



The Crane

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

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 2025/2026 fiscal year. Three successful projects – one educational and the other two conservation-based – were approved for continued funding.

Alachua Audubon will continue providing important funding to Alachua County Public Schools to cover transportation costs for 3rd and 4th graders attending Morningside Nature Center and Sweetwater Wetlands Park nature-related educational programs. Several years ago, sufficient funds for bus transportation were eliminated from the school budget, causing 3rd and 4th grade nature programs to stall. For the third consecutive year, and in conjunction with Friends of Nature Parks who organizes the field trips, AAS will provide much-needed funds so these elementary school children can continue to experience nature and learn about conservation.

Our Purple Martin nesting program has produced exciting results with a record number of fledglings at each of the four sites where nest gourd systems were installed. The AAS board voted to expand this successful conservation project by purchasing and installing more gourd systems at Sweetwater Wetlands Park and Prairie Creek Preserve. AAS will also partner with Marion Audubon at Orange Lake Overlook by installing a new nesting gourd system and educational signs at this popular preserve that straddles Alachua and Marion Counties.

Alachua Audubon continues to provide suitable nesting opportunities for the Southeastern American Kestrel, a threatened subspecies that has seen a precipitous population drop throughout its breeding range. Started over 30 years ago by Bob Simons, this successful kestrel program has expanded considerably by partnering 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, but data from this important study are now providing insights into dispersal patterns and survival of this charismatic falcon.

Our Backyard Bird Tour will be returning in February. This self-guided tour will showcase four to six local yards that are maintained to benefit wildlife through native plants, bird feeders, water features, and other wildlife attractants. *If you are interested in offering your yard for the Backyard Bird Tour, please contact AAS at contact@AlachuaAudubon.org.*

Advocacy for the protection of wildlife and its habitat has and continues to be an important role for AAS. These advocacy actions have included protecting state and local parks, opposing large-scale developments that would impact extensive sensitive habitats, advocating for keeping cats indoors, promoting more habitat for grassland species, protecting wading bird rookeries, and numerous other conservation-based projects. During our recent planning meeting, we realized that many of the important conservation

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and advocacy efforts by AAS and its volunteers are being forgotten. This spurred us to create a list of the critical contributions AAS has and continues to make in support of the AAS Mission Statement: *to foster appreciation and knowledge of birds and other native wildlife, to protect and restore wildlife population and their habitats, and to promote sustainable use of natural resources.*

AAS's long list of achievements is provided below. Certainly, there are some accomplishments that escaped our memory. Please check out the wide range of important projects that this organization has embarked on. And don't hesitate to contact us at contact@AlachuaAudubon.org if you recall an AAS project, advocacy effort or achievement that is missing from this list. Your membership dollars and donations allow us to invest in these actions that support our mission statement. If you are not a member of Alachua Audubon, please consider joining this important conservation organization. You may join at any level [here](#).

Alachua Audubon continues to offer over 100 bird walks annually through weekend outings, Wednesday walks at Sweetwater Wetlands Park, Birds and Brews, the Santa Fe College Continuing Education Program, Bird Rambles, and field trips for school groups. Those outings are posted on the AAS website calendar as they become scheduled. We welcome your attendance, involvement, and support with the Alachua Audubon Society.

By Debbie Segal, President

AAS Projects and Advocacy Initiatives

Species and Habitat Conservation

San Felasco Hammock Preserve State Park – From 1972 through 1974, Bob Simons, Helen Hood, Archie and Marjorie Carr, and others advocated for the purchase of 10 private parcels, comprising over 6,000 acres, for the creation of a new state park. They documented the unique ecological resources, met with private landowners, and lobbied local and state legislatures. After two years of continuous involvement, they successfully spearheaded the purchase and preservation of San Felasco Hammock Preserve State Park, the largest and most consequential AAS accomplishment to date.

Southeastern American Kestrels – Providing long-term nesting program for SE American Kestrels. Expanded the project to tag and track fledgling kestrels.

Purple Martin Nesting Gourds – Established significant breeding populations of Purple Martins at Sweetwater Wetlands Park, Orange Lake Overlook, Prairie Creek Preserve, and Lake City Wetlands by purchasing and installing large nesting gourd systems at those four locations.

Orange Lake – Some of the largest and most significant wading bird rookeries in the state historically occurred at Orange Lake, including the famous Bird Island, but those rookeries were abandoned due to questionable lake management activities. At least four small rookeries have reestablished at Orange Lake, and Alachua Audubon provided management recom-

mendation to FWC for protecting those islands, including advocating for large protective buffers.

Orange Lake – Advocated against the wide-spread aerial application of herbicides and opposed the large-scale removal of floating vegetation by mechanical methods.

Sweetwater Wetlands Park – Advocated for reduced mowing at the park to enhance habitat for grassland species. Funded the white board map at the park's entrance, designed and printed the "Let's Start Birding" brochures, and donated 15 pairs of binoculars to the park. Funded the purchase of animal rescue equipment for the park and advocated for development of a woodland trail, and serve on the quarterly SWP Stakeholders group to address management and public use issues at the park.

Southwest Wetlands Park – Serve as a stakeholder for Gainesville's newest treatment wetland project and conducted baseline bird surveys at the site.

Sandhill Cranes – When Alachua Audubon learned that the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) was killing Sandhill Cranes to protect their peanut crop at the Citra Research Station, we alerted FWC and Audubon Florida and were able to stop IFAS from those destructive and illegal actions.

Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park – Encouraged park staff to conduct wading bird rookery surveys during the early breeding season before aerially applying herbicides to the prairie; served as a stakeholder in the

review of the 10-year management plan.

Newnans Lake State Forest West – teamed with the FL Forest Service on the design and implementation of a sparrow restoration project.

Prothonotary Warblers – Installed and monitored nest boxes around forested floodplain habitats to enhance nesting opportunities for this species.

Prairie Creek Preserve Native Plant Garden – Created and maintain a native plant garden with educational signs in partnership with Alachua Conservation Trust.

Tuscahill Prairie – Partnered with Alachua Conservation Trust to provide 50% funding for the two-story observation tower.

ACT Bird Surveys – Conducted bird surveys at Alachua Conservation Trust properties prior to the introduction of active management plans.

Native Plants Talk with Doug Tallamy – Co-sponsored a presentation by Doug Tallamy with the Gainesville Garden Club and Master Gardeners on the importance of using native plants for wildlife.

Advocacy Activities

Feral Cats – Attended multiple meetings and opposed the Trap, Neuter, and Release (TNR) program to reduce bird mortality caused by feral cats. Also opposed releasing TNR cats on conservation lands.

State Parks – Participated on the Protect Payne's Prairie coalition with Alachua Conservation Trust, the Sierra Club, Friends of Paynes Prairie and the Gainesville Garden Club to oppose state proposals to allow timbering, hunting and grazing in state parks.

State Parks – Opposed development of lodges, golf courses, pickleball courts, and other impactful recreational facilities in Florida's state parks.

Barr Hammock – Opposed a landowner's proposal to block access to a portion of 6-mile Barr Hammock. Took County Commissioners on a tour of Barr Hammock and spoke out against the closure at a County Commission meeting. Printed and wore pins stating "Keep the Barr Open".

Tom Petty Park – Advocated with the City Commission to minimize impacts on bird habitat when building new pickleball courts.

Tuscahill Prairie – Advocated against a Dollar General store that was proposed to be constructed next to a significant archaeological site and across from the environmentally sensitive Tuscahill Prairie.

Solar Farms – Advocated for the installation of solar farms on agricultural lands in western Alachua County.

Florida Power and Light – Served as a stakeholder to promote use of native plants to support pollinator species at its two solar farms in Putnam County.

Large-scale Development – Opposed the large-scale development by Plum Creek in eastern Alachua County due to the extensive environmental impacts.

Tree Removal Ordinance – Encouraged the City of Gainesville Public Works to follow applicable city tree ordinances related to tree removal on SE 1st Avenue.

Alachua County Development – provided input on the Alachua County comprehensive plan; supported the restoration of a portion of the Lee property on Parker Road to a longleaf pine ecosystem; opposed amending the comprehensive plan to allow construction of homes on sensitive conservation land near Newnans Lake.

State Advocacy – Opposed diversion of Amendment 1 funds for infrastructure projects; promoted selection of Florida Scrub Jay as our state bird; served as a stakeholder in the review of the 10-year management plan for Fanning Springs State Park and Newnans Lake State Forest; supported restoring the Ocklawaha River by breaching the Rodman dam; opposed declaring the Ellaville tract of Twin Rivers State Park to be surplus land; requested that DOT erect signage on 441 across PPPSP to prevent bird strikes; opposed the FWC proposal to resume bear hunts; opposed a land swap for a tract in the Guana River Wildlife Management Area.

Other letters of support – for Alachua Conservation Trust to purchase 296 acres on the Santa Fe River Ranch with Florida Communities Trust funds; for the City of Gainesville for a grant from Wells Fargo to support invasive species activities; for the Florida Springs Institute proposal to have the springs area declared a National Heritage Area; for the Santa Fe Zoo for a grant to improve its aviary.

Education – School Groups, Bird Outings (next page)

Bird Banding Laboratory – Operated a bird banding laboratory in partnership with Alachua Conservation Trust at Prairie Creek Preserve from 2019-2024 to support a college internship program.

UF College Internship Program – Administered an internship program for University of Florida students.

UF GREBE Audubon Campus Chapter – Provided support to the University of Florida's Audubon Campus Chapter known as GREBEs.

UF GREBE Garden for Birds – Supported development of the UF GREBE native plant garden by arranging plant purchases.

Bluebird Nest Boxes – Constructed and erected bluebird boxes at a local elementary school.

High School Scholarship Program – Initiated an annual scholarship program for high school students.

Gainesville High School Birding Program – Donated a spotting scope and provided funds to purchase bird seed for the GHS Bird Club. Obtained grants from Audubon Florida and National Audubon Society to support establishment of a native plant garden at GHS.

Middle School Bird Study Classes – Taught outdoor bird study classes at Howard Bishop and Westwood Middle Schools. AAS received this touching message from a teacher at Howard Bishop. *“At the end of the year, when students were asked what labs they liked best in my class, 9 out of 10 said they liked being outside for the Bird study. That week changed several lives. And of course, it was so much because our team effort was elevated by your knowledge, sense of humor, and great passion for the outdoors. It's very rare to find people willing to volunteer their time to the classroom the way you did, Kate. I cannot thank you enough.”*

3rd and 4th Grade Environmental Education – Provide funding to Alachua County Public Schools to transport and pay fees for 3rd and 4th graders to attend environmental field trips at Morningside Nature Center and Sweetwater Wetlands Park .

Rawlings Elementary School – Lead elementary students on weekly bird walks at a Title 9 school.

Audubon Adventures Birding Kits – For 10 years, AAS purchased 30 to 40 Audubon Adventure kits annually from National Audubon and donated them to elemen-

tary school science teachers for use in their science classes. The kits contained science lessons on birds, conservation, and various ecological topics.

Youth Bird Outings – AAS has organized and led numerous bird outings for kids including bird camp and Christmas Bird Counts.

Boy Scouts' Birding Merit Badge – Provided classroom instruction at Santa Fe College followed by bird outings, with the final goal of earning a merit badge. AAS then awarded the scouts a birding field guide to commemorate their accomplishment.

Young Birders Club – Organized the Alachua chapter of the state Young Birders Club and lead bird outings for middle school- and high school-aged students.

Home School Programs – Lead many birding programs for various home school groups.

Library Birding Kits – Donated ten birding backpacks to the Alachua County Library District for checkout by patrons.

Evening Programs – Monthly evening programs on various research projects related to bird behavior and conservation, as well as domestic and international bird-related travelogues.

Weekend Field Trips – Organize and lead weekend field trips to birding locations throughout Alachua County and beyond.

Sweetwater Wetlands Park – Lead a bird walk every Wednesday morning from September through May.

Santa Fe College Birding Classes – Organize and lead four birding classes annually for SFC's Continuing Education program. Each class has four weekly outings.

Birds and Brews Bird Walks – Lead a monthly afternoon bird stroll from First Magnitude Brewery to Depot Park. Provide loaner binoculars for attendees.

Bird Rambles and The Flock Bird Walks – Lead occasional bird outings for targeted attendee groups.

Family Bird Walks at Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park – Through a partnership with PPPSP, AAS volunteers led monthly bird walks at La Chua Trail that were designed to attract families.

Zen Birding – Led a monthly outing at Possum Creek Park that started with yoga and ended with birding.

Poetry in the Parks Connects Students to Nature

Poetry in the Parks is an innovative program that allows Gainesville's elementary students to experience local nature parks, bridging the gap between classroom learning and the living world outside. Many children, especially those from lower-income areas, may have never visited a nature park. For some, the field trip is a chance to overcome fears of the outdoors and form a connection to the natural world. Recognizing this, the Poetry in the Parks initiative was created to make these experiences accessible to all, regardless of financial background.

For two years, Alachua Audubon has partnered with Friends of Nature Parks (FoNP) and the City of Gainesville Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs (PRCA) Department to fund this unique form of nature education. The target audience is third and fourth graders in public schools – students who are both old enough to appreciate guided exploration and young enough to let curiosity shape their learning. Field trips to Morningside Nature Center and Sweetwater Wetlands Park are not simply casual outings; they are hands-on, guided experiences led by knowledgeable park staff, bringing science and the environment to life.

The experience does not end with the field trip. After returning to their classrooms, students write poems that reflect on what they saw, felt, and learned. This creative process reinforces science concepts and supports language arts skills.

An important element of the program is its integration with Florida curriculum standards. FoNP and PRCA collaborated closely with the Alachua County Public Schools science curriculum coordinator to design field trips that support required standards in both science and language arts for grades 3 and 4. Teachers benefit from the program's alignment with classroom goals in STEM and ELA, and students gain opportunities to engage in experiential learning that can enhance their performance on standardized tests.

Funding had been a significant challenge – schools and parents often lack the resources for field trips. Alachua Audubon's ongoing financial commitment has been critical: in the 2023-2024 school year, we covered program fees and transportation costs for over 800 students from five elementary schools, providing 18 buses. The following year, we funded 15 buses to bring 720 students from eight schools, with an average field trip cost of \$395. These efforts ensure that logistical and financial barriers do not prevent students from exploring local nature parks.

By Anne Casella

Sweetwater

Poem by Camille

Sunbathing alligator frozen like ice.
Walking along nature's path.
Enjoying crickets putting on a concert.
Elegant flowers dressed in rainbow hues.
Turtles relaxing like a lazy Saturday.
Water splashed as birds caught their prey.
Acrobat dragonflies, performing a circus routine.
Temperatures rising under the lava hot sun
Eating lunch, munch, munch, munch
Riding home bumpy as a jumping bean.

Thank you Morningside

Poem by Bryson

I hear nature's whispers,
Soft breezes rustling leaves,
The gentle heartbeat of the small river

I smell mildew and corn,
Earthy notes mingling in the air, A reminder of life
The cycle, the harvest.

I feel the sheep's warm fur, A soft woolen embrace
And the sturdy presence of cows, Content in their
pasture
The sun kissing their backs.

Learn more about Friends of Nature Parks and read more student poems at [Friends of Nature Parks](#).

Purple Martins Need our Help

The Purple Martin is the largest of the swallow species in North America. They nest in North America and spend winters mostly in the rainforests of Brazil and Argentina. Decreasing winter habitats affect the number of



Male Purple Martin.

birds that return each spring and some birds do not survive the long migration. Another factor limiting their population is a lack of available nest sites.

In ancient history, martins nested in woodpecker holes and cliff faces. Native Americans have been building housing for martins for thousands of years. Early European explorers documented natural gourd cavities at native villages for these birds. This may have been done for the insect eating abilities that may have helped the crops grown near the villages. Martins do not eat mosquitoes. They prefer dragonflies and grasshoppers. Perhaps the birds were also considered good omens for indigenous peoples. Either way European settlers followed the tradition and so it continues today.

The eastern subspecies of Purple Martins is now totally reliant on human made nesting cavities as natural tree cavities are in very short supply. In larger nesting colonies there is stiff competition for those cavities. Not all sites



Eggs and newly hatched chick.

Photo by Dottie Dreyer.

are ideal for erecting a nesting array but Sweetwater Wetland Park, Prairie Creek Preserve and Orange Lake Overlook (OLO) are as perfect as a site can get to help these birds be successful. At Sweetwater there are 16 cavities, Prairie Creek has 8, and at OLO there are six.. Alachua Audubon funded the first two and Bubba Scales, former owner of Wild Birds Unlimited, donated the OLO housing. All three are at or near capacity and we plan to expand this winter and add educational signage.

Adult martins return to the site where nesting was successful the previous season. This is known as site fidelity. Birds often avoid returning to a site if their nesting failed the previous season. Nest failure often can be attributed to inadequate housing conditions, competition from starlings or House Sparrows, or predation. Protection from ground predators such as raccoons and snakes is essential; predator guards are used on all our nest arrays.

Pre-migration gatherings near the coast start a few weeks after fledging which happens from late May to early June in our area. If you missed them this year, the birds will faithfully return in mid-February.

For more information, visit the Purple Martin Conservation Association [here](#).

By Winnie Dahm Lante



Winnie Lante and Rick Williams lower the nest array to check for chicks and eggs. Photo by Dottie Dreyer.



Purple Martin paparazzi. After eggs and chicks were counted for data reporting, field trip participants were allowed to briefly look inside the gourds. Care was taken to then raise the array quickly and we watched as the adults returned to their nests. Photo by Karen Brown.

The Bob Simons Southeastern American Kestrel Nest Box Program

The Southeastern American Kestrel (SEAMKE) is a subspecies of the American Kestrel. It is classified as “threatened” in Florida, the most protected category. Research data is sparse and AAS has considered it a priority to promote conservation strategies that can benefit this remarkable falcon’s success. AAS has special interest in where our fledged birds are traveling to determine new nest box support.

Alachua Audubon has been working with Dr. Ken Meyer of the Avian Research and Conservation Institute (ARCI). Eric Amundson leads other AAS volunteers in monitoring existing nest boxes that AAS has placed and maintained over the many years since Bob Simons began the program as a conservation effort. Dr. Meyer and his team use our successful boxes to place bands and transmitters on chicks prior to fledging. This typically is done approximately 25 days after hatching. The birds fledge by 30-32 days, weighing approximately the same as their parents. They spend up to a few weeks flying and hunting with the adults.

This past nesting season has seen the results of Dr Meyer’s tracking tagged birds from the last 3 years. Four new boxes were placed on articulating poles in areas identified by studying the routes frequented by tagged birds. Two of the boxes were located and occupied by kestrels within a few days of placement. The result was that eight new SEAMKEs fledged from [Ashton Biological Preserve](#) (ABP) and a nearby private property.

This was made possible by a partnership with Chase Pirtle, Director of the ABP, who facilitates our work both at Ashton and with private owners in the area. Chase has guided us around the 100-acre preserve and introduced his staff and interns to SEAMKE conservation efforts. They have provided real time observation and hands-on support for AAS and ARCI in and beyond the preserve.

Dr. Meyer has enhanced data collection with 12 nest cameras that provide 24/7 observation. The solar powered systems are designed and fabricated by wildlife photographer Drew Fulton who works with Dr. Meyer on other sites in Florida. Drew has accompanied us on multiple sites where AAS maintains nest boxes.

Camera data collection and interpretation will add to the understanding of nestling diets, feeding rates, behaviors, and causes of nest failure. More data will be collected from the solar powered backpack transmitters placed on 20 fledglings that reached a weight of at least 100 grams.

Audubon Florida awarded Alachua Audubon the “Conservation Research Project of the Year” last year for our work with ARCI and the goals of identifying threats to the SEAMKE’s survival. (See the *Jan-Feb 2025* issue of *The Crane*). Some of Dr. Meyer’s interests are natal dispersal distances from the hatch box to subsequent first breeding efforts and to further understand first year survival and causes of nest failure.

Alachua Audubon has contributed many volunteer hours and significant financial support to this

Some results from the 2024-25 season:

29 boxes monitored.

15 boxes used for nesting.

53 chicks fledged.

20 chicks fitted with transmitters.

32 chicks banded with a metal band on one leg and a colored band on the other.



Drew Fulton setting up a solar panel to power a nest box camera.



From left: Chase Pirtle (Ashton Biological Preserve), Miguel Olvera, Dr Ken Meyer, and Ernesto Reyes shading a 25 day-old-hick with lowered nest box pole in the background.



Alachua County Land Conservation biologist, Anastasia, holds a kestrel chick awaiting data collection.

effort which has been influential in securing generous grants from the Wagmore Foundation to ARCI in support of Dr Meyer's ongoing research on the SEAMKE. Long-time volunteer Miguel Romero-Olvera began volunteering with Bob Simons in the 2021-22 season and guided me through the 2022-23 season. He was key in securing the Wagmore grant after demonstrating our work at Watermelon Pond to the Wagmore founders and others. He is now a master's student in the UF/IFAS School of Natural Resources and Environment, Wildlife Ecology and Conservation Department.

By Eric Amundson

Great Florida Birding & Wildlife Trail—Update!

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission has launched the newly redesigned [Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail website!](#) With over 500 birding and wildlife viewing locations across the state, this major update makes it easier than ever for birders and wildlife viewers to explore Florida's natural wonders. What's new?

Interactive "Find a Site" Map

Easily discover wildlife hotspots by entering a location or selecting Florida's favorite birds, activities and amenities.

Beginner-Friendly Resources: New sections offer tips for those just getting started with birding and wildlife watching.

Florida's Birds and Wildlife Highlights: Explore the species and ecosystems that make Florida unique.

Start exploring today at FloridaBirdingTrail.com



The 2025 June Challenge Results

Mike Manetz's annual June Challenge limerick was spot on. I won't go so far as to say that sitting at my computer and following the discoveries on WhatsApp was as exciting as actually being in the hunt, but it was pretty exciting nonetheless! Let's say a WhatsApp post announces a rarity at Watermelon Pond in the southwest corner of the county. Oh woe, writes John in a response, I am many miles to the east at Newnans Lake! I will jump in my car and head across the county to Watermelon Pond! Forty-five minutes later, John posts a line of sad-face emojis and writes that the Watermelon Pond bird has vanished! Ten seconds later Trudy posts a sighting of a new rarity – at Newnans Lake! John writes, "Keep it there for me!" and jumps in his car and heads back to where he started from! Will he be successful this time? Will the rarity fly away the moment he pulls into the parking lot? Stay tuned! This maddening but not even slightly unusual bird behavior, appearing and then disappearing and then appearing again and then disappearing again and then appearing somewhere else – I'm looking at you, Willet! – played out day after day on WhatsApp during June. When Bob Wallace founded the Alachua County Birding Facebook page in 2013, this is exactly what he was hoping for: you see a rarity, a few seconds later you post your sighting, your sighting is instantaneously distributed to other local birders, and twenty people are enroute before you've even put your phone back in your pocket. Facebook turned out to be unsuitable for this because rare bird sightings got buried under highlights from the Gator game, a GoFundMe appeal from some guy who wanted to make the glazed doughnut the State Pastry, and seventeen pictures of your sister's cat. So it's proper to remember and recognize that it was Peter Polshek who spent years urging us to switch over to WhatsApp before we actually did it. Peter, you have our belated thanks.

*The birders in June won't be nappin'
When a rarity comes a-flappin'.
They won't miss the word
About a good bird --
They're twenty-four-seven WhatsAppin'!*

By Mike Manetz

The spring that preceded this year's Challenge was not auspicious. Actually, since "auspice" means "an observation of birds for the purpose of obtaining omens," spring was in fact *extremely* auspicious: finding migrants in April and May was like pulling teeth, and that's always a bad omen for June birding. By late March the last mud flats on Paynes Prairie's central basin were drying up, and by June they were gone. Preston Ballard wrote, "Ben Fick and I did about a 7–8-mile hike out there from Bolen Bluff on June 3rd. There was no water and nearly no mud at all. Just a sea of grass – quite tall grass, truly a prairie....I really wonder if Levy Lake or Barr Hammock or something might have mud somewhere? At this point I'm just hoping to even get a single Semipalmated Sandpiper. If anyone knows where literally any mud would be right now please do share." There was in fact a little bit of mud left on the Prairie, not quite an acre, running along the east side of US-441 near Bolen Bluff. Initially it attracted great numbers of water birds, mostly local nesters like Mottled Ducks, Black-necked Stilts, and herons, but also Roseate Spoonbills (up to 50!) and two Blue-winged Teal. But a few days into the Challenge it started to attract a more exotic clientele: on the 4th a Caspian Tern showed up, on the 7th a Stilt Sandpiper, and on the 12th a Short-billed Dowitcher, only the second-ever June occurrence for Alachua County. A couple of other spots held enough water for a shorebird or two: Preston found a Lesser Yellowlegs at the Hague dairy on the 1st. Richard Kaskan found a one-legged Spotted Sandpiper at Sweetwater Wetlands Park on the 11th, a Greater Yellowlegs at Watermelon Pond on the 14th, and a Willet at the Butler Plaza retention ponds on the 26th. That was it for migrant shorebirds, six species, which is actually quite good for a normal June Challenge; we've been spoiled by the abundance of the past few years.

A bigger story than the paucity of shorebirds this year was the variety of terns. If we're going to see several species of terns during a June Challenge, we usually require a tropical storm to blow them inland. But we didn't have a tropical storm this June, and the terns came inland anyway, maybe just out of habit at this point. First – and I need to take a deep breath before I start typing – first was a Black Tern at Newnans Lake on the 3rd, then the Caspian at the 441 mud flats on the 4th (remaining through the 8th), a Forster's at Lake Lochloosa on the 5th, a Least and three Commons at Newnans on the 6th, another Black Tern, this one at Watermelon Pond on the 8th, another Least and five Commons at Newnans on the 9th, two more Commons at Bivens Arm on the 10th, two Forster's at Newnans, and yet another two Commons and a Least at Lochloosa on the 11th, a Sandwich at Newnans on the

12th through the 14th, (only the second June occurrence in the county), a Royal at Newnans on the 14th, another Least at Newnans on the 15th, a Forster's at Orange Lake on the 18th, and another Black at Watermelon Pond on the 19th. Toward the end of the month Tim Hardin arranged boat trips that found a Common Tern on Lake Santa Fe on the 21st and two Royals on Santa Fe on the 28th. That's 29 terns of seven species. All in fair weather. And I'm not counting the many "tern sp." that were too distant to identify.

Miscellaneous rarities were few this year: a Ring-necked Duck off the 441 observation platform during most of the month and five more at Barr Hammock, a Bobolink on the 1st, only the fourth June record for the county, a Brown Pelican at Newnans on the 17th and 18th and another at Orange Lake on the 18th, and an American Goldfinch at a Micanopy feeder during the first few days of the month and then again during the last few. Two birders who weren't participating in the Challenge – I know, crazy, right? – saw birds that no one else did: Jonathan Mays saw a Gray Catbird in southeast Gainesville on the 19th and passed the information on to me, but none of the birders who looked for it were able to relocate it. And Jean Lansford photographed a Rose-breasted Grosbeak in the Idylwild neighborhood on the 3rd, the county's first June record ever. Ms. Lansford did not notify anyone of this. Perhaps she foresaw the stampede of birders on her front porch and decided against it.

Sadly, the ultra-rare White-breasted Nuthatch that visited Geoff Parks' yard on May 22nd didn't stick around to be seen during the Challenge.

As usually happens, the last five days of the month saw the beginning of fall migration: the aforementioned Willet on the 26th, a Belted Kingfisher at Sweetwater Wetlands Park on the 27th, a Pied-billed Grebe at Sweetwater and a Louisiana Waterthrush along the Santa Fe River on the 28th, and a trifecta on the 30th, a Louisiana Waterthrush, a Belted Kingfisher, and a Black-and-white Warbler along the Santa Fe River on the 30th.

Eight times in the previous 21 June Challenges we've had a two-way tie for first place. This year it happened for the ninth time, and in addition we had our first-ever two-way tie for second place. Since that's already four people, there was no third-place winner this year. Our first-place winners were Ben Fick, who holds the record for the second-highest June Challenge total ever (145 in 2023), and, for the sixth time in a row (!), Tim Hardin. We'll be retiring Tim's number in a small ceremony later this year, prior to inducting him into the June Challenge Hall of Fame. Both Ben and Tim saw 131 species. Tied for second place with 129 species were Preston Ballard and Dottie Dreyer. Preston, who is currently tied with Tim Hardin for the most bird species seen in Alachua County in 2025, discovered or was involved in the discovery of some of the Challenge's best birds, such as the Sandwich Tern and the Short-billed Dowitcher. Dottie made a real impression on me a couple of years ago when she offhandedly mentioned that she had been wandering through the pines at Longleaf Flatwoods Reserve at 11:00 at night, searching for (I think) a screech owl. My mind is still boggled by that. This year we also had an entry in the under-18 category, Ollie Flanagan. Ollie is 17 and a student of another Challenger, Ellen Frattino. Ollie vows to be back next year with a driver's license and a car and will give all of us elderly folks a run for our money.



Tim Hardin and Ben Fick tied for first place.

Everyone – not just the winners – should report his or her totals to FWC's statewide June Challenge page [here](#). The deadline is July 7th, so hurry! (Yeah, I know. My fault.) It takes about two minutes to complete.

On to the numbers. Taking all the winning totals from 2004 to 2025 and lopping off the two lowest and the two highest, the average of the rest is 118. We first beat that average in the ninth year of the Challenge, 2012, but we've beaten it every year since 2019, six years in a row. This year's were the third-highest winning totals in the 22 years that we've been doing this. Anyway, here are the results. Ties are listed in alphabetical order by last name. Ben Fick 131, Tim Hardin 131, Preston Ballard 129, Dottie Dreyer 129, Raci Ulusoy 128, Eileen Ahlquist 127, Ellen Frattino 125, Sharon Kuchinski 122, Bert Foquet 120, Mark Gorday 120, Anne Casella 119, Pelin Karaca 117, Pratibha Singh 117, Kristen Suggs 116, Tina Greenberg 113, Barbara Shea 111, Renee Slaw 111, Chris Cattau 109, Richard Kaskan 107, Austin Gregg 102, Jeanette Matheny 102, Bob Carroll 101, Glenn Israel 100, Diane Pruitt 100, Jerry Pruitt 100, Eric Link 98, , Tonya Becker 96, Rex Rowan 96, Becky Enneis 95, Emily

Schwartz 94, Linda Holt 93, Judith Hunt 92, John Martin 89, Will Salmon 88, Cyndi Dunphy 86, Jamielee Thompson 84, Stephanie Hornbuckle 82, Tom Wronski 81, Anne Barkdoll 54.

Under-18 Category: Oliver Flanagan 53

We also had an out-of-county entry: Lackawanna, County, Pennsylvania. Richard Carroll 47. (Richard, age 14, is Bob Carroll's nephew, and this is his third June Challenge!) (Good work, Richard and Bob!)

And here's the complete list of bird species seen in Alachua County during the Challenge (not all were seen by all participants): Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Canada Goose, Muscovy Duck, Wood Duck, Blue-winged Teal, Mallard, Mottled Duck, Ring-necked Duck, Northern Bobwhite, Wild Turkey, Pied-billed Grebe, Rock Pigeon, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Common Ground Dove, White-winged Dove, Mourning Dove, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Common Nighthawk, Chuck-will's-widow, Chimney Swift, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, King Rail, Common Gallinule, American Coot, Purple Gallinule, Gray-headed Swamphen, Limpkin, Sandhill Crane, Black-necked Stilt, Killdeer, Stilt Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher, Spotted Sandpiper, Lesser Yellowlegs, Willet, Greater Yellowlegs, Laughing Gull, Least Tern, Caspian Tern, Black Tern, Common Tern, Forster's Tern, Royal Tern, Sandwich Tern, Wood Stork, Anhinga, Double-crested Cormorant, American White Pelican, Brown Pelican, Least Bittern, Little Blue Heron, Tricolored Heron, Snowy Egret, Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron, Green Heron, Great Egret, Western Cattle Egret, Great Blue Heron, White Ibis, Glossy Ibis, Roseate Spoonbill, Black Vulture, Turkey Vulture, Osprey, Swallow-tailed Kite, Cooper's Hawk, Bald Eagle, Mississippi Kite, Snail Kite, Red-shouldered Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, Short-tailed Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, American Barn Owl, Eastern Screech-Owl, Great Horned Owl, Burrowing Owl, Barred Owl, Belted Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, American Kestrel, Great Crested Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Acadian Flycatcher, White-eyed Vireo, Yellow-throated Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Loggerhead Shrike, Blue Jay, American Crow, Fish Crow, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Bank Swallow, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Purple Martin, Barn Swallow, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Carolina Wren, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, Northern Mockingbird, European Starling, Eastern Bluebird, House Sparrow, House Finch, American Goldfinch, Bachman's Sparrow, Eastern Towhee, Yellow-breasted Chat, Bobolink, Eastern Meadowlark, Orchard Oriole, Red-winged Blackbird, Brown-headed Cowbird, Common Grackle, Boat-tailed Grackle, Louisiana Waterthrush, Black-and-white Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Hooded Warbler, Northern Parula, Pine Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Summer Tanager, Northern Cardinal, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Blue Grosbeak.

By Rex Rowan

Library Birding Kits Update

In 2021, Alachua Audubon embarked on a partnership with the Alachua County Library District to bring free birding kits to the public. AAS created and donated 10 backpacks containing a pair of binoculars, a bird field guide, and an educational resource notebook; the library branches made them available to patrons. Since that time, the birding kits have been checked out over 400 times. And there is often a waiting list for this item.

This year it was decided to refurbish the birding kits by updating the resource notebook and replacing the single pair of binoculars with two new rubberized, waterproof, lightweight pairs. Two pairs of binoculars enables multiple family members or friends to go birding together. The new binoculars are smaller and lighter than the originals, making them more user friendly to children while also being adequate for adults. Thanks to a bulk purchase, the cost of this upgrade was approximately \$1,200 for 20 new pairs.

The used binoculars from the original kits were returned to AAS to add to our collection of loaners that are used at educational outreach and other events.

We are excited to continue this successful program that allows community members to explore birding alone, with friends, or with family at no cost, and encourages participation in our active birding community.

By Karen Brown



Everglades Emergency

Alachua Audubon fully supports Audubon Florida's statement on the Proposed Detention Facility at the Everglades Jetport Site in Big Cypress National Preserve:

For 125 years in Florida, Audubon has worked in partnership to advance durable conservation solutions which benefit birds, habitat and people. We were on the front lines in 1968 when bulldozers began clearing a massive tract of Everglades land for what was to become a regional airport hub between Miami and Naples, known as "The Jetport." Back then, there were no modern environmental assessments, permitting requirements with teeth, or substantial public transparency, but Floridians rallied and thwarted this catastrophic proposal that would have meant, in the words of the Nixon Administration's Leopold Report, "death for the Everglades." Any proposal for the use of this site in the middle of Big Cypress National Preserve should be considered with the transparency, accountability, and environmental review that modern Floridians now expect, and that our Everglades deserve. We believe the establishment of a detention center at this site is moving forward with haste and has not met these expectations.

Alternatives exist, and there is only one Everglades.

While Audubon recognizes the state's authority under emergency order to fast track this work for temporary site use, we oppose this use for the site and urge the administration to simultaneously evaluate capacity needs and alternative locations. A priority should be placed on more economical and resilient site options without substantial risk to the public's investment in Everglades Restoration or the residents of the nearby Miccosukee Indian Village. The Everglades is the foundation of South Florida's quality of life, economic prosperity, and drinking water.

Audubon Florida

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SCAN TO SIGN UP

Sweetwater Wetlands Park &
Alachua Audubon Society

Present

Wednesday Bird
Walks at the Wetlands



Will resume in September!

When: Every Wednesday @ 8:30 am
from September - May

Where: Sweetwater Wetlands Park -
Entrance Pavilion

Walks are free with park admission fee (\$5/vehicle)
Bring water, binoculars, sunscreen, and walking shoes



Florida Young Birders Club



The Florida Young Birders Club is welcoming people ages 9 - 17 in Florida who have an interest in birds or birding. We have active chapters in Tampa Bay, Orlando, and St. Augustine plus new chapters forming in Sarasota, Charlotte Harbor and Gainesville.

Our club offers:

- Unique 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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Spot eagles, cranes, and wrens with a Birding Kit created by your library and the Alachua Audubon Society.

Each backpack contains:

- Binoculars
- Local resource guide
- Birding field guide book





Reserve a kit online for pick up at your preferred library branch. Kits check out for 14 days.

www.aclib.us/birdingkits

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 3rd, at 5:45 pm





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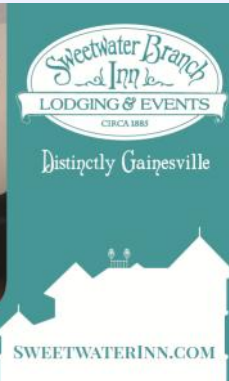
Check out the Paynes Prairie Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society [here](#). Meetings take place on third Wednesdays – September through May (excluding December) – 7:00 pm at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship at 4225 NW 34th Street, Gainesville in Phillips Hall. The public is welcome to attend. Join their chapter to attend monthly field trips.



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While we do not send requests for donations via email or paper mail, we do appreciate donations any time of the year. We are an all-volunteer organization and all donations are used to fund our many community projects. Donations may be made by individuals, families, on behalf of others, or as bequests. Please use our donate button [here](#), or send a check to AAS, PO Box 140464, Gainesville 32614-0464. For questions, please send an email to contact@AlachuaAudubon.org.



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Choosing a higher level provides additional support for our conservation & education efforts.

Student	\$10	Individual	\$25
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Sandhill Crane			\$500
Whooping Crane (<i>lifetime membership</i>)			\$1,000

Sliding scale memberships welcome. Send what you can afford.

DONATIONS ARE ALWAYS APPRECIATED. DONATE [HERE](#).

Join online with PayPal at 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/ 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](#), [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*. To **renew** your National membership, click [here](#).

Please send any membership questions to AlachuaAudubonMembership@gmail.com

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.

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. 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.

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.

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