



# The Crane

Volume 62 Number 2 Nov–Dec 2020

## Christmas Bird Counts Coming Up!

The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is an annual census of birds administered by the National Audubon Society. CBCs are intense, day-long surveys for experienced and intermediate-level birders. Each count takes place in an established 15-mile diameter circle and is organized by a count compiler. Volunteers identify and tally all birds they see and hear along their specified routes or within their designated zones. It's not just a species tally—all birds are counted all day, giving an indication of the total number of birds in the circle that day. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, this year's Christmas Bird Count will require a few changes from prior years. Social distancing and/or masking will be required for those birding together, and carpooling is discouraged. The evening count-up will be virtual or canceled, depending on the decision of the count compiler.

**Melrose:** Thursday, Dec. 17. Contact Sallie Carlock [graphixbyesc@aol.com](mailto:graphixbyesc@aol.com) or 561-809-6525. Volunteers needed. No evening count-up.

**Lake City:** Saturday, Dec. 19. Contact Valerie Thomas at [v.thomas57@gmail.com](mailto:v.thomas57@gmail.com) or 386-466-2193. Volunteers needed. No evening count-up.

**Gainesville:** Sunday, Dec. 20. Contact Andy Kratter at [kratter@flmnh.ufl.edu](mailto:kratter@flmnh.ufl.edu) or 352-226-2462, or Bob Carroll at [gatorbob23@yahoo.com](mailto:gatorbob23@yahoo.com) or 352-281-3616. The hugely popular evening count-up will be held as a Zoom presentation on the following evening (Monday, 12/21). The time and link to the meeting will be posted on the AAS website and Fb page.

**Ichetucknee/Santa Fe/O'Leno:** Tuesday, Dec. 22. Contact Ginger Morgan at [ginger.morgan@myfwc.com](mailto:ginger.morgan@myfwc.com) or 386-586-8249. Volunteers needed. No evening count-up.

**Cedar Key** Wednesday, Dec. 30. Contact Ron Christian at [ronrun@embarqmail.com](mailto:ronrun@embarqmail.com) or 850-567-0490. No evening count-up.

## Don't Miss Our Evening Programs

**November Evening Program – A New Wetland in Gainesville! Wednesday, November 4 at 7:00 p.m.** Gainesville Regional Utilities and their partners, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and Suwannee River Water Management District, plan to create a groundwater recharge wetland park near Diamond Sports Park in western Alachua County. The wetland park will create valuable wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities while simultaneously replenishing the Floridan Aquifer which will help support flows at the Santa Fe River and its springs. During the presentation, Kristen Sealey, GRU Engineer and Rick Hutton, GRU Supervising Engineer, will provide background about the project and share the multiple benefits the park will bring to the community and environment.

Join us on **Wednesday, November 4 at 7:00 p.m.** You do not need to preregister to attend this presentation. Simply click on [this link](#) (which can also be found on the AAS website and Fb page).

**November Evening Program – Building Better Birding Skills. Monday, November 9 at 7:00 p.m.**

Do you know how to identify individual Downy Woodpeckers based on their head patterns; how to

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*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.*

Submissions to *The Crane* are welcomed. Deadline for the Jan–Feb issue: December 15<sup>th</sup>

Content of *The Crane* fulfills the stated objectives and goals of the Alachua Audubon Society. Annual subscription to *The Crane* is included in National Audubon and/or Alachua Audubon membership. Please see the back page for more information.

Additional advertisers are welcome. Please contact the editor for more information at [karenpbrown1953@gmail.com](mailto:karenpbrown1953@gmail.com)

## Local Photographer Soars

Local photographer and AAS member, Tom Wronski, captured this male Snail Kite as it winged low over Paynes Prairie. His lovely photograph was recently featured in the internationally distributed, BirdWatching magazine. Tom's photograph of an immature snail kite



with an apple snail in its beak was taken last October from the gazebo near the end of the LaChua boardwalk. This photo was awarded a blue



ribbon (top 10%) in a state-wide photo competition organized by the Florida Camera Council. *Congratulations, Tom, for your photographic accomplishments!*

## Ocala Wetlands Recharge Park Now Open

The Ocala Wetland Recharge Park opened its gates in September of this year with a great reception. Over 300 individuals visited on opening day, and the park has averaged nearly 200 visitors a day since then. The park is a 60-acre parcel that historically was a golf course and then a disc golf course. The park is owned by the City of Ocala and maintained and operated by the Water Resources Department.

The park's purpose is three-fold:

To **reduce** nutrients and other pollutants from the water coming in to the park. This water is a combination of stormwater from a nearby retention pond and advanced treated wastewater from the two water reclamation facilities in the City of Ocala. The water is sent through the engineered wetland where wetland plants, and the microorganisms that live on them, reduce the nutrients – specifically total nitrogen – to much lower levels.

To **recharge** the aquifer. City of Ocala customers consume an average of 12 million gallons of water a day. The park will be able to recharge, or give back, up to five million gallons of water a day once it is at full capacity. Currently it receives just over three million gallons of water a day and this amount is recharged daily.

To **recreation**. The park features two and a half miles of fully accessible, eight-foot-wide, asphalt paved trails, 1,500 feet of boardwalk, and educational signs throughout.

The Ocala Wetland Recharge Park provides an immersive nature experience. The recharge and nutrient reduction benefits of the park will help protect Silver Springs by providing clean water directly into the aquifer. Silver Springs is an ecological asset for Marion County and all of Florida.

Establishing the park as a birding hotspot, while spreading the positive message of the importance of conservation areas, was a focus of outreach before the park opened. Prior to opening, multiple sneak peek tours were given to local groups to boost the park's eBird ranking. The Ocala Wetland Recharge Park is currently listed as the tenth top hotspot in Marion County on eBird.

The park provides welcome relief in a fast-paced world. Visitors are encouraged to enjoy the peaceful conservation area, take a walk, and engage with nature. The park is located at 2105 NW 21<sup>st</sup> Street, Ocala. Hours of operation are daily from sunrise to sunset. There is no admission charge.

For more information visit [wetlandpark.ocalafl.org](http://wetlandpark.ocalafl.org) and follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) @ocalawetlandrechargepark



*Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks.  
Photo by Rachel Slocumb.*

By Rachel Slocumb

## Alachua Audubon Opposes Toll Road

Alachua Audubon has signed on to a letter prepared by the [No Roads to Ruin](#) coalition opposing the Multi-use Corridors of Regional Economic Significance program (M-CORES) – the three toll roads proposed for construction through rural areas on the west side of Florida. The Florida Department of Transportation’s (FDOT) own task forces concluded that they could not identify a need for the roads after more than a year of review. Data from the Turnpike Authority indicates toll receipts would not come close to covering debt service on the bonds required to finance a project of this scale. While the stated purpose of the roads is to promote economic development, the task force reports were not able to conclude that the roads would promote the promised economic development. FDOT’s claims that increasing road capacity will reduce congestion are questionable and there are numerous examples that demonstrate that additional or widened highways lead to more, rather than less, congestion.

Millions of acres of protected conservation land and hundreds of thousands of acres of land in already-approved Florida Forever projects are located within the proposed corridor areas, evidence of the important conservation value of these areas. In addition, the proposed corridor areas include large amounts of Florida’s agricultural land. These lands are indispensable to maintaining connectivity among conservation lands, and agriculture’s contribution to Florida’s economy is second only to tourism and is at risk from these proposed corridors. Rural Florida residents and local governments are concerned about the impact of toll roads on existing local businesses and their way of life. Toll roads will either bypass historic downtowns altogether or are likely to replace them with mega gas stations, fast food chains, and sprawl. Claims that the roads would bring important infrastructure, like high speed internet, to isolated rural areas and help address hurricane evacuation needs are questionable. High speed internet and other utilities could be extended to rural areas without investing billions on unneeded roads, and Florida’s Department of Emergency Management prefers improved evacuation planning that would allow evacuees to remain close to home as a safer and more cost-effective solution than building new roads.

By Anne Casella

## Evening Programs

(Continued from Page 1)

identify a Tricolored Heron based on bill length; or how to tell an American Crow from a Fish Crow when it is calling, even if you can’t hear it? Adam Kent will answer these questions and more in this presentation geared toward birding in your neighborhood. The presentation will be about 30 minutes long with time left for questions afterwards via the chat function.

Join us on **Monday, November 9 at 7:00 p.m.** No need to register – just click on this [link](#) (which can also be found on the AAS website and Fb page).

### **December Evening Program – Bird Bling – Thursday, December 3, 7:00 p.m.**

Bling – expensive, ostentatious clothing and jewelry, or the wearing of them. So why are birds wearing those brightly colored bracelets on their legs? You may think that you know a lot about bird banding but here is a program that will give you new insight into the “why” behind this practice. Join bird bander Adam Dinuove, Audubon staff member from the Naples/Marco Island area, as he shares his experiences banding Black Skimmers at the Florida coast.

Join us on **Thursday, December 3 at 7:00 p.m.** No need to register – just click on this [link](#) (which can also be found on the AAS website and Fb page).

*Would you like to be reminded when our programs are nearing? Send an email to [programs@alachuaudubon.org](mailto:programs@alachuaudubon.org) and you will be sent an email reminder prior to each program.*

## GREBE Garden for Birds Thriving

The **UF GREBE Garden for Birds**, located next to Newins-Ziegler Hall on the UF campus, is now open to visitors! Installed by the UF “Gators Ready for Exceptional Birding Experiences” Audubon Campus Chapter (UF GREBE ACC) as part of National Audubon’s **Plants for Birds Program**, this garden features over 20 species of native plants ranging from wildflowers to small trees.

By turning a lawn into a native garden, you are not only beautifying the area and saving water, you are also creating a sanctuary for all species. During migration, these areas are important rest stops for exhausted birds that have been travelling for hundreds of miles. Just as valuable, if not more, are the area’s local pollinators. Native areas lacking harsh chemicals are a hotspot for busy bees, butterflies, and moths (and the birds that feed on them!)

UF students, faculty, and local citizens of Gainesville are also among those that may benefit from the garden. With plant ID signs, birdfeeders, brochures, and a bird bath accompanying the plants, the GREBEs hope to show how easy it can be to create habitat for native wildlife in your own yard.

Searching online can be overwhelming when you try to grow something. I wanted to create a garden that was just as informative as it is beautiful to show others how easy it is to plant natives in their own yards to attract birds and pollinators. By visiting this garden, you get to see how all the species interact, learn about planting them, and you may even see a bird or two! This was a project we certainly could not have done without the help of the amazing UF Facilities Services team. They supported us every step of the way.

The UF GREBE ACC is excited to use this location for future workshops with community members and as a new birding location on campus (it has its own eBird Hotspot, too!)

Come visit the garden and learn how to plant for birds! For further questions, please email [grebeuf@gmail.com](mailto:grebeuf@gmail.com) or visit us on Facebook: [@ufgrebegarden](https://www.facebook.com/ufgrebegarden)

by Jacob Ewert  
2019-2020 President, UF GREBE ACC



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Also see Alachua County Birding and the Alachua County Rare Bird Alert on Facebook.




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## The John Hintermister High School Scholarship Program

To encourage youth activities consistent with the Alachua Audubon Society mission, AAS is pleased to announce the availability of scholarships (\$300) to Alachua County high school seniors who demonstrate an interest in wildlife or conservation. The expenditure of scholarship funds is not limited to academics and may be used however the student wishes. The number of awards may vary annually.

The award will be based upon the following criteria:

- Keen interest in the environment, nature, and/or conservation
- Involvement in extracurricular environmental/nature activities
- Academic record
- Teacher/counselor recommendation.

To be considered for a scholarship, an applicant must:

1. Be a resident of Alachua County
2. Be a student at the 12th grade level
3. Be in good academic standing.



To learn more about the program and to apply online, go to [www.alachuaaudubon.org/scholarship/](http://www.alachuaaudubon.org/scholarship/). The deadline to apply is March 31, 2021. Scholarships will be awarded in April 2021.

### Short, Cool and Fun to Watch!

Jason Ward has been an avid birdwatcher since he was a kid growing up in the Bronx, where he spotted a peregrine falcon eating a pigeon on a ledge outside his bedroom window. Join him as he travels around the United States meeting birders and bird enthusiasts of all kinds on [Birds of North America](#). There are 24 short (all under 10 minutes) fun and funny episodes on YouTube [here](#). For a quick introduction, watch [Meet the Birds](#) (under 2 minutes).

### Live Broadcast – Weekly Alachua County Birding Updates

Local birder extraordinaire Tim Hardin is posting live weekly birding broadcasts on Thursdays at 6:30 PM on the [AAS Facebook page](#) at [www.facebook.com/AlachuaAudubon](http://www.facebook.com/AlachuaAudubon). Tune in then or watch later for news and notes on local birding highlights, events, occurrences, opportunities, and more!

### Sweetwater Wetlands Park Updates

Arguably Gainesville's favorite birding spot, [Sweetwater Wetlands Park](#) is open from 7 a.m. to sunset daily, including holidays. Daylight Savings Time ends November 1<sup>st</sup> so the park will close at an earlier hour. Park Admission Fees: \$5 per car, \$2 per person (bicyclists, pedestrians, buses). Annual Passes: \$78/year. Military discounts are available for those who qualify. Call 352-334-5067 for more information.

There are now several convenient park admission payment options:

1. Insert cash into the payment box located at the entrance of the parking lot.
2. Use [Passport Parking](#) app on a smart phone; select 32601 as the main lot zone number.
3. Online payment at [ppprk.com/park](http://ppprk.com/park). The patron will need to verify information by text message or phone call. Select 32601 as the main lot zone number. The fee will cover the entire day.
4. Purchase an annual pass by calling 352-334-5067 (Mon.-Fri. 8 a.m.-5 p.m.)

**Suspect a crime against Florida's birds, fish, wildlife or natural resources? See an injured animal? Report incidents to FWC's [Wildlife Alert Reward Program](#) online or call 888-404-3922. From your cell phone call \*FWC or #FWC, or send a message to [Tip@MyFWC.com](mailto:Tip@MyFWC.com). Learn more at [MyFWC/contact/wildlife-alert](#).**

## The Impact of Cat Predation on Birds

Most of us are aware of the damage domestic cats inflict on native wildlife, birds, ecosystems, and nature's balance. But when the ships first brought domestic cats to North America, this was neither understood nor considered. Cats were a crucial part of the cargo for one reason: cats had proven invaluable in controlling rats drawn to the food stores. With time, cats spread across the continent, multiplying rapidly and moving into most ecosystems. There are now roughly 90 million owned cats and 80 million feral cats in the U.S. It's estimated that there are more than 150,000 feral cats living in Miami Beach alone!

The Smithsonian, National Audubon, the American Bird Conservancy, and others have calculated that feral and outside cats kill approximately 2.4 billion birds every year, making predation by domestic cats the number one direct, human-caused threat to birds in the United States and Canada.

In recent years, several countries have implemented practices to decrease or eliminate introduced predators such as rats and cats. In 2015 Australia began a program to eliminate 2 million feral cats by 2020 out of grave concern for the nation's indigenous wildlife, with most Aussies supporting it.

The popular practice called TNVR (Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-Return) not only is ineffective but does not address the issue of



*This tipped-eared cat with a dead female Black-throated Blue Warbler, a migrating species, was taken on October 5th in Spanish River Park in Boca Raton. This park is part of the Florida Birding Trail and is a hotspot for migrants. Photo by Chuck Hignite of Everglades Audubon*



*Even though multiple protective actions were taken, including guarding the colony until 5:00 a.m. many nights, the cats could not be completely stopped. This Least Tern chick, along with 30 others, was killed by well-fed, neutered and released feral cats. Photo by David Bates, one of many photographers who visited the colony every day.*

and migratory birds are acceptable or if we should rethink and change them. The Alachua Audubon Society promotes and advocates for keeping all cats indoors.

bird deaths as it is the cats' feeding habits, not their breeding habits, that endanger birds and wildlife. In 2018, the Alachua County Commission formally adopted an ordinance regarding feral and free-roaming cats. They are trapped, sterilized, vaccinated, their left ears are clipped, and they are "returned to the field."

This summer neutered feral cats invaded the only beach-nesting Least Tern colony along Florida's southeast coast and killed over thirty chicks in less than two weeks, despite all efforts to stop them. Least Terns, a state-listed threatened species, have decreased by 88% over the past 40 years, while feral cat numbers have skyrocketed.

We need to decide if policies and practices that directly result in the killing of native species

By Ann Wiley



## Hummer Update # 1 2020

Fellow Hummer Lovers

Ruby-throated migration has slowed significantly now except along the Gulf Coast where some hosts are still feeding large numbers. Most of those Ruby-throated hummers will soon be gone, and we can turn our attention to the start of our winter banding season.

Our winter season got a great start during the middle of the summer. July 27 a lady in Colorado Springs, CO noticed an adult male Rufous with a band. She took enough pictures to get the complete band number to find out I banded that bird January 6, 2019 as a juvenile male at the home of Paula and Ralph Wright in Atmore, AL. That bird had left its breeding grounds in the Pacific Northwest and was migrating south.

Some of our previously banded hummers have already returned to their winter homes. Steve Backes in Valrico, FL is happy and relieved to have his male Rufous back for the eighth winter, and a female Rufous is also back for the eighth winter south of Birmingham, AL. Joe Misiaszek in Lakeland, FL has a couple of male Ruby-throated hummers back. He has identified one as back for the third winter and is taking pictures to identify the other one.

We are getting more early reports of western hummers than we have gotten for several years. Most Rufous have been one-day wonders that did not stick around for banding, but Fred Dietrich has banded two Rufous and a Buff-bellied in the Tallahassee area. I banded my first Rufous September 26 in Birmingham, AL. October 5, Duane Miller in Fairhope sent me a picture of a juvenile male Broad-billed at his feeder. Unfortunately, that bird was only seen once, but I did go to the coast the next day to band a Rufous for Cynthia Walker in Foley, AL and a Rufous for Lucy and Bob Duncan in Gulf Breeze, FL. I hope to get new reports for a trip to the coast next week.

Please look carefully at hummers coming to your feeders now. If the bird has rufous color on its flanks and in the tail, you may have a Rufous. Try to get a picture if possible, and I may be able to identify your bird. Ruby-throated hummers count as winter birds after November 15, so please let me know [[FHound@aol.com](mailto:FHound@aol.com) or (334) 868-9658] about any hummer coming to your feeder between November 15 and March 1. One of us will be glad to come to your home to identify and band your special winter visitor.

I hope to see you soon with a hummer.

Fred Bassett

*Fred Bassett is a certified master bird bander who has worked with birds for over twenty years. Fred has banded more than 35,000 hummingbirds in more than 1,000 locations from Miami, Florida to Haines, Alaska. During the winter he documents western hummingbirds wintering in south Alabama and Florida. Over the last fifteen winters he has captured more than 2,000 hummingbirds of ten different species in this area.*

*Editor's note: If you would like to receive occasional Hummer Updates from Hummingbird Research, Inc., a non-profit organization, please send an email to Ron Robinson at [gonebirden@cox.net](mailto:gonebirden@cox.net).*



### College Student?

Check out the GREBES—the University of Florida Audubon Campus Chapter focused on teaching college students about the importance and beauty of the avian world. UF and Santa Fe students are eligible to join. Loaner binoculars are available. For questions, please email [grebeuf@gmail.com](mailto:grebeuf@gmail.com) or visit us on Facebook: [@ufgrebegarden](https://www.facebook.com/ufgrebegarden)

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*The Crane*  
November – December 2020

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**To join National Audubon, please go to [AlachuaAudubon.org/Membership](http://AlachuaAudubon.org/Membership) where you will be directed to their membership page.**

*Alachua Audubon is a 501(c)3 organization.*

**Audubon Membership Explained**

**To join Audubon at the local level**, please visit the AAS website where you may use PayPal to pay by credit card. You may also complete the membership form to the left, or print a form at [AlachuaAudubon.org/Membership](http://AlachuaAudubon.org/Membership). Choose the membership level that is appropriate for you. Mail the completed form with your check, payable to **Alachua Audubon Society**, to the address provided.

**To join Audubon at the National level**, go to [AlachuaAudubon.org/Membership](http://AlachuaAudubon.org/Membership) where you will be directed to the NAS membership page. Your introductory membership will be credited to our local chapter and you will become an annual member of the **National Audubon Society**, **Audubon Florida** and **Alachua Audubon**, with one-year subscriptions to **National Audubon** magazine, **Audubon Florida Naturalist** magazine, and Alachua Audubon's bi-monthly newsletter, *The Crane*.

Please send any questions to [AlachuaAudubonMembership@gmail.com](mailto:AlachuaAudubonMembership@gmail.com)