

## ALACHUA AUDUBON SOCIETY 2020-2021 INITIATIVES

Alachua Audubon Society is embarking on several new and exciting initiatives in 2020/2021 as well as expanding our successful existing programs. After almost a year of planning, AAS board members Jonathan Varol and Dr. Katie Sieving have established a **bird banding lab** at Alachua Conservation Trust's Prairie Creek Lodge property. The necessary banding permits have been received, new nets and equipment have been purchased, and some initial bird banding occurred in early 2020 before the field work was shut down by COVID-19. The purpose of the bird banding lab is to help educate and train students and other participants on the scientific methods of capturing, banding, and tracking birds.

The Alachua Audubon **college internship program** has been extremely successful and, despite a truncated spring internship schedule (due to the pandemic), six college interns gained valuable career experience by participating in a multitude of projects. Those projects included monitoring spring migration of Common Loons, netting and banding birds at the AAS bird banding lab, leading family bird walks, constructing, installing, and monitoring kestrel nest boxes, and tagging Snail Kites. We will again host a fall and spring internship program and compile a list of exciting projects for the new interns.

Four high school seniors were awarded the **John Hintermister Memorial High School Scholarship** in memory of John Hintermister, who was a charter member and long-time volunteer of AAS and a huge supporter of high school programs. We plan to advertise this high school scholarship program more widely this year in hopes of attracting even more applicants and to promote an interest in conservation.

As a local stakeholder and partner with **Sweetwater Wetlands Park**, AAS has made multiple contributions to the park that facilitate the education and enjoyment of birds. Our newest projects with the park will be purchasing a large white-board map so rangers and visitors can label specific locations where target species have been observed, designing and constructing educational signs for the overlook structures in Cells 2 and 3, and purchasing a collection of binoculars for the rangers to use when their educational tours resume.

GRU has embarked on the initial design of a new treatment wetland and has invited AAS to be a stakeholder and provide input on the public use facilities. If the initial design proves feasible and the project moves forward, this new wetland will be located next to the Diamond Sports Facility on Parker Road on the west side of Gainesville. The wetland will be designed to receive reclaimed water from GRU's Kanapaha Water Reclamation Facility and then infiltrate the high-quality, low-nutrient water into the ground where it will recharge the Floridan Aquifer. GRU staff will be delivering an evening PowerPoint presentation, possibly to be viewed through Zoom, to AAS members this fall. More details about the new wetland and the fall presentation will be available in an upcoming newsletter. For more information about the wetland visit [www.gru.com/rechargewetland](http://www.gru.com/rechargewetland).

AAS hopes to emulate a very successful **backpack library lending program** that Palm Beach Audubon implemented and has since expanded. AAS would purchase and furnish backpacks with binoculars, bird books, and other bird-related educational items to be available for checkout from Alachua County libraries. We hope to explore this proposal with librarians when the libraries fully reopen.

**Purple Martins (PUMA) have successfully nested at the Lake City Treatment Wetlands** thanks to a joint project between AAS and Four Rivers Audubon. In January 2019, AAS and Four Rivers Audubon purchased and installed PUMA nesting gourds. Soon after the gourds were

installed, a colony of PUMAs nested in them. The colony increased substantially in 2020 and eggs and/or young were present in almost all 20 gourds. Based on the success of this project, AAS and Four Rivers Audubon will again team together to purchase another PUMA nesting gourd system and install it next to the existing gourds in early 2021. Although the Lake City Treatment Wetland is not open to the public, the City staff members open the wetland for an AAS field trip each winter and for the Christmas Bird Count in December.

The Alachua Conservation Trust invited AAS to be partners on a **Grassland Bird Habitat Restoration Project**. AAS will assist with baseline and post-restoration bird surveys on ACT's Fox Pen site in eastern Alachua County. We will also contribute to some of the restoration activities such as collecting seed from a recently burned donor site and promoting the benefits of controlled burns for grassland bird species at local festivals.

Like other organizations, AAS is cautiously optimistic that we can implement our many upcoming **field trips and outings**. The format for our bird walks will definitely change and require certain safety protocols for attending. Look for more information in the September/October issue of *The Crane* newsletter.

The Alachua Audubon Society is an all-volunteer organization. You do not need to be a member to participate in any of our activities, but your membership enables us to offer more to the community and makes us stronger in our efforts to promote conservation initiatives in Alachua County. If you are not a member, please consider joining the Alachua Audubon Society.

Debbie Segal  
President