestone and you'll get a handsome tree. They are deciduous, and thus are a good choice tree for the southern or western side of a house, providing shade from the summertime sun while allowing the warming rays of the winter sun to shine below.

Sugarberry trees are good for wildlife too. Find sugarberry trees in summer and you are almost certain to find butterflies flying about or perching upside down on the trunks. Hackberry and tawny emperors use it as a larval host plant and rarely stray from its foliage, and another species, the question mark, also commonly uses sugarberry trees for caterpillar rearing. However, unlike the previous two species, this handsome butterfly is not much of a tree-bound homebody and is more likely to venture forth. As the tree's name suggests, the sugarberries themselves are sweet, though short on pulp. The fruits usually persist into the winter until stripped by a wandering flock of robins or waxwings or any number of other fruit-eaters.

In 1997 a state agricultural inspector found the state's first Asian woolly hackberry aphid on a sugarberry tree in Duval County. The first American sighting was the year before in Georgia, and by 2002 had made it to California. Like other invasive species, the aphid was transported beyond the range of many of its natural controls (i.e. parasites, pathogens, and predators), and thus faced a tremendous competitive advantage over its native counterparts. In its new range, the aphid thrived. Look under the leaves of a sugarberry in summer, and you'll find the aphids—maybe dozens on each leaf—looking like tiny cottony tufts. In the air you may see the slow-flying white puffs that are winged adults. Like other aphids, Asian woolly hackberry aphids secrete excess sap out of their backsides, and within a short time, sooty mold soon grows on this sugary sap, turning it black. In fact, most everything under a sugarberry tree gets a black coating, and the tree that was once suitable for planting over a driveway is no longer. Throughout north-central Florida sugarberry trees are being hammered by the aphid, and some become defoliated in late summer; severely

weakened when they should be storing carbohydrates to fuel the growth of the spring's buds. However, what has been a detriment to our sugarberry trees has been a benefit to our birds.

Last fall I walked through a hardwood hammock and though migration was underway and this was a good-quality hammock (perhaps even never having been cleared), birds were few until I found a sugarberry tree. Among the American redstarts and magnolia warblers foraging in the tree was a veery. I had never seen a thrush glean insects from leaves, but here was one. The birds were drawn to this tree like no other in the forest. Nocturnal migrants such as these descend into woodlands at dawn to fuel their Central American-bound journeys and forage randomly through the forest. But when they found the sugarberry tree with its unnaturally-occurring bounty, they stayed. I have since seen other species drawn to sugarberry trees like never before, from green anoles to ladybird beetles. This past November I watched crowds of ruby-crowned kinglets in local sugarberry trees. On their way from their breeding range of Canada's vast boreal forest, waves of kinglets were making their way through northern Florida, and like their earlier migrating brethren, foraged from tree to tree until finding the sugarberry trees. They flitted from tree to tree, looking under each leaf for their cottony candy, some flitting to catch slow-flying aphids feebly attempting to escape. After a few weeks, the supply of aphids was exhausted and the kinglets numbers thinned out. The others probably made their way down the peninsula, cleaning the sugarberry trees of aphids along the way.

The introduction of non-native species beyond their normal range is a serious problem many species must contend with. Habitat is degraded and its ability to sustain native species is compromised. Many of us know about invasive plants, but others—like invasive insects or pathogens—have the ability to insidiously sweep through an ecosystem, selectively culling out a single species from the forest. The situation for the sugarberry is not entirely grim, as most trees survive the aphids. On the flip side, many insect-eating birds appear to be benefitting from this invasion. For birders that can identify a sugarberry tree, we too can benefit from the aphid invasion by knowing how to increase the likelihood of finding birds.

Micheal Meisenburg

Shad harvests to improve lake water quality

Reducing numbers of gizzard shad may improve water quality in Newnans Lake

A 3-year experimental shad harvest in Newnans Lake in north-central Florida will begin in March 2009. The purpose is to determine if the shad harvest will improve water quality in a lake with no significant reduction in nutrients entering the lake from surrounding lands.

SHAD INFO

Gizzard shad are a native fish found in most Florida lakes. Shad become abundant in lakes with high levels of nutrients. Nutrients feed algae that turn lake water murky green, limiting growth of desirable underwater plants that provide fish habitat. Sport fish are less abundant in lakes with high nutrients and few underwater plants.

Large numbers of gizzard shad may contribute to nutrient recycling by stirring of bottom sediments during feeding. Recycling of nutrients due to gizzard shad feeding may be significant in some lakes.

How nutrients affect Florida lakes

Water quality in most Florida lakes is determined by the amount of nutrients entering the lake from surrounding lands. Human activities can increase nutrients entering the lake, degrading water quality. Low nutrient lakes have tea-colored water and lots of underwater plants. Excess nutrients feed algae that turn lake water murky green, which blocks sunlight to underwater plants. Lakes with murky green water and fewer underwater plants have fewer sport fish and more gizzard shad.

How shad harvests may improve lake water

Gizzard shad feed on algae on the lake bottom, stirring up sediments and clouding the water. Shad excrete nutrients back into the lake water, recycling nutrients from the lake bottom that feed more algae, keeping the lake murky green.

Removing large numbers of bottom-feeding gizzard shad may improve water quality in degraded lakes by reducing resuspension of lake sediments and recycling of nutrients from the lake bottom. Removing large numbers of shad from a lake also removes the nutrients in their bodies.

Previous shad harvests

Harvests of large numbers of gizzard shad from three nutrient-rich lakes in central Florida may have helped improve water quality in those lakes. In Lake Denham, a three-year experimental rough fish harvest ending in 1992 reduced nutrients by more than half and improved water clarity four-fold.

Annual large-scale shad harvest began at Lake Apopka in 1993 and Lake Griffin in 2002. The shad harvests occurred at the same time as runoff of nutrients into the lakes from surrounding lands was being reduced. In Lake Apopka the nutrient phosphorus declined 55% and water clarity improved 47%. In Lake Griffin, phosphorus declined 32% and water clarity improved 41%. Some of these improvements in water quality may be due to shad harvesting and some may be due to reduction in nutrients entering the lakes.

How harvests are done

The St. Johns River Water Management District hires commercial fishers to net shad. Other fish such as bowfin, gar, and tilapia are also harvested when caught in the nets, while sport fish are immediately released. The shad harvest occurs for a 6-week period during March and April to minimize interference with sport fishers.

Harvested fish are unloaded from the boats at a landing site temporarily constructed on the lake shore. After the shad harvest, the landing site is restored to its previous condition until the harvest begins the following year. Each boat's catch is weighed, iced, and transferred to a refrigerated trailer truck for transport to a processing plant. The frozen fish are sold as crab trap bait and as feed for crayfish farms.

The District is permitted by the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to harvest the shad. The permit requires that the shad harvest minimize impact to sport fish and special effort is made to minimize interference with sport fishers. The District and FWC monitor netting activities to assure compliance with the permit. The District also monitors commercial fish numbers, numbers of fish caught other than rough fish, and water quality in the lake before, during, and after the harvest. Sport fish populations are monitored by FWC.

Carol Lippincott, Project Manager for St. Johns River Management District's Orange Creek Basin Program

AAS Bulletin Board

We need YOU!

It's a New Year and the Alachua Audubon Society is looking for some new blood to help in all kinds of ways. We are looking for people who have a variety of skills and interests. Time commitment and dedication toward helping AAS can be as much as each individual wants. We need people to join the board of directors, committees and/or to just volunteer a couple hours at special events. You don't need to be an expert birder to help out. We even need people who are into computers and websites to give us a hand. If interested, please contact Stacy Porvasnik, her email address is slporvas@yahoo.com. It is going to be an exciting year. Don't miss out!

Check out audubonoffloridanews.org for lots of details about the **Audubon Academy** and how you can register!

Reminder - AAS Events

Don't miss the AAS Lecture series!
See page 8

Come help with exotic removal at Audubon Park! See page 10

If you ever see **banded Sandhill Cranes** while you are out birding, you need to report them!
<http://www.savingcranes.org/longtermresearch.html>

Sightings should be emailed to:
Anne Lacy, *Sandhill Projects Manager*, International Crane Foundation
anne@savingcranes.org

Former AAS board member Marcy Jones is now a volunteer at Haven Hospice, maintaining the bird feeders. Several feeders were in bad shape, and she donated 8 of her own but would like to take them back home. If anyone has any old feeders that they would like to donate, contact Marcy at marcy_jones@hotmail.com.

The next two **Volunteer Ardisia Pull** at San Felasco Hammock Preserve State Park will be on Sat., Feb. 7th and Sat., Mar. 7th, from 9 am until 12 pm. Volunteers will meet at the main parking area for the trailhead off Millhopper Road.

Talks on Conservation and Environmental History in Florida

- Sunday, February 15, 2009 2:30 to 4 p.m.
The Founders of Florida Audubon and the Fight to Save Florida's Birds
Leslie Poole—Adjunct Professor of Environmental Studies, Rollins College
- Sunday, March 22, 2009, 2:30 to 4 p.m.
Archie Carr: the Man who Saved Sea Turtles
Frederick Rowe Davis—Associate Professor, FSU
- Sunday, April 19, 2009 2:30 to 4 p.m.
The Art of Painting Florida's History – an Afternoon with Jackson Walker
Jackson Walker—Artist-in-Residence, Museum of Florida Art, DeLand

Free and open to the public. All talks will be held at the Florida Museum of Natural History in the museum classroom. Pre-program events, featuring materials from the P.K. Yonge Library of Florida History and the Manuscripts Division, George A. Smathers Libraries, begin at 1:30pm. Talks begin at 2:30 pm with book-signings and food and refreshments at 3:30pm. Call James Cusick at 352-273-2778 for additional information.

Holiday Social and Christmas Tree Sale Success

Third time was a charming success! Thanks to all those who bought their organic **Christmas trees** from us for another great fund raiser. We were able to bank \$2900 after all expenses were paid. If you missed out on getting a tree with us, you can put your name on a list with Bob Carroll by sending an email request to gator-bob23@yahoo.com.

With the **Holiday Social** we raised over \$2000 and had another fun evening hanging out at Wild Birds Unlimited, listening to the harp music of Barbara Kerkhoff and soft mix of holiday and cool tunes by Marcy and Ron Jones. Good music, good food, some exciting bidding activity but most of all there was a great attendance during the busy holidays. Look for a repeat in 2009!

Helen Warren

Community Calendar

- ♦ **7 Feb** Sierra Club /Ardisia/ pull, San Felasco Hammock, 9:00 a.m.
- ♦ **7 Feb** Orlando Wetlands Festival, Christmas, FL
- ♦ **17 Feb** Florida Native Plant Society local meeting, 7:00 p.m.
- ♦ **21 Feb** Florida Native Plant Society field trip, TBA
- ♦ **7 Mar** Sierra Club /Ardisia/ pull, San Felasco Hammock, 9:00 a.m.
- ♦ **14 Mar** Pelican Island Wildlife Festival, Sebastian, Florida
- ♦ **17 Mar** Florida Native Plant Society local meeting, 7:00 p.m.
- ♦ **21 Mar** Florida Native Plant Society field trip, TBA

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

Orlando Wetlands Festival
<http://www.nbbd.com/festivals/OrlandoWetlands/index.html>

Pelican Island Wildlife Festival:
<http://pelicanislandfriends.org/2009fest-index.htm>

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

Nominations for Officers and Members to the Board of Directors

It is hard to think about events and things to do in the spring when I am preparing for a hard freeze tonight but such as it is, that is my duty. It is time for the nomination committee to open the process for recommendations for officers and members to the Board of Directors (BOD). The election of officers and members to the BOD takes place at the end of the year gathering in May or June. If you have an interest in being a volunteer as an officer or on the BOD, or know someone who would like to do the same, please email me at helenkwarren@cox.net with subject "Alachua Audubon BOD" or call me at 352-214-7755.

Helen Warren

AAS Lecture Series

Saturday, Feb. 28, 2 pm, 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.

Saturday, March 28, 2 pm, Tower Road Library
Learn about conservation efforts to support our beautiful and special Florida Scrub Jay from **Craig Faulhaber**, Scrub Jay Conservation Coordinator for FWC.

Getting the young ones involved

Got kids? Check out the websites for Audubon of Florida and National Audubon Society. There are some really cool things to do with kids in or out of the classroom and a lot of info for parents and teachers to get involved. National Audubon Society has just kicked off their "PENNIES FOR THE PLANET" campaign (www.penniesfortheplanet.org). Along with an alliance with Toyota and support from TogetherGreen, this initiative will promote conservation action and support current and future environmental leaders.

Materials including a full color poster and educator's guide, a newsletter for kids, and a participation form with incentives and awards are available for download for classroom or at-home use.

This little note barely scratches the surface. Check out the websites and explore the fun and function! Make 2009 a big year for involvement.

Helen Warren

CONSERVATION CORNER

It's a new year and there are many ways to jump into action. While you may make a promise to get outside more, lose some weight, eat more locally grown foods and less junk . . . how about tweaking up your voice for some political action for the planet? Sure, it's a never ending story but you got to believe in something. Here are a few ways to let your voice be heard.

Check out Audubon of Florida (www.audubonofflorida.org) and National Audubon Society (www.audubon.org) websites for some really cool and easy ways to get involved in statewide and nationwide issues. You can join a networking system that will connect you to issues as they come up and link your comments to your representatives in Tallahassee or Washington, DC. You can get a lot of action done from the chair and through your email. I have even had responses from a senator on more than one issue through this system.

Helen Warren



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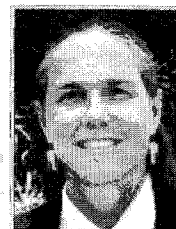
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ON STAGE

EURYDICE

Playwright Sarah Ruhl - a MacArthur Foundation "genius grant" winner and Pulitzer Prize nominee - reinvents the fantastic myth of Orpheus in this fresh look at a classic love story.
 "Rhapsodically beautiful." - *The New York Times*
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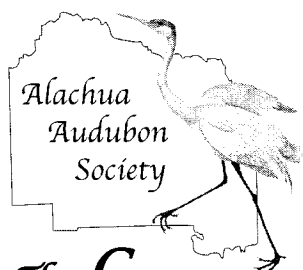
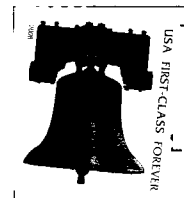
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Alachua Audubon Society
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Gainesville, Florida 32614-0464



The Crane

Feb—Mar 2009

**Colclough Pond Sanctuary
Exotic Plant Clean-Up
Saturday, Feb. 21, 9am-12pm**

Help Alachua Audubon Society improve its own nature preserve at Colclough Pond Sanctuary by keeping invasive exotic plants at bay.

Meet in Colclough Hills at the home of Ingrid and Bubba Scales, 3002 SW 1st Way, to receive equipment and instructions. After the clean-up, AAS will provide lunch at the Scales' home. BYOB.

If you have equipment, especially yard waste receptacles, pruning shears, and shovels, please call to find out if we need you to bring them.

For more information contact Ingrid Scales
367-1065, neznarfi@hotmail.com

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
paulmoler@bellsouth.net

Chapter E-18 New Membership Application
Not for renewals!

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Please check level of membership:

☐ Basic \$35.00 ☐ Senior \$15.00 ☐ Student \$15.00

Introductory Membership:

☐ One Year \$20.00 ☐ Two Years \$30.00

Make check payable to National Audubon Society