

# The Crane

Volume 64 Number 6 July – August 2023

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Alachua Audubon Members,

I hope you are finding time to enjoy birds and nature wherever you may be spending your summer. The Board of Directors of the Alachua Audubon Society just completed a very successful annual planning meeting where we mapped out how and where we plan to direct our funding and support for the upcoming 2023/2024 fiscal year. Similar to previous years, AAS will focus our efforts and resources on environmental education and conservation related projects. However, this year marks an undertaking of more projects, more complicated projects, and more expensive projects. This greater investment into our local community is possible through many generous donations, the high energy investment of the all-volunteer, 19-member Board of Directors, and numerous other volunteers who contribute their time and effort to AAS-related initiatives.

Introducing and connecting kids with nature continues to be a high priority of the Alachua Audubon Society. We have ramped up our support and involvement by expanding the successful birding program at Rawlings Elementary School – a Title 1 school that serves underrepresented kids in east Gainesville. We are doubling our funding to bus 4th graders throughout Alachua County to Morningside Nature Center and Sweetwater Wetlands Park where they will engage in nature-based programs. We continue to support the Gainesville High School Birding Club and their recently expanded native plant garden. And our new dynamo board member, Kate Hellgren, has prepared a very flexible birding program that she enthusiastically presents to a wide age range of students.

AAS is starting a new chapter of the state-wide Florida Young Birders Club (FYBC) for those middle and high schoolers who want to expand their birding interests and opportunities. This new chapter will receive support at the state level. Please refer any enthusiastic birding students ages 9-17 to Alachua Audubon so we can connect them with Florida's newest chapter of the FYBC.

Audubon's environmental education programs extend up to the college level where we have just expanded the very successful college internship program to now include the summer semester. We anticipate supporting 10 college interns during the 2023/2024 school year and exposing them to a wide range of avian-related projects including netting and banding birds, monitoring nesting kestrels and Prothonotary Warblers, monitoring migrating Common Loons, assisting with the native plant garden, and other Audubon-supported projects.

Started 30 years ago by our longest-running board member, Bob Simons, Alachua Audubon's Southeastern American Kestrel nesting program expanded this past breeding season when we partnered with Dr. Ken Meyer with Avian Research Conservation Institute (ARCI) to band and add transmitters to soon-to-fledge kestrels. Little is known about where and how far this threatened species ventures after fledging and their associated survival rates. Hopefully, data collected will offer more insights into the dispersal patterns and survival of this small

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falcon, a subspecies which has seen a precipitous population drop throughout its breeding range.

The Prothonotary Warbler (PRWA), another local breeder that has also experienced a population decline, is the target of Audubon's newest conservation project. AAS board member Zach Holmes convened a group of 40 UF student volunteers, and together they constructed 40 PRWA nest boxes and installed them around the floodplain of Newnans Lake. This spring marked the beginning of a multi-year monitoring program to assess the nesting success of this stunning yellow "swamp warbler" which is one of only two cavity-nesting warbler species.

Audubon's Bird Banding Lab at Prairie Creek Preserve is entering its sixth year of operation, and the data set that is being generated is becoming more robust and more informative with each subsequent year. Interestingly, this information is confirming the high wintering site fidelity of multiple species – Gray Catbird, Ovenbird, Hermit Thrush, Song Sparrow, House Wren, and others – which have returned to the same few acres in subsequent winters. Netting and banding rarities is always exciting and has included a Golden-winged and Cape May Warbler and Henslow's Sparrow. College interns have gained valuable experience each fall and spring semester, mist-netting and banding birds, and this internship experience has been a pivotal point for many in their college careers. Join an Audubon-sponsored field trip to the banding lab this fall or winter to see the banding lab in action and meet the dedicated AAS volunteers and interns.

Located next to the bird banding lab is Audubon's native plant garden. The garden has transformed from a bahiagrass pasture into colorful circles of attractive and wildlife-friendly native species. Directional signs were recently installed in key locations to bring awareness of the AAS gardens to visitors of ACT and Prairie Creek Preserve. More information-based signs and website entries are currently being designed and should be completed by this fall.

Alachua Audubon will once again provide funding support for the Osprey cam that will be installed next to an existing nest at the top of the UF baseball stadium lights. While the original cam reached well over 70,000 viewers, it was struck by lightning and became inoperable. A replacement cam will be installed in early 2024, well before the next nesting season, and hopefully lightning won't strike twice in the same location.



*The soon-to-be completed observation platform at Tuskawilla Prairie.*

You may wish to search for birds or simply enjoy the lovely expansive views from Alachua County's soon-to-open observation platform. AAS provided a 50% match to Alachua Conservation Trust to construct an observation tower at ACT's Tuskawilla Preserve in Micanopy. This preserve has always been a super birdy location and now the opportunity exists to more easily view those distant birds.

It is probably too early to be thinking of the holiday season, but this December looks very promising for AAS to resurrect its hugely popular Holiday Social. This annual event was formerly held each December at the Mill Pond clubhouse until 2020 when Covid intervened. But stay-tuned – the holiday social will likely return, although to a larger venue to accommodate the increased number of local birders who have gotten hooked on birds.

While the popular Birds and Brew field trip continues through the summer on the first Sunday afternoon

of each month, more field trips of all types will start up in September. Wednesday bird walks at Sweetwater Wetlands Park; weekend outings to search for migrants, winter residents, and rarities; birding classes through Santa Fe College Continuing Education; and periodic weekday rambles. Lots of local volunteers are all contributing to provide a smorgasbord of bird learning and enjoyment opportunities. We welcome your attendance, involvement, and support with the Alachua Audubon Society.

By Debbie Segal, President

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## The June Challenge 2023: Five Stars, Would Recommend

Long ago, in 2012, I won The June Challenge with 126 species and a friend commented, "I don't think anyone will ever beat that total." The phrase hadn't been invented yet, but the proper response would have been, "OK Boomer." My friend hadn't foreseen today's crop of birders, or the amazing communications network they would have at their fingertips. My winning total was actually beaten four times in the following decade: in 2015 by Lloyd Davis and Mike Manetz, who set a new record with 129; in 2016 by Jonathan Mays with 128; in 2021 by Tim Hardin with 127; and in 2022 by Tim Hardin and Jose Miguel Ponciano, who tied the record with 129. Although I never would have been rash enough to say, "I don't think anyone will ever beat 129," I figured that 126-129 was pretty close to the upper limit of what was possible in Alachua County during June. Someone might hit 130 one of these days, maybe even 132. But nobody was going to exceed it by much.

But then came 2023. The low water at Paynes Prairie boded well; similar conditions had brought lots of shorebirds to the Prairie in 2021 and to Newnans Lake in 2012 and 2017. So I expected a good year with a winning total in the 120s. There seemed to be a lot of enthusiasm among the birders too. Actually to say it was "a lot" understates it. It was a "hold my beer" kind of enthusiasm, the kind that trekked out onto the mud flats at the center of the Prairie basin, the kind that wandered around Longleaf Flatwoods Preserve at 11:00 at night, the kind that rented touring boats to get out into remote sections of Newnans Lake and Lake Santa Fe, not once but six times, the kind of enthusiasm that actually alarmed some people who read about it. Birders splashed around in alligator-infested water. They got mired on the Prairie (Maggie Paxson advised, "For anyone thinking of going out there, expect knee-deep plunges and thigh-high vegetation to wade through. It was exhausting.") Tim Hardin and Jose Miguel Ponciano spent 45 minutes squatting on the open mudflats while a violent thunderstorm raged overhead. Jose Miguel wrote, "We just hunkered down, made ourselves as small as possible and waited for it to pass. We saw the Prairie filling with water in real time. We saw the storm (and our lives) pass before our eyes, with high winds and loads of water, right above our heads. Thunders falling left and right. It was scary. And stupid. And then it was awesome!!!! We saw Black-bellied Plovers, Short-billed Dowitchers, and a Caspian Tern sitting by a freaking Franklin's Gull, and yep, two American Avocets. Man, this was an EPIC birding day. Absolutely fantastic!!!!"

Law enforcement even got involved, and not just once. Mostly they were responding to reports of possible trespassing, but in one instance the Sheriff's Office was called out to rescue a poor man who was stuck way out on the Prairie – it was Tim Hardin, of course, not stuck at all. This is the first year in which it might have been reasonable to regard The June Challenge as an Extreme Sport! It may have been a little reckless at times – the Park Service actually requested that we tone it down – but it was certainly fun to watch!

And all of this extra enthusiasm, all of this adventuring, produced a list of birds that didn't just beat the old record but obliterated it. As stated above, the five highest winning totals during the previous nineteen years had been 126, 127, 128, 129, and 129. This year's winning total was 146 by Tim Hardin – not just one more than the old record, not just two more, but seventeen more! And in fact the old record was beaten by five other birders as well and tied by one. Ben Fick nearly equalled Tim's winning total with 145, and Jose Miguel Ponciano, despite being out of the country for the first week of the month, made superb use of his remaining time and finished with 138. It was also great to see the under-16 contingent represented in the Challenge again this year. Isaac Ewing, age 14, is the younger brother of the legendary Ben and Sam Ewing, and he seems to be made of the same impressive stuff. No doubt he'll be carrying home the June Challenge trophy before much longer.

But not all the credit goes to the birders. The birds had something to do with it as well. There were eighteen species of shorebirds, including a Red-necked Phalarope, Black-bellied Plovers, American Avocets, Short-billed Dowitchers, and Stilt, Pectoral, and Western Sandpipers. There were nine species of gulls and terns, including a Common Tern, a Black Skimmer, and a Franklin's Gull. There were four late-spring or early-fall migrant warblers:



*Rex Rowan hands off the trophy to Tim Hardin, once again.*

American Redstart, Blackpoll Warbler, Louisiana Waterthrush, and Black-and-white Warbler. There were eleven species of waterfowl, including Ruddy Duck, Lesser Scaup, Ring-necked Duck, and Northern Shoveler. Both pelicans, Brown and American White, showed up. And don't forget that poor Dickcissel, first found on April 19th, who was kind enough to remain at his post on Sparrow Alley, singing away, until June 11th!

It was our twentieth June Challenge, and our best ever. Thanks to all of you who worked hard and continuously to make it so exciting and so successful. Alachua County's birders are the very best!

By Rex Rowan

Here is the complete list of totals per Challenger. The number of people who saw 100 or more birds was 34, which is 71% of the total participants. (When tied, the contestants are listed alphabetically by last name.)

|                          |                      |                          |                    |
|--------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|
| Tim Hardin 146           | Rex Rowan 118        | Darrell Hartman 105      | Dean Ewing 91      |
| Ben Fick 145             | Bob Carroll 117      | Sue Hartman 105          | John Martin 90     |
| Jose Miguel Ponciano 138 | Gary Daniels 117     | Matt Hitchings 104       | Rick Wolf 90       |
| Raci Ulusoy 137          | June Daniels 117     | Craig Parenteau 104      | Anne Barkdoll 86   |
| Roxy Ohanyan 136         | Brent Henderson 116  | Danielle Zukowski 104    | Lloyd Davis 86     |
| Maggie Paxson 136        | Sharon Kuchinski 116 | Brad Hall 103            | Tonya Becker 82    |
| Chris Cattau 129         | Ellen Frattino 114   | Jerry Pruitt 103         | Linda Holt 77      |
| Anne Casella 126         | Pratibha Singh 113   | Isaac Ewing 102 (age 14) | Eric Link 77       |
| Pelin Karaca 125         | Barbara Shea 111     | Andrés Leon-Reyes 100    | Rebekah Rimes 62   |
| Marie Zeglen 124         | Scott Robinson 110   | Christine Zamora 100     | Erin Kalinowski 52 |
| Eileen Ahlquist 121      | Howard Adams 106     | Barbara Woodmansee 98    | Phil Laipis 36     |
| Dottie Dreyer 120        | Austin Gregg 106     | Renee Slaw 95            |                    |
| Tina Greenberg 120       | Becky Enneis 105     | Glenn Israel 92          |                    |

The cumulative total of birds reported in Alachua County during June was 152.

|                              |                            |                          |                               |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Black-bellied Whistling-Duck | Stilt Sandpiper            | Roseate Spoonbill        | Bank Swallow                  |
| Canada Goose                 | Least Sandpiper            | Black Vulture            | Northern Rough-winged Swallow |
| Muscovy Duck                 | White-rumped Sandpiper     | Turkey Vulture           | Purple Martin                 |
| Wood Duck                    | Pectoral Sandpiper         | Osprey                   | Barn Swallow                  |
| Blue-winged Teal             | Semipalmated Sandpiper     | Swallow-tailed Kite      | Brown-headed Nuthatch         |
| Northern Shoveler            | Western Sandpiper          | Snail Kite               | Blue-gray Gnatcatcher         |
| Mallard                      | Short-billed Dowitcher     | Mississippi Kite         | Carolina Wren                 |
| Mottled Duck                 | Spotted Sandpiper          | Cooper's Hawk            | European Starling             |
| Ring-necked Duck             | Lesser Yellowlegs          | Bald Eagle               | Gray Catbird                  |
| Lesser Scaup                 | Willet                     | Red-shouldered Hawk      | Brown Thrasher                |
| Ruddy Duck                   | Greater Yellowlegs         | Broad-winged Hawk        | Northern Mockingbird          |
| Northern Bobwhite            | Red-necked Phalarope       | Short-tailed Hawk        | Eastern Bluebird              |
| Wild Turkey                  | Laughing Gull              | Red-tailed Hawk          | House Sparrow                 |
| Pied-billed Grebe            | Franklin's Gull            | Barn Owl                 | House Finch                   |
| Rock Pigeon                  | Least Tern                 | Eastern Screech-Owl      | Bachman's Sparrow             |
| Eurasian Collared-Dove       | Caspian Tern               | Great Horned Owl         | Eastern Towhee                |
| Common Ground Dove           | Black Tern                 | Burrowing Owl            | Yellow-breasted Chat          |
| White-winged Dove            | Common Tern                | Barred Owl               | Eastern Meadowlark            |
| Mourning Dove                | Forster's Tern             | Belted Kingfisher        | Orchard Oriole                |
| Yellow-billed Cuckoo         | Royal Tern                 | Red-headed Woodpecker    | Red-winged Blackbird          |
| Common Nighthawk             | Black Skimmer              | Red-bellied Woodpecker   | Brown-headed Cowbird          |
| Chuck-will's-widow           | Wood Stork                 | Downy Woodpecker         | Common Grackle                |
| Chimney Swift                | Anhinga                    | Pileated Woodpecker      | Boat-tailed Grackle           |
| Ruby-throated Hummingbird    | Double-crested Cormorant   | Northern Flicker         | Louisiana Waterthrush         |
| King Rail                    | American White Pelican     | American Kestrel         | Black-and-white Warbler       |
| Common Gallinule             | Brown Pelican              | Eastern Wood-Pewee       | Prothonotary Warbler          |
| American Coot                | Least Bittern              | Acadian Flycatcher       | Common Yellowthroat           |
| Purple Gallinule             | Great Blue Heron           | Great Crested Flycatcher | Hooded Warbler                |
| Gray-headed Swamphen         | Great Egret                | Eastern Kingbird         | American Redstart             |
| Limpkin                      | Snowy Egret                | White-eyed Vireo         | Northern Parula               |
| Sandhill Crane               | Little Blue Heron          | Yellow-throated Vireo    | Blackpoll Warbler             |
| Whooping Crane               | Tricolored Heron           | Red-eyed Vireo           | Pine Warbler                  |
| Black-necked Stilt           | Cattle Egret               | Loggerhead Shrike        | Yellow-throated Warbler       |
| American Avocet              | Green Heron                | Blue Jay                 | Summer Tanager                |
| American Oystercatcher       | Black-crowned Night-Heron  | American Crow            | Northern Cardinal             |
| Black-bellied Plover         | Yellow-crowned Night-Heron | Fish Crow                | Blue Grosbeak                 |
| Semipalmated Plover          | White Ibis                 | Carolina Chickadee       | Indigo Bunting                |
| Killdeer                     | Glossy Ibis                | Tufted Titmouse          | Dickcissel                    |

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## Purple Martins Return to Lake City Wetlands

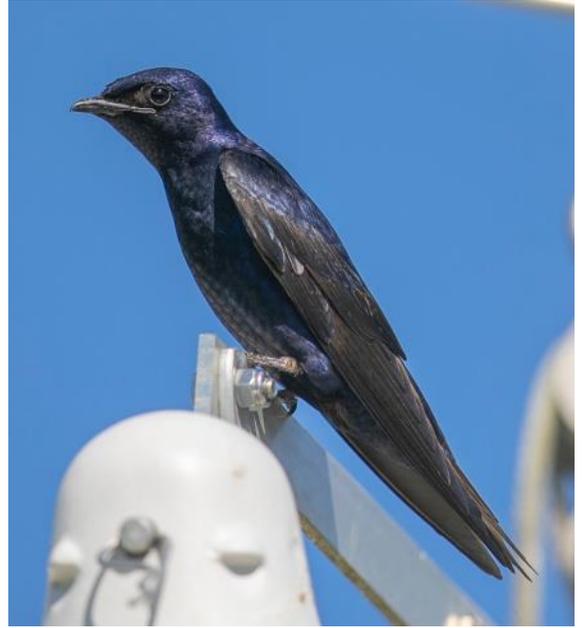
Monitoring and maintaining the Purple Martin nesting gourds at the Lake City Treatment Wetlands has been an ongoing collaboration between Alachua Audubon and Four Rivers Audubon for the past four years. Each spring comes with eager anticipation and this year was no different. Six Audubon volunteers – Jacqui Sulek and Valerie Thomas from Four Rivers, Kim and Dave Kandz from St. Petersburg, and Tedd Greenwald and I from Alachua Audubon – arrived at the wetlands on May 2<sup>nd</sup> with high hopes of finding many nesting martins using the gourds. Dozens of Purple Martins greeted us with their lovely twittery songs but were probably none too pleased to see us. Surprisingly, though, they always seem to tolerate the intrusion.

In 2018, Four Rivers and Alachua Audubon received permission from staff at the treatment wetlands to erect the first stand of gourds. Two more stands were added over the next few years to accommodate the increasing population of martins, with the number of nesting gourds now totaling 32.

The Purple Martin Conservation Association (PMCA) recommends lowering the gourds during the nesting season to monitor the status of the nests and to detect any problems that might arise. Based on annual nesting season data, there has been a steady increase in the number of eggs and young produced at this site. This positive trend continues in 2023.

It's always such a thrill to witness the productivity of the wetlands. The morning of our planned monitor event was cool, the vegetation lush, and the birds abundant. To open the lids of each gourd and see clusters of tiny white eggs or the gaping mouths of hatchlings was pure joy. Pictures are worth a thousand words, they say. Many thanks to Tedd Greenwald for the images. This year we counted 134 eggs and 32 young in 30 gourds. Sadly, two nests with eggs and one without contained a dead female. There was conjecture about why. According to the PMCA, the two most serious nest-site competitors are the non-native European Starling and House Sparrow, both of which will take over martin compartments and kill martins and their young. Only one dead female was found in prior years. Nonetheless, it seems the efforts by Alachua Audubon and Four Rivers Audubon to attract and nurture this colony of lively little acrobats has paid off handsomely, with 2023 potentially seeing well over 150 martin fledglings from this site.

By Mary Ellen Flowers. Photos by Tedd Greenwald.



## SWP Supports Nesting Purple Martins

Hoping that Purple Martins would nest at Sweetwater Wetlands Park, Alachua Audubon purchased and installed an eight-gourd nesting system several years ago. The gourd system was originally located on a low slope next to the water control structure on the south side of Cell 1 where it would not hinder mowing of the berms. For whatever reason – perhaps the gourds were not high enough or they were too close to pedestrian traffic – the martins surprisingly did not start nesting.

After meeting with park staff, Alachua Audubon received permission to relocate the gourds to another location where the pole could be installed at the top of the berm and consequently, the nesting gourds could be elevated higher. In 2022, the first nesting season after the relocation, a couple of Purple Martins were occasionally seen at the gourds, but monitoring was not conducted and it is unknown if any martins nested.

In late March and throughout April of this year, several Purple Martins were frequently observed flying around the nesting gourds. Hopes were high that Sweetwater Wetlands Park would finally support a nesting colony of Purple Martins.

With support from park rangers, Darby Guyn and James Eddy, on May 5<sup>th</sup> Alachua Audubon volunteers Winnie Lante and Rick Williams lowered the nesting apparatus and checked each gourd. They discovered three nests containing four eggs and 10 hatchlings. We are optimistic that this is the start of a growing colony of Purple Martins at Sweetwater Wetlands Park.



*Purple Martin hatchlings inside a nesting gourd at Sweetwater Wetlands Park. Photo by Winnie Lante.*

By Debbie Segal

### GAINESVILLE/ALACHUA COUNTY CLIMATE CHANGE SUMMIT



**Keynote Speaker:**  
**JACQUELINE PATTERSON**  
Founder/Director of the  
Chisholm Legacy Foundation  
for Climate Justice.

- Projections of how and when climate changes will affect Alachua County.
- Panels of local experts on Water, Health, Energy and Food.
- Featuring results of the Alachua County Vulnerability Study (commissioned by the Citizen Climate Advisory Committee).

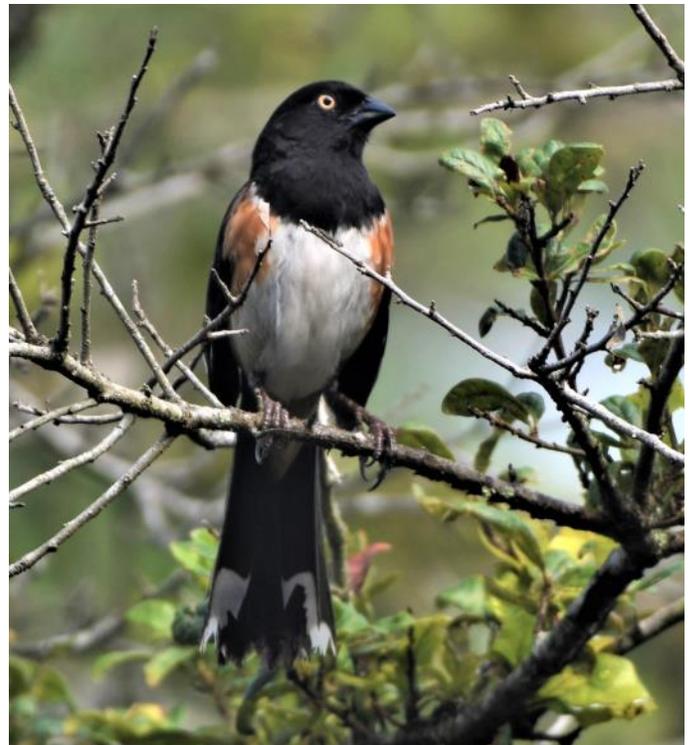
**United Church of Gainesville**  
1624 NW 5th Ave.  
Gainesville, FL. 32603

**9:30a - 4:00p**

**SATURDAY  
SEP. 30TH  
2023**

Sponsored by: **The Alachua County NAACP  
Environmental & Climate Justice Committee**

[CLICK HERE TO PRE-REGISTER!](#)



*Eastern Towhee photographed during the June Challenge by Pratibha Singh. See more photos from the Challenge on p. 11.*

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## AAS Starting a Young Birders Club

Most Audubon chapters around the country are interested in sharing the exciting world of birds with younger generations. Chapter leaders realize that ultimately the conservation of birds lies with our young people, and often begins with a passion for birds and nature.

Following pioneering efforts by the Black Swamp Bird Observatory with the Ohio Young Birders Club, in 2020, Jim McGinity started a Young Birders Club for birders ages 9-17 in the Tampa Bay Area. Within a year, Jim had connected with chapter leaders in Orlando and St. Augustine that were starting similar programs, and then teamed with the Florida Ornithological Society to become the sponsor.

Alachua Audubon is pleased to announce that we will be joining in by also starting a Young Birders Club. This is an exciting new venture that will serve young birders locally and help connect them to a state-wide network of other young birders.

*Please assist us with this new and exciting initiative by helping us connect with middle and high schoolers who have an interest in birds.* We can be contacted at [contact@AlachuaAudubon.org](mailto:contact@AlachuaAudubon.org).

By Debbie Segal



### Florida Young Birders Club

The Florida Young Birders Club is welcoming people aged 9 - 17 in Florida who have an interest in birds or birding. We have chapters in the Tampa Bay Area, Orlando, and St. Augustine, with more chapters being formed in other parts of the state.

**Our club offers:**

- Monthly field outings
- Monthly virtual guest speaker events
- A chance to communicate with other young birders in a secure space
- Member discount on Vortex optics



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## AAS Supports Outdoor Education for 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Graders

The Alachua Audubon Society board voted to fund the cost of transporting elementary school children to Morningside Nature Center and Sweetwater Wetlands Park for nature-based outdoor education during the 2022/2023 school year. Public schools have difficulty scheduling field trips for children and one of the barriers is the cost of transportation. Over the past school year, AAS partnered with the Friends of Nature Parks to support their sponsored field trips for over 350 kids! This school year 80 third graders from Littlewood, 70 fourth graders from Parker Elementary and 130 fourth graders from Wiles went to Morningside where the Parks Recreation and Cultural Affairs Environmental Education staff provided lessons on the natural and cultural history of Alachua County. Additionally, 70 fourth graders from Littlewood went to Sweetwater Wetlands Park where they learned about the ecology and wildlife of the park. The nature-based lesson plans were developed to align with the Sunshine State Standards and one of the outcomes of the lessons was poems written by the kids about their experiences. Adults who attended reported that the kids were fully engaged and transfixed by their time at the parks. Alachua Audubon plans to support additional outdoor education in our public schools for the upcoming school year.

One of the poems written by a 4<sup>th</sup> grader is reproduced here. To see more, go to the [Friends of Nature Parks](http://Friends of Nature Parks website) website.

By Anne Casella

*The Amazing Life at Sweetwater!*

*The water sparkled like glistening diamonds.  
We walked as if we were snails,  
Watching every movement.*

*The wind smelled like Mother Nature,  
Spraying a new scent in the air.  
It was all of a sudden,  
The trees were starting a conversation in a  
different language.*

*Among the beauty there was life,  
Graceful birds among the sky.  
Alligators getting a tan,  
Different colors around the land*

*The thoughts in mind,  
At one with nature.*

*By Marley*

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## Birds Are Part of the Community at Howard Bishop Middle School!

Alachua Audubon is always focused on interesting and important topics, but sometimes there is a nugget that, to me, shines extra bright. During late March/early April, I had the opportunity to provide outreach to Dr. Chloe Winant's four 6th grade science classes at Howard Bishop Middle School (HBMS). The six-day unit focused on the overlap between human communities and bird communities.

We began by exploring the idea of habitat and the needs of all animals, including humans. I adapted two Project WILD activities to fit the classes' needs. We used 'Oh Killdeer!' (instead of 'Oh Deer!') and 'How Many Crows Can Live in This Schoolyard' (instead of 'How Many Bears Can Live in This Forest') to illuminate concepts such as limiting factors and population fluctuations. These activities occurred outside, behind the school, on the warm grass. While there, we also closed our eyes and listened to the surrounding human and natural communities.

*Thank you for everything you have done!  
I love birds now!*

The question for the students was, where will most birds occur in the HBMS school yard? Morningside Nature Park lent four platform bird feeders to Dr. Winant, and she had them erected in four distinct areas of the school yard. Three feeders were distributed around a retention pond that had some degree of nearby cover. The fourth feeder was placed adjacent to a second retention pond that had no cover. Over a two-day period, the students used the school's binoculars along with those provided by Alachua Audubon to survey birds using the feeders, as well as the birds nearby. Dr. Winant and her student teacher, UF student Douglas Brazie-Brown, compiled the data and on the sixth and last day of the unit, the students did the analysis using Excel. From their findings, the students determined where birds were most prevalent. Unsurprisingly, they were most abundant around the feeder located between the retention pond and an established hedgerow. They also proposed areas to enhance bird habitat.

Three weeks later, I was invited to be present during their tree-planting day! The City of Gainesville had donated two dozen healthy, 5 to 6-foot-tall mulberry, cypress, and anise specimens. Excitement was high as the students dug deep holes, sunk the trees, snuggled them in, added water, and then stood back to admire their work. Monitoring the bird community as the trees mature will be a fascinating endeavor.

Dr. Winant put a lot of work into this unit. Her students are very fortunate to have such a committed teacher. It was great that Alachua Audubon could contribute to make the initiative even more of a success. Alachua Audubon's Felicia Lee and Anne Casella helped the students record bird species during observation days.

On that last day, I received a wonderful thank-you card, signed by almost 60 students. Some of my favorite messages are: "Your passion for birds inspired mine", "Thank you for everything you have done! I love birds now!", "Thank you for teaching us! Now I always use the Merlin bird app to listen for new birds", "I had a great time playing Killdeer. Every time I hear a bird, I pull out my app. I loved the games soo much", "Thank you for your time and sharing your passion for nature." Needless to say, I hope Dr. Winant asks me back next year!

By Kate Hellgren

*Author birdwatching with students (right). Dr. Winant (red shirt) planting trees with students (far right).*



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## Gainesville High School Native Plant Garden



*GHS Teacher Maggie Paxson (far left) with students.*

In November 2022, Alachua Audubon was awarded a \$2000 grant from the Plants for Birds program funded by Audubon Florida and Florida Power and Light. Native plants are an important source of food, cover and nesting sites for birds and are host plants for the insects that many birds need as a protein source. Native plants evolved in their ecological niches so need little maintenance in the way of water, fertilizer or pesticides once established. The conversion of natural areas in Florida to residential and commercial uses makes it critically important that we foster an environment that supports birds. The Plants for Birds grant was a partnership with Maggie Paxson, Chair of the Science Department at Gainesville High School. The funding supported refurbishing an existing pollinator garden and installation of a new native plant garden outside the science wing of the high school. Students assisted with removing invasive plants and replacing them with natives. Some of the funds from the grant were used to purchase grow lights and seed starters that will be used for a laboratory experience in fall 2023 in Ms. Paxson's Environmental Management class. The plants that result from this lab will be installed in the garden by the students. In addition to providing nectar, fruit and insects for birds, the ultimate goal of the garden is to increase students' science engagement through outdoor education and nature journaling.

We thank Audubon Florida and Florida Power and Light for their support!

By Anne Casella

*After voluminous summer rains and abundant sunshine, these newly established plants should be large and lush by fall.*



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## Helping the Southeastern American Kestrel

Did you know that the American kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) is the smallest bird of prey in North America and the only bird of prey capable of hovering? Unfortunately, their populations are declining, including our native Floridian, the Southeastern American Kestrel, which is now classified as a threatened species in Florida under the Endangered and Threatened Species Rule by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. We need to act, especially considering the limited data available. Many factors are affecting their population; for example, loss of habitat. Habitats such as open country, farmlands, and cattle farms are needed to ensure their population success because they primarily eat insects.

Why should we protect the American kestrel? Keeping the food chain balanced is important but the American kestrel also plays a key role as a biological control agent. According to Catherine Lindell, a scientist from MSU, "American kestrels consume numerous crop pests and reduce crop damage, which are important ecosystem services." The Southeastern American Kestrel requires tree cavities for nesting. With the loss of habitat, finding a natural tree cavity is almost impossible for this bird to find. Mr. Bob Simons of the Alachua Audubon Society launched our Southeastern American Kestrel nest box program. For the past 31 years, we have been building, installing, maintaining, and monitoring nest boxes to aid their nesting success. Being part of this project has been one of my biggest achievements, thanks to Bob Simons who gave me the opportunity to volunteer in this amazing project. Coming from a small farm town in Mexico surrounded by wildlife is how my interest in conservation biology started, inspiring me to pursue a bachelor's degree in zoology at the University of Florida. This year the American kestrel nest box program was a success. Thanks to Eric Amundson and Dr. Jose Miguel Ponciano Castellanos, we have been able to carry on Bob Simons' legacy and continue to help our Southeastern American Kestrels. With the expertise of Dr. Ponciano Castellanos in statistics, we are now collecting and recording useful data on their nesting success. We took a step forward and collaborated with the Avian Research and Conservation Institute (ARCI), a nonprofit conservation initiative that has focused on applied ecological studies of rare and imperiled birds to gather scientific data for conservation purposes. Dr. Meyer is the executive director of ARCI and with his experience and knowledge, we banded and tagged four female and five male Southeastern American kestrels with transmitters at Watermelon Pond. This was done for the purpose of studying their post-fledging survival rates and dispersal distances.

Thanks to the Alachua Audubon Society for giving me the opportunity to be part of this amazing project. Now I know that I want to pursue a master's in bird conservation biology and continue collecting data to aid one of our Floridian birds of prey, our unique Southeastern American Kestrel.

By Miguel Romero Olvera

*Note from Eric Amundson, currently leading the AAS Kestrel nest box program: Watermelon Pond at the Metzger Tract has 8 nest boxes that have produced 21-25 fledglings this year.*

*Editor's note: To learn more about the AAS Kestrel nest box program, please visit our website [here](#).*



*A male kestrel nestling that achieved the minimum weight to have a transmitter attached. After fledging, this bird was located near the nest box using a directional antenna. Photo by Araks Ohanyan.*

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June Challenge Photos



*Red-necked Phalarope by Ben Fisk.*



*Yellow-breasted Chat by Araks Ohanyan.*

**Thank you June Challengers!**



*Wood Stork with Snake by Araks Ohanyan.*



*Acadian Flycatcher by Araks Ohanyan.*



*Prothonotary Warbler by Danielle Zukowski.*



*Anhinga and Wood Stork by Danielle Zukowski.*

## AAS Seeks Board Member

Alachua Audubon is seeking a new board member to join our dynamic and highly motivated board of directors. We are currently in need of someone with expertise in website maintenance and development. This volunteer position entails attending a monthly board meeting (except during July) via Zoom or hybrid (in person/Zoom) and spending a few hours each month posting updates to the website. Alachua Audubon is an all-volunteer organization. If interested or for more information, please send an email to [contact@AlachuaAudubon.org](mailto:contact@AlachuaAudubon.org)

## Please Join Us!

Alachua Audubon is an all-volunteer organization. Your membership and contributions help us continue and expand our work of providing education and outreach about birds and birding and supporting local conservation efforts. We support a high-school scholarship program, college internship program, a library "backpack for birding" lending program, youth education, and many other research, education and outreach efforts. Read about [our many activities](#) on our website and in our bi-monthly newsletter, [The Crane](#), sent to members via email and available to anyone via the website.

### *Be sure to check out the following!*

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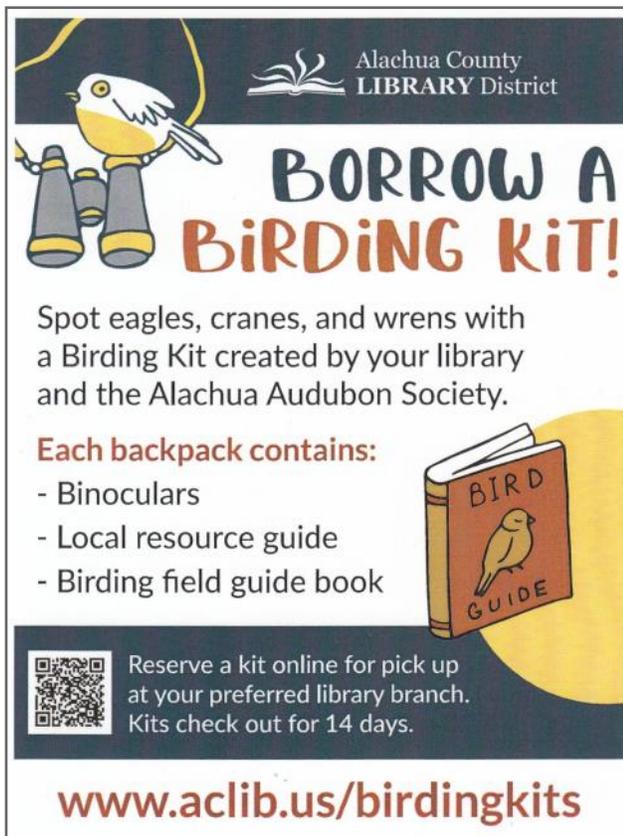
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## Sweetwater Wetlands Park Offers Mobility Tours

Mobility tours are now available upon request at Sweetwater Wetlands Park. Please schedule tours at least two weeks in advance by calling [352-554-5871](tel:352-554-5871). For other special needs accommodations, please call [352-554-5871](tel:352-554-5871) 48 hours in advance. Visit the park website [here](#).



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## Monthly Birds and Brews

The AAS Birds and Brews event continues to be popular with both new and experienced birders. Meet the first Sunday afternoon of the month at [First Magnitude Brewery](#), 1220 SE Veitch St. Arrive early as parking can be scarce. There will be an Alachua Audubon table set up and **loaner binoculars will be available**. It is a lovely time of day for a leisurely stroll around the Depot Park ponds to look for birds. Then we'll return to First Magnitude for an optional brew and conversation.

*All birding skill levels are welcome!*

Next event: Sunday, August 6<sup>th</sup> at 5:45 p.m.



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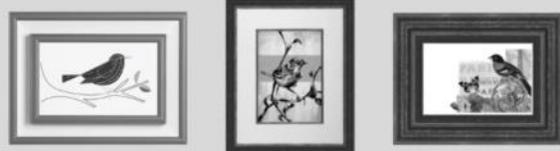


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Join online with PayPal at [AlachuaAudubon.org/join/](http://AlachuaAudubon.org/join/) or send your application (print from the website) and check payable to **Alachua Audubon Society** to PO Box 140464, Gainesville, FL 32614-0464. Include your name, address and email. *The Crane* is distributed via email. Your email address will not be shared with other organizations.

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

To join National Audubon, please go to [AlachuaAudubon.org/Join/](http://AlachuaAudubon.org/Join/) where you will be directed to their membership page. A portion of your introductory membership will be credited to our local chapter and you will become an annual member of the [National Audubon Society](http://NationalAudubon.org), [Audubon Florida](http://AudubonFlorida.org) and [Alachua Audubon](http://AlachuaAudubon.org), with one-year subscriptions to National *Audubon* magazine, *Audubon Florida Naturalist* magazine, and Alachua Audubon’s bi-monthly newsletter, *The Crane*. To **renew** your National membership, click [here](#).

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

*Alachua Audubon is a 501(c)3 organization. A copy of our official registration and financial information may be obtained from the Florida Division of Consumer Services by calling toll-free (800-435-7352) or visiting their website at [fdacs.gov/Consumer-Resources](http://fdacs.gov/Consumer-Resources). The state registration does not imply endorsement, approval, or recommendation by the state.*

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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 the sustainable use of natural resources.*

Submissions to **The Crane** are welcomed. Deadline for the Sept – Oct issue: August 15th. For advertising information, contact the editor at [Contact@AlachuaAudubon.org](mailto:Contact@AlachuaAudubon.org)

Annual subscription to **The Crane** is included in National Audubon and/or Alachua Audubon membership.

Alachua Audubon Society, Inc. is one of more than 40 Audubon chapters in Florida and is chartered by the National Audubon Society and Audubon Florida.

Alachua Audubon offers all our neighbors respect, inclusion, and opportunities to participate and be heard in our organization. Please read the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion statement on our website [here](#). Comments and suggestions are welcomed.