



The Crane

Volume 62 Number 3 Jan – Feb 2021

2020 John Hintermister – Gainesville Christmas Bird Count Summary

Many birders are people of measures: life lists, county lists, rarest bird, etc. We are prone to measure the success of our Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs) by number of species seen, number of participants, number of rare birds, high counts of particular species, or overall number of birds. The standards by which we measure these milestones may be previous counts or comparable counts across the state or even the continent. By all measures, the John Hintermister – Gainesville CBC, with its 50+ years of history, has set some mighty high standards. In the past few years, this CBC has led the state of Florida in species seen (2018), has been the high inland count in the US (2018 and 2019), and has eclipsed all other US counts in high counts of species (2018). In 2018, we set a highwater mark of 175 species seen.

As we approached the 2020 CBC on December 20th, weather forecasts went from potentially pesky (chance of rain 30%) to downright troubling the night before (80% rain, possible strong winds, early morning fog). This being 2020, with its myriad of hardship and suffering, I half expected the worst, and made sure I had plenty of foul weather gear for our nautical excursions on Newnan's Lake. We were already dealing with COVID-19 restrictions like social distancing, mask wearing, no car-pooling, and a compilation held on Zoom. Despite this year's run of bad luck, a calm cool morning gave way to a mostly pleasant day, mixed with a few showers here and there. Fog and wind were negligible, and I think we all breathed a sigh of relief that we got a fine day of birding. That, in itself, was reason to measure this year's count as a smashing success.

But, of course, we all still want to see the numbers so here you go. Overall, we made it to 162 species (+ a non-countable Whooping Crane), tied for the fourth highest ever (with 2012 and 2015). Given the weather and COVID restrictions, this is a fantastic number.



Andy Kratter starting the CBC on the water at sunrise.
Photo by Tedd Greenwald.

Most amazingly, given these difficulties, we set all time high counts for 26 species, and tied the high count for two additional species. Especially noteworthy, we smashed our previous high counts by over 50% for Blue-winged teal (3128, old mark 1416), Ring-necked Duck (8002, old mark 3481), Purple Gallinule (19, old mark 10), Yellow-throated Warbler (113, old mark 66), and Baltimore Oriole (120, old mark 72).

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2020 John Hintermister – Gainesville
Christmas Bird Count Summary

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The teal and duck numbers were boosted greatly by airboats on the prairie. High counts were recorded for four woodpecker species (Red-bellied, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Downy, Pileated) and three wren species (House, Sedge, Carolina). The grand total of about 77,500 individual birds was the highest number ever found on this count, and about 15,000 higher than most recent counts. Aside from the two ducks above, species with more than 2000 individuals were Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (7960), Sandhill Crane (7875), American Coot (2320), American Robin (4004), Tree Swallow (2021), Red-winged Blackbird (8296), Common Grackle (2502) and Boat tailed Grackle (2137).

Rare species provide the highlight reel of our count compilation. These were somewhat less prevalent this year (note to self: that is why they are rare!) but included: 20 Purple Finches were scattered across five of the 11 count sectors; 89 Snail Kites were at three sectors (Prairie Basin, Paynes Prairie State Park, west Prairie); two Rufous Hummingbirds were along the prairie rim and in NW Gainesville; the Paynes Prairie Basin also had 2 Roseate Spoonbills, 5 Least Bitterns, a Gray-Headed Swamphen, and a Least Flycatcher; the Prairie rim had its now yearly Ash-throated Flycatcher; the west Prairie had a Western Tanager visiting a feeder; the Kanapaha Prairie had a Nashville Warbler and its usual White-winged Doves; the UF campus area had a Western Kingbird (only fourth ever on our count); Morningside Nature Center had 3 Bachman's Sparrows; and a Brown Pelican plopped next to our boat on Newnan's Lake for only our third CBC record. On the day after the count, boat captain Tedd Greenwald sent me a photo he took of a warbler from count day – a beautiful Tennessee Warbler to add to the total. Great birds, a great day.

The John Hintermister – Gainesville CBC is administered by Alachua Audubon Society. Bob Carroll is co-compiler. Many thanks to all the participants and especially the eleven area captains (Debbie Segal, Bubba Scales, Craig Faulhaber, Helen Warren and Greg McDermott, Steve Hofstetter, Dan Pearson, Rex Rowan, Scott Robinson, Mike Meisenburg, Barbara Shea). Looking forward to a normal CBC in 2021 (Sunday December 19th)!

SPECIES LIST (rare birds in **bold-face**, high counts in **bold-face**, with previous high given):

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck **7960** (old high 6872 in 2019), Muscovy Duck 267, Wood Duck 568, Gadwall 41, American Wigeon 62, Mallard 20, Mottled Duck 274, Blue-winged Teal **3128** (old high 1416 in 1984), Northern Shoveler 52, Northern Pintail 10, Green-winged Teal 339, Redhead 1, Ring-necked Duck 8002 (old high 3431 in 2018), Lesser Scaup 45, Bufflehead 12, Hooded Merganser 237, Ruddy Duck 91, Northern Bobwhite 10, Wild Turkey 75, Pied-billed Grebe 135, Horned Grebe 1, Rock Pigeon 17, Eurasian Collared Dove 1, Common Ground

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Dove 12, Mourning Dove 556, **White Winged Dove 4**, Whip-Poor-Will 4, Ruby-throated Hummingbird 1, **Selasphorus sp. 1**, **Rufous Hummingbird 2**, King Rail 6, Virginia Rail 20, Sora 67, Purple Gallinule 19 (old high 10 in 2018), **Gray-headed Swamphen 1**, Common Gallinule 783, American Coot 2320, Limpkin 144, Sandhill Crane 7875, Whooping Crane 1, Killdeer 308, Least Sandpiper 44, Wilson's Snipe 197, Long-billed Dowitcher 25, American Woodcock 7, Spotted Sandpiper 2, Greater Yellowlegs 69, Lesser Yellowlegs **56** (tied old high in 1985), Bonaparte's Gull 1, Laughing Gull 8, Ring-billed Gull 124, Forster's Tern 25, Common Loon 2, Wood Stork 154, Double-crested Cormorant 1003, Anhinga 434, **Brown Pelican 1**, American White Pelican 24, American Bittern 17, **Least Bittern 5**, Great Blue Heron 261, Great Egret 231, Snowy Egret 145, Little Blue Heron 323, Tricolored Heron 151, Cattle Egret 371, Green Heron 42, Black-crowned Night-Heron 126, White Ibis 1154, Glossy Ibis **901** (old high 750 in 1999), **Roseate Spoonbill 2**, Black Vulture 563, Turkey Vulture 809, Osprey **33** (old high 25 in 2019), Bald Eagle 110, **Snail Kite 89**, Northern Harrier 51, Sharp-shinned Hawk 12, Cooper's Hawk 10, Accipiter sp. 1, Red-shouldered Hawk 226, Red-tailed Hawk 42, Barn Owl 5, Eastern Screech-Owl 18, Great Horned Owl **56** (old high 55 in 2012), Barred Owl **75** (old high 67 in 2019), Belted Kingfisher 58, Red-headed Woodpecker 28, Red-bellied Woodpecker **548** (old high 435 in 2008), Yellow-bellied Sapsucker **136** (old high 115 in 2018), Downy Woodpecker **251** (old high 230 in 2008), Northern Flicker 55, Pileated Woodpecker **206** (old high 195 in 2019), American Kestrel 50, Merlin **6** (old high 5 2013), Eastern Phoebe 553, **Least Flycatcher 1**, **Western Kingbird 1**, **Ash-throated Flycatcher 1**, Loggerhead Shrike 18, White-eyed Vireo 102, Blue-headed Vireo 100, Blue Jay 381, American Crow **1037** (old high 813 in 2017), Fish Crow 78, Crow sp. 41, Tree Swallow 2021, Carolina Chickadee **402** (old high 379 in 2017), Tufted Titmouse **503** (old high 450 in 2018), Brown-headed Nuthatch 5, House Wren **327** (old high 325 in 2019), Sedge Wren **119** (old high 101 in 2016), Marsh Wren 39, Carolina Wren **636** (old high 521 in 2019), Blue-gray Gnatcatcher 658, Ruby-crowned Kinglet 437, Eastern Bluebird 344, Hermit



Henslow's Sparrow. Photo by Chris Burney.

Thrush 60, American Robin 4004, Gray Catbird 238, Brown Thrasher 26, Northern Mockingbird 187, European Starling 22, Cedar Waxwing 613, House Sparrow 17, American Pipit 19, House Finch 102, **Purple Finch 20**, American Goldfinch 449, Ovenbird 10, Northern Waterthrush 2, Black-and-White Warbler 137, Orange-crowned Warbler 162, **Nashville Warbler 1**, **Tennessee Warbler 1**, Common Yellowthroat **314** (old high 292 in 2012), American Redstart 1, Northern Parula **7** (tied old high in 2015), Palm Warbler 1410, Pine Warbler **393** (old high 310 in 1995), Yellow-rumped Warbler 1694, Yellow-throated Warbler **113** (old high 66 in 2019), Prairie Warbler 7, Eastern Towhee 104, **Bachman's Sparrow 3**, Field Sparrow 6, Chipping Sparrow 1193, Vesper Sparrow 10, Savannah Sparrow 232, Grasshopper Sparrow 5, Henslow's Sparrow 2, Song Sparrow 35, Swamp Sparrow 405, White-throated Sparrow 14, Summer Tanager **10** (old high 5 in 2019), **Western Tanager 1**, Northern Cardinal **926** (old high 910 in 2010), Indigo Bunting 1, Painted Bunting 19, Red-winged Blackbird 8296, Eastern Meadowlark 152, Rusty Blackbird **155** (old high 120 in 2010), Common Grackle 2502, Boat-tailed Grackle 2137, Brown-headed Cowbird 586, Baltimore Oriole **120** (old high 72 in 2006). Total individuals **77542** (old high 72,237 in 1977).

By Andy Kratter

Note: See the [2019 Gainesville CBC Results Set Records](#) article on [page 8](#).

Winter Bird Congregations

One of the exciting aspects of birding the Christmas Bird Counts is discovering large congregations of wintering birds. These avian convergences often represent nocturnal roost sites or diurnal feeding spots. And while many of these feathered crowds are comprised of similar abundant species, rarities can often be discovered commingling with their more common relatives.

My husband and I birded several CBCs this season and, with the help of other birders, we were able to resurvey several known nocturnal bird roosts as well as stumble upon other unexpected flocks of birds. In this newsletter are panoramic, bird's-eye view articles of the Gainesville, Melrose, and Ichetucknee/Santa Fe/O'Leno CBCs. This article delves into some of the large bird patterns that contributed to the overall results of those North Florida CBCs.

The Gainesville CBC annually reports large numbers of water birds thanks to the extensive and bird-rich Paynes Prairie wetland basin. Until three years ago, CBCers searched the basin from stationary vantage points at the La Chua, Bolens Bluff, and Visitor Center observation towers for glimpses of distant birds. Fast moving flocks of ducks were identified by only the most skilled birders who could assign a name to far-off flapping silhouettes. Several years ago, when water levels on the prairie dramatically transformed from record lows to record highs, the prairie basin became easily accessible by boat. And with permission from state park managers, the Gainesville CBC was permitted to survey the basin with airboats. This year marked the fourth year of airboat surveys on Paynes Prairie and consisted of three drivers and seven observers.

Flocks of a few dozen Black-bellied Whistling Ducks can frequently be seen most days flying low over Paynes Prairie, dropping and disappearing into the marsh, circling, repositioning, and disappearing again. However, for me, the abundance of this species could not be comprehended until far-reaching flocks flushed near the still-flooded La Chua observation platform after the airboats launched. The first flock extended from east to west and we conservatively estimated 1,500 whistlers. As the boat inched forward, more of these nocturnal ducks flushed from their diurnal roost. Of the 7,960 Black-bellied Whistling Ducks reported on the 2020 Gainesville CBC, over 6,000 were tallied from Paynes Prairie east of US 441.

Like the Black-bellies, Ring-necked Ducks challenged our ability to assign numbers to large flocks of flying ducks. But unlike the large whistlers that lifted close to the boats and circled nearby, the agile flying Ring-necks appeared as distant clouds of black dots, with each cloud winging in different directions.

Andy Kratter points out in his article that this year's Gainesville CBC overtook the high count record for Blue-winged Teal (3,128 new count total, 1,416 previous high count, 2,605 from airboats) and Ring-necked Ducks (8,002 new count total, 3,481 previous high count, 7,693 from airboats), and as noted, the numbers tallied from the two airboats east of US 441 exceeded both of those species' previous high count. As Jonathan Mays penned in an email, "How awesome to behold the 'ducknados' we all witnessed."

Other water birds noted in large concentrations on the prairie during the air boat surveys were Wood Ducks, Mottled Ducks, Green-winged Teal, Common Gallinules, American Coots, Limpkins, White Ibis, and Glossy Ibis. Mottled Ducks (194 from airboats, 274 count total) and Glossy Ibis (853 from airboats, 901 count total) seemed much more abundant on the prairie basin as compared to previous airboat surveys.

Blackbird species roost in wetlands during the winter in mind-boggling numbers and this phenomenon can be viewed each morning and evening at Sweetwater Wetlands Park. Strolling the Sweetwater berms during late afternoon and early evening and you will likely glimpse a continuous trickle of Red-wings, grackles, and cowbirds coasting over the wetlands, and then diving and disappearing into the wetland plants. It is hard to fathom the number of incoming birds when the evening procession is comprised of small flocks and stretches over a couple of hours during late afternoon. But just after sunrise, masses of blackbirds erupt from the wetlands and wing to the horizon to their many diurnal feeding spots. The difficulty of identifying and tallying these blackbird eruptions is challenging at best, with low light conditions, mixed species flocks, and multiple rising flocks occurring simultaneously. Two teams consisting of seven total bird counters were stationed at

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Winter Bird Congregations

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Sweetwater and ready for the anticipated explosion of blackbirds, which (conservatively as several flocks escaped our radar) yielded almost 4,000 Red-wings, 750 Boat-tailed Grackles, 440 Brown-headed Cowbirds, and 370 Common Grackles, all occurring within about 30 minutes. A similar blackbird roost occupies the Lake City Treatment Wetlands and we attempt to quantify that large concentration of blackbirds annually during the Lake City CBC.

Another impressively large winter roost can be witnessed each winter evening at Lake Santa Fe, when thousands of Ring-billed Gulls seemingly float in from the north and settle on the deep open water. Over the years, the numbers have ranged from a few thousand to over 8,000 gulls by sunset and this year, during the Melrose CBC, we estimated 4,000 Ring-bills. Mixed in with the mass of Ring-bills are scatterings of Bonaparte's, Laughing, Herring, and this year, a Lesser Black-backed. The hordes of Ring-bills and other gull species are thought to concentrate at landfills and other gull-attractants during the day and then wing south to Lake Santa Fe for their collective evening roost. Bonaparte's may be the exception as they can be observed throughout the day at Lake Santa Fe dipping down to the water to feed.

Large gatherings of other water birds congregate on Lake Santa Fe, most notably Ruddy Ducks, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Horned Grebes, Common Loons, and Double-crested Cormorants. While we scrutinized a flock of 30 or so diving and actively feeding Common Loons, Andy Kratter picked out a smaller version, a rare Pacific Loon.

Anyone participating in a North Florida CBC likely added American Robin to their checklist. At the Melrose CBC, flocks of 20 to 50 or so robins were seen continuously throughout the morning flapping to their feeding zones, and again throughout the afternoon returning to evening roosts. Our small CBC group tallied 1,461 American Robins during the mostly morning survey, which accounted for a small percentage of the 4,100 robins detected on the Melrose CBC.

Turkey Vultures are especially abundant on the CBCs and represent a massive influx of wintering TVs that presumably commingle with Florida's year-rounders. Kettles of vultures – Turkey and Black alike – are frequently observed rising once the mid-morning thermals begin and then streaming with the air currents. Several years ago during the Ichetucknee/Santa Fe/O'Leno CBC, my husband and I stood mesmerized, trying to count, as a continuous procession of over 1,000 Turkey Vultures streamed silently southward for as far as we could see for well over a half hour.

As the sun inched lower towards the horizon, we stood on a boardwalk in the middle of a cypress swamp searching for our final birds for our Lake City CBC checklist. We had just added two Wood Ducks, a Green Heron, and a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. "Do you hear that?" my husband beckoned. I cupped my ears and the harsh screeching became audible. "Common Grackles," he added. Their raucous calls grew louder and we caught glimpses as their black forms advanced closer. We began counting as the flock leapfrogged from cypress to red maples to black gums, passing in front of us but remaining largely concealed by the swamp canopy. Our count of 220 Common Grackles likely underestimated that boisterous flock, but ended that count day with a special glimpse into the uniqueness of nature.

The expected and unexpected are part of the excitement of the annual CBCs. For us, we have come to anticipate and even plan for the large gatherings of blackbirds that erupt at dawn from Sweetwater and the Lake City Wetlands, the massive afternoon influx of gulls at Lake Santa Fe, and the mind-boggling number of ducks flushing from Paynes Prairie. We are comforted to know that these intriguing patterns of nature continue to play out each year, and honored that we can witness and document these avian phenomena during the CBCs.

By Debbie Segal

Ichetucknee / Santa Fe / O'Leno (FLIS) Christmas Bird Count

The Ichetucknee/Santa Fe/O'Leno Christmas Bird Count (FLIS CBC) held its 12th annual event on Tuesday, December 22nd, 2020. This year's 15-mile wide circle, centered near the town of Fort White, involved 32 participants traveling by car, foot, and canoe/kayak. Many of the participants are affiliated with the Four Rivers Audubon, Alachua Audubon, Florida Park Service, and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. The CBC welcomed 3 new participants who enjoyed their socially-distanced day with our dedicated birders who led us to a successful count.

The FLIS CBC covers many natural and state-managed lands including Ichetucknee Springs State Park, O'Leno State Park, River Rise Preserve State Park, Gilchrist Blue Springs State Park, Fort White Wildlife and Environmental Area, multiple Suwannee River Water Management District properties, the lower Santa Fe River, the entire Ichetucknee River, and private lands of varying uses (commercial, residential, agricultural, and silvicultural). Three of the five teams concentrated their efforts on public lands while the other two teams focused on the remaining rivers, uplands, private lands, and neighborhoods. Although stories of the day couldn't be swapped at our traditional Count-Up Supper, we were all excited to hear through the grapevine of each other's success.

The day started cool and then became quite comfortable with clear skies. Temperatures ranged between 39° F and 66° F with a calm NW to N wind. Both rivers were experiencing moderate river levels and normal flow.

The FLIS CBC recorded 7,148 birds comprising 98 species, plus 1 count week species. These observations included 12 high records, including three tied records, and four additional uncommon species. High counts were observed for Hooded Merganser (138), Anhinga (27), Cattle Egret (256), Black-crowned Night-heron (2 / tied 2017 and 2018), Red-shouldered Hawk (76), Eastern Whip-poor-will (2), Tree Swallow (20), Brown-headed Nuthatch (12), Winter Wren (3), Black-throated Green Warbler (1 / tied- 2013, 2014, 2019), Prairie Warbler (1 / tied- 2012 and 2018) and Purple Finch (35) which has only been seen one other time on the count date in 2010. Although not records, the group was excited to observe its uncommon species of Greater Yellowlegs (3), American Bittern (1), American Woodcock (1) and Pine Siskin (2). Of the 60 species that have been commonly recorded on the FLIS CBC, the Eastern Meadowlark continues to be notably absent for four straight years.

Many thanks to the Team Leaders and birders who continue to make the FLIS CBC a success! Mark your calendars for Tuesday, December 21st, 2021 – I hope we'll get to visit together at a Count-Up Supper!!

By Ginger Morgan, FLIS Compiler

Got Purple Finches?

I had heard that this might be a big year for irruptions so the power of suggestion was pretty strong when early on December 17th I noticed a solitary reddish bird sitting quietly on one of my feeders. I rushed for the binoculars and camera. House finch? Never had one of those before. I grabbed the Sibley's. Another bird and then another, the streaky kind. Clicked a few photos before I started looking closely at field marks. Raspberry? Maybe. But it was the facial pattern on the streaky ones that gave it away. I sent a few photos to my circle of birding friends. My excitement grew as I waited for their responses and a few more birds joined the growing flock. ID confirmed, PURPLE FINCH – first one ever for me!

It has been over two weeks now. The flock has grown to well over 60 and I am filling the feeders twice a day. Black oil sunflower seems to do the trick. I also have a flock of over 90 Chipping Sparrows feasting on millet. And my "regulars" sneak in between feeding frenzies. Not sure how long the Purple Finches will stay but things sure will seem quiet when they move on. I couldn't have asked for a better Christmas present.



Purple Finches on the author's feeder in Columbia County, FL. Photo by the author.

By Jacqui Sulek

Cedar Key CBC 2020

The weather was simply perfect: highs in the low 70s, a cloudless sky, and still water made for pleasant and painless excursions by both land and sea in an effort to ensure that the 49th annual Cedar Key Christmas Bird Count went on without a hitch. A census of every single bird seen or heard in the 177 square-mile zone that incorporates the Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge, Cedar Key Scrub State Reserve, the City of Cedar Key, and the southernmost portion of the Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge was generated over a 24-hour period on December 30th, 2020. The 24,642 birds observed, which constituted individuals from 129 different species, was a satisfying culmination to an otherwise less than agreeable year.

This Christmas Bird Count, along with approximately 2,600 other counts across North America, is organized by the National Audubon Society in an effort to generate data on bird populations that can inform research on species' demographic health and inform future conservation efforts. In addition, these counts are ideal ways for members of the public to gain admission into the realm of citizen science and take part in a long-term project investigating bird populations in their city or region.

This year's count held a number of notable highlights with record-high counts for Semipalmated Plover (557) and American Oystercatcher (1,267). Cedar Key is home to the largest wintering population of American Oystercatchers in Florida, and this high count reflects the ongoing importance of the area's high-tide sandbars and oyster reefs to the species' wintering habitat needs. In addition, the joint venture between the University of Florida and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission in restoring degraded offshore oyster reef habitat in the area may already be increasing stability and enhancing the resilience of American Oystercatcher roosting sites from the threat of sea-level rise and extreme weather events.

Two Reddish Egrets and three Long-billed Curlews were tallied on the count this year. The Reddish Egret is a charismatic species that is North America's rarest and least-studied heron, and the Long-billed Curlews that winter in Florida are part of a relict number of the last remaining birds of the eastern population of the species. The Reddish Egret was nearly extirpated from the United States in the nineteenth century as hunters pursued them and all other wading birds for the millinery trade which sought out wading bird breeding plume feathers for the fashion industry. Long-billed curlew were subjected to increased hunting throughout the nineteenth century as expansionist endeavors moved from east to west across the continent. Several pairs of Reddish Egrets are nesting on Snake Key, one of the four main islands that comprise the Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge, marking the species' recolonization of the area. Eastern Long-billed Curlews continue to make the journey to Cedar Key from their breeding grounds in the Rocky Mountain states every winter.

One of the more memorable events of the day was when my team and I were observing a large flock of shorebirds loafing on a sand bar. We scanned the flock from our vessel, separating the Western Sandpipers from the Red Knots and the Short-billed Dowitchers from the Dunlin. Suddenly, a panic-stricken Semipalmated Plover whizzes by us. It's crying out in alarm and moving at a pace I've never seen one fly...and with good reason. A Peregrine Falcon is hot on its tail. The commotion causes the entire flock we were observing to flush, and the air is soon filled with up to a thousand shorebirds all trying to evade one of the most masterful avian predators in existence.

By Jonathan Varol



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 or visit us on Facebook: [@ufgrebeparden](https://www.facebook.com/ufgrebeparden)

2020 Melrose Christmas Bird Count: Success

On December 17, 2020, 54 participants from Santa Fe Audubon, Alachua Audubon and other volunteers drove, boated and walked to survey all the birds that could be seen and heard for the 31st annual Melrose Christmas Bird Count (CBC). The Melrose CBC covers a 15-mile-diameter circle centered at the intersection of SR 219 and SR 100 that encompasses parts of Clay, Putnam, Alachua, and Bradford Counties. This dedicated effort resulted in locating 126 species of birds. Due to COVID-19, teams often had to caravan in different cars, or faced restrictions on whether volunteers were even allowed on some private properties.

A total of 126 species beats the old record of 123 (set last year) and is attributed increasing skill levels of the volunteers and more access to more parts of the area in the circle. Sallie Carlock, President of Santa Fe Audubon, commented “We are really pleased at the permission extended to us by so many private landowners – residential, commercial and industrial. We are grateful to these generous landowners who welcomed volunteers on their property to count.

Many bird-rich natural areas occur in this circle and include Lake Santa Fe, Santa Fe Swamp, Gold Head Branch State Park, the Ordway-Swisher Preserve, plus numerous other lakes, forests, and agricultural lands.

The species with the most individuals counted were Red-winged Blackbirds with 4350 individual birds counted, American Robins with 4,100 birds and Ring-bill Gulls with 4000 birds. Unusual for the count were the Lesser Black-backed Gull, Henslow’s Sparrow, Pacific Loon and Rusty Blackbirds. Other rarities were two hummingbirds which were seen after count day and cannot be included in the total species count.

28,839 individual birds were counted, up from the prior record of 16,908 set in 2017. While hawks do not make up a large part of the total count, the numbers of species and individual hawks were up. The numbers of ducks were also up, but the sparrow count was down.

Begun 120 years ago in New York City’s Central Park, Christmas Bird Counts provide important insight into the health of the environment. Since birds are the most visible of our wildlife and the easiest to survey, bird survey data provide an indication of the overall health of the less visible wildlife species. An abundant and diverse avian community can reflect healthy ecological habitats, while declining bird populations can signify disturbing trends in our land development patterns and their detrimental effects to natural areas. Changes in the range of some bird species have implications in assessing results of climate change. National Audubon has identified 314 species of birds in the U.S. that will be affected by climate change.

Results from the Melrose CBC (begun in 1990) combined with data from hundreds of other CBC surveys throughout the world allow ornithologists to assess bird trends on a national and international scale. If you would like to see the complete list of birds seen on the Melrose CBC, please request by email to lberkelman@windstream.net.

By Laura Berkelman

A Note on Ruby-crowned Kinglets

Female Ruby-crowns lay the largest clutch relative to size of any North American songbird, packing the nest with nine to 10 eggs, but sometimes as many as 12! This species raises a single brood each year — understandable given this large clutch size. This unusual productivity offsets a high rate of winter mortality, particularly during severe and prolonged cold weather. Source: American Bird Conservancy website. Photo by Alan Shapiro.





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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.alachuaudubon.org/scholarship/. The deadline to apply is March 31, 2021. Scholarships will be awarded in April 2021.

2019 John Hintermister – Gainesville CBC Results Set Records

National Audubon just released the results from the CBCs last winter (2019-20). With 170 species, the John Hintermister – Gainesville CBC was the highest in Florida and tied for 26th highest in the US, but we were the highest **inland** count in the nation. Our **number of participants** (133) was about 50th highest. We were **third** in the nation for numbers of national high count species, with 16. Kendall, Florida (south Miami) had 20, and Midway Atoll (Hawaii) had 18. Two of our high count species in 2019-20 were **all-time** national high counts! The national highs for our count: (bold are all-time high counts):

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck 6875, **Snail Kite 104**, Red-shouldered Hawk 229, Limpkin 510, Barred Owl 67, Vaux's Swift 1 (tied), **Pileated Woodpecker 195**, Brown-crested Flycatcher 1 (tied), White-eyed Vireo 104, Blue-headed Vireo 114, House Wren 325, Wood Thrush 1 (tied), Black-and-white Warbler 131, Palm Warbler 1200, Yellow-throated Warbler 66, Baltimore Oriole 59.

By Andy Kratter



*Female Pileated Woodpeckers at Bolen Bluff.
Photo by Mitch Walters.*

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. Learn more at [MyFWC/contact/wildlife-alert](#).

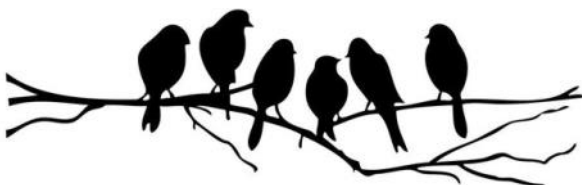
Bird Feeders Available

Alachua Audubon recently received a donation of 36 bird feeders from AAS member Jeanne Kaufman. Eighteen of these feeders were purchased with a donation from a family member whose loved one passed away at Haven Hospice. The feeders were installed at Haven and maintained by Jeanne and some helpers for five years with Alachua Audubon assisting with the cost of the seed to keep the feeders filled. Jeanne purchased additional feeders to allow those in use to be taken down and cleaned while not depriving the residents of active feeders. Over those years Jeanne received much feedback from staff and family members that the sight of birds at the feeders outside the resident rooms was a great joy and comfort. When a new administration took over at Haven, Jeanne was asked to remove the feeders. She has donated these feeders to AAS and we would like to distribute them to schools, nursing homes, parks or other non-profit organizations where they might benefit our community. Please contact Anne Casella at 352-256-5960 or annecasella@gmail.com for more information.



Past AAS Programs Available Online

Miss one of the AAS evening programs? Watch them online from the [Programs](#) page of our website at www.alachuaudubon.org/programs/ “Bird Bling: How Banding Birds Aids Conservation” presented by Adam DiNuovo “Building Birding Skills”, presented by Adam Kent “A Fight Against Time”, about the critically endangered Nordmann’s Greenshank by Philipp Maleko “A New Wetland in Gainesville!” presented by Gainesville Regional Utilities.



Don't Miss Our Evening Programs!

January 21, 2021, 7:00 p.m. The 2020 Christmas Bird Count in Alachua County

Join us on [zoom](#) to hear a report on the 2020 Christmas Bird Count in Alachua County. Andrew Kratter will discuss the historical significance and importance of doing a yearly count. He will also discuss the most recent count and trends seen. In December the count up was done by computer on zoom due to the pandemic. What have we learned this year?

February 15, 2021, 7:00 p.m. Conservation Ecology of Short-tailed Hawks, Swallow-tailed Kites, and Snail Kites

Join us on [zoom](#) to hear Conservation Ecology of Short-tailed Hawks, Swallow-tailed Kites, and Snail Kites. Gina Kent of the Avian Research and Conservation Institute (ARCI) will share the latest research on tracking and migration and update listeners on monitoring opportunities for three magnificent Florida raptors. She will report on GPS-tracked Snail Kites from Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park. This Snail Kite research was made possible with support from Alachua Audubon and St. Pete Audubon.

March 16, 2021, 7:00 p.m. Breaking New Ground with Florida Scrub-Jay Translocations

Join us on [zoom](#) to hear Breaking New Ground with Florida Scrub-Jay Translocations. Dr. Karl Miller of FWC’s Fish and Wildlife Research Institute will share the latest findings from his translocation research on Florida Scrub-Jays. Karl and his team are translocating jays from Ocala National Forest to conservation lands in north and south Florida to achieve multiple objectives. New techniques, used at different times of the year, are proving beneficial for the safe and effective translocation of this threatened species.

Zoom link: <https://zoom.us/j/93253490621?pwd=WGtPQ1BHcWxic1dsQ0pKUXQ4c0ZDQT09>

Would you like to be reminded when our programs are nearing? Send an email to programs@alachuaudubon.org and you will be sent an email reminder prior to each program.

Captive-reared Florida Grasshopper Sparrows Are Breeding in the Wild

The Florida grasshopper sparrow population is getting a boost from birds bred in captivity and released into the wild. One of the rarest birds in North America, only around 30 known breeding pairs of this critically endangered sparrow remain in the wild. The first attempts to breed these birds in captivity started about five years ago, and in 2019 biologists started releasing captive-bred birds to augment the wild population in dry prairie habitat in central Florida.

We entered 2020 with excitement, knowing that this was the year in which we were going to find out if the captive breeding efforts would pay off. A total of 150 captive-bred sparrows were released prior to the 2020 breeding season. So far, the results have been very positive. Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission staff monitored the population and detected many individuals that had survived and settled in the population, which they identified based on their unique combination of color leg-bands. The small size of the population allows biologists to find and monitor the vast majority of Florida grasshopper sparrow nests and this, combined with the exhaustive color banding of wild and captive-bred birds prior to release, enables detailed monitoring. The population at the release site is now composed of over 40% captive-bred birds. More importantly, released birds bred with both wild and other captive-bred birds and together produced 65% of the nestlings that fledged in the wild at the release site in 2020. This is only the first year of the study but biologists are very pleased and encouraged by the results!



Photo by Karen Parker

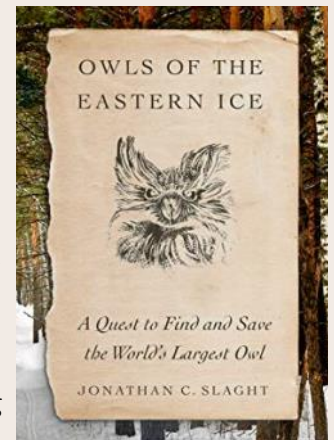
Birds continue to be bred at White Oak Conservation in Yulee, Florida and the captive-breeding effort is expanding to include two new facilities. The captive breeding and release program is a collaboration of non-profit organizations with state and federal agencies, and will continue for several years. The goal of the program is to enhance the wild population while ongoing research identifies management solutions to factors that may be limiting the sparrow population. The next set of releases will occur in February of 2021.

By Juan Oteyza and Karl Miller

BOOK REVIEW: Owls of the Eastern Ice – A Quest to Find and Save the World's Largest Owl by Jonathan C. Slaght

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Publishers, 2020. Available in hardcover, audio CD and Kindle eBook

The Blakiston's Fish Owl is the largest species of owl on earth, found only in the far northern regions of Russia, Japan, and Korea. American doctoral student Jonathan Slaght embarked on a five-year journey to find and study these enigmatic creatures to formulate a conservation plan while earning his PhD. Slaght documents his travels to the Primoriye region of Eastern Russia where he and his small Russian team traverse the frozen forests in search of the enormous but secretive owls. Over the course of several field seasons, they adjust and adapt their methods as they struggle to know more about these magnificent birds, embark on all-night monitoring missions from freezing tents, make insane dashes across quickly thawing and flooded rivers in their Hilux field vehicle, listen to wild stories during vodka-fueled nights in tiny cabins shared with a variety of Russian characters, all while learning about the elusive owls that sing haunting duets, raise their young in tree cavity nests over 200' up, and fish in their almost impossibly specific habitat.



By Karen Brown

Hummer Update # 2 November 29, 2020

Fellow Hummer Lovers,

In September, October, and early November, I went through a lot of reports of one-day wonder Rufous, with a lot of them feeding on flowers only when I tried to catch them. The tide has turned now, and good numbers of Rufous are settling in at feeders for me to band.

September 29 in Silverhill, I banded a Rufous for Karen Chaisson and then went to Lillian to band my first Allen's of the season and two Rufous for Jim Dickerson.



Juvenile male Allen's Hummingbird.
Photo by Fred Bassett.

November 1 I banded a Rufous for Burke Baker in Santa Rosa Beach and another Rufous for Sondra and James Stokes in Laurel Hill, FL. On November 6, I went to a lot of homes along the coast but only banded a Black-chinned and a Rufous for Jackie Swenson in Milton, FL. I was lucky to get a picture of Jackie's juvenile female Rufous flying out of her hand.

Back down on the coast on November 15, I had a lot of no shows and only banded a Black-chinned in Foley for Cynthia Walker. Banding picked up November 20 when I banded a Rufous for Jim Dickerson in Lillian, two Rufous for Ellen Crotty in Foley, and a Rufous for Serena and Jimmy Cooper in Navarre, FL. Two days later Emma Rhodes banded this beautiful female Buff-bellied at Ellen Crotty's home.



Juvenile female Rufous Hummingbird.
Photo by Fred Bassett.



Female Buff-bellied Hummingbird.
Photo by Janice Neitzel.

November 23, I went to Dothan to band a Black-chinned for Dennis Campbell and then near Hartford where I caught a third year return Rufous and banded a Rufous for Dick Mowbray. I finally got my first real good banding day November 27 when I started by banding a Rufous for Jane Nall in Atmore. In Fairhope I banded an amazing five Rufous for Duane and Betty Miller and didn't catch all of their birds. I ended a great day in Mobile where I banded a Black-chinned for Ron Rowell and another Black-chinned for Velma and LJ Britain.

By Fred Bassett

Fred Bassett is a certified master bird bander who 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. Fred Dietrich also bands winter hummingbirds and releases Hummer Updates periodically.

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

Alachua Audubon Society
P. O. Box 140464
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AlachuaAudubon.org

The Crane
January – February 2021

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Alachua Audubon (AAS) is an official chapter of **National Audubon** and **Audubon Florida**. If you belong to National Audubon and live in our area, you are automatically a member of AAS.

To join National Audubon, please go to 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. 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 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