

Alachua Audubon Society Code of Conduct
Approved by the Board of Directors August 13, 2025

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I. Introduction

Alachua Audubon Society (AAS) is committed to creating a culture where board members, volunteers, chapter members and event participants feel welcome, secure, and appreciated for their contributions and participation. Adherence to core ethical principles will ensure:

- openness and respect to a diversity of people and ideas in all aspects of the Society's conduct;
- support and encouragement to help everyone develop their birding skills and experience; and
- a safe environment for all members of the birding community.

AAS has developed this Code of Conduct Policy (“Policy”) to set forth standards for professional behavior. This Policy also creates a process for addressing reported violations.

II. People, Entities and Activities Covered by the Code of Conduct Policy

This Policy applies to all “Society Affiliates” that participate in or are involved in any AAS-sponsored event, meeting, social media or other activity sponsored, funded, or conducted by the Society in any capacity. Society Affiliates include, but are not limited to, board and committee members; chapter members; volunteers; and any individuals, groups or entities organizing, leading, attending, or otherwise participating in such activities.

Board members will be asked to read this Policy and agree to abide by it in writing upon joining the AAS board. Event leaders or board members will have a print or digital copy of the Code of Conduct available during events to reference as needed. Society Affiliates will have access to the Code of Conduct through the AAS website and other media.

III. Professional Conduct

To promote ethical and professional conduct and to foster free expression and exchange of ideas, the Policy prohibits Society Affiliates from engaging in the conduct listed below whether intentional or unintentional, or implicit or explicit. Board members and leaders supervising volunteers must act professionally, fostering a respectful and welcoming environment. Inappropriate behavior, including harassment, bullying, intimidation, or any other form of misconduct, is not tolerated.

This Policy prohibits discrimination or harassment based on gender, race, ethnic or national origin, religion, age, marital status, pregnancy or parental status, sexual orientation, gender expression, disability status, physical appearance, socioeconomic level, political affiliation, or other protected status.

A. Discrimination:

treatment of an individual or group that results in unfair, unequal, or differential opportunities or benefits.

B. Harassment:

conduct that involves unwelcome or unwanted, or persistent offensive or hostile behavior that is directed toward a person or group. Harassment can be manifested by, but not limited to, verbal or written abuse such as slurs, epithets, jokes, or stereotyping; non-verbal behavior, such as obscene gestures; or the display of denigrating or insulting written or graphic materials.

C. Sexual harassment:

unwelcome conduct such as sexual advances; requests for sexual favors or dates; remarks about an individual's appearance; discussions, remarks or jokes of a sexual nature; behavior involving "quid pro quo" offers of professional or other opportunities; other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature; and non-verbal behavior, such as unwanted physical contact or violations of personal space that are of a sexual nature.

D. Bullying:

unwelcome or unreasonable verbal or non-verbal behavior by an individual or group that demeans, intimidates, humiliates, abuses, or sabotages the work of people and causes physical or emotional harm. Bullying behavior is most often aggressive, persistent, and part of a pattern, but it can also occur as a single egregious incident. Bullying often involves abuse of supervisory authority or position. Exercising appropriate authority, directing the work of others pursuant to their job responsibilities, an honest error, and respectful scientific debate over differences of opinion are not considered bullying behavior.

E. Other Conduct:

The Society reserves the right to expand or consider other conduct that is found to be unprofessional, unacceptable, unethical, or harmful to others as a violation of this Policy.

IV. Policy for Activities Involving Minors

Connecting kids with nature is a priority initiative of AAS. The safety and well-being of these minors is our top priority. AAS Activity Leaders accept that they will act in a supervisory role and shall treat each minor with respect.

A. Supervision

1. At least two adults (preferably including one AAS Activity Leader and one parent, guardian, or approved chaperone) must be present for any event involving minors. No unrelated adult volunteer or participant should be alone with a minor before, during, or after AAS-sponsored activities without parent permission.
2. AAS encourages parents or guardians to attend or observe any events or field trips in which their child is participating.
3. If parent/guardian(s) are not present, an emergency contact should be provided.
4. Parent/guardian(s) may be asked to sign a liability waiver on behalf of their child.

B. Transportation

1. AAS volunteers and leaders may not transport minors unless they are the minor's legal guardian or have written consent from a parent/guardian.
2. Prompt drop off and pick up is the responsibility of parent/guardian(s) unless transportation has been organized by an event AAS is sponsoring.

3. AAS does not assume responsibility for minors that do not have transportation after an event has ended.

C. Interactions

1. No adult participant shall conduct unsupervised, one-on-one instruction or activities with a minor outside of scheduled AAS events unless authorized by the parent or guardian.
2. No AAS volunteer, employee, or adult participant shall interact with a minor in a way that could be construed as inappropriate, abusive, sexually suggestive, or involving the use or presence of illegal substances including drugs, alcohol, or tobacco.
3. If Society Affiliates observe any concerning behaviors, injuries, or interactions involving a minor, they shall immediately notify the minor's guardian(s) and report the matter to the AAS Executive Committee. AAS Activity Leaders shall respond to parent or guardian questions and concerns promptly and respectfully.
4. All communication between non-related adult volunteers and minors via personal email, text, social media, or any other private platform must be strictly limited to AAS-related events or topics. Personal, unrelated, or inappropriate communication is not permitted under any circumstance.

D. Conduct of minors

1. With the support of their parent(s) or guardian(s), minors should follow AAS guidelines, remain with the group, listen to instructions, and show courtesy to others and the environment. Minors are expected to treat AAS leaders, volunteers, peers, and wildlife with respect, and to maintain a positive, cooperative attitude throughout the activity.

V. Policy for AAS Social Media and Commenting

The Society encourages its board members, chapter members and all others interested in AAS's mission to participate on its social media platforms, including blog posts, to facilitate lively, constructive, and respectful conversations about birding and avian conservation. Any misconduct displayed on online communication platforms affiliated with Alachua Audubon Society whether public posting, commenting or private messaging is covered by the Professional Code of Conduct as described in this document. In its efforts to ensure a welcoming and safe environment for online dialogue on its social media platforms, the Society may, at its discretion:

- Delete or hide comments (as appropriate, per platform) that could be interpreted as spam (i.e., content that is irrelevant to the conversation)
- Unfollow or block accounts when the posted content violates a given platform's stated rules and policies, including harassment and threats of violence, or constitutes extended and egregious provocation (e.g., abusive direct messages), or
- Unfollow or block accounts that violate (on- or off-line) this Policy.

VI. Handling Potential Violations of Society Policy

A. Jurisdiction

1. The Executive Committee or its designee(s) shall have jurisdiction to receive and determine the handling of any Complaint of a violation by an alleged offender ("Respondent") of the Policy filed by a Society Affiliate (the "Complainant"). In the event that a Respondent terminates their membership or association with the AAS subsequent to the filing of a complaint against them, the Executive Committee shall have discretion to resolve the Complaint as if the Respondent were still a member or other individual covered by AAS Policy.

B. Submitting a Complaint

1. Who can submit a complaint?

- a) Any Society Affiliate who becomes aware of, experiences, or witnesses another Society Affiliate potentially in breach of the Policy.

2. Anonymous complaints

- a) The Executive Committee does not evaluate or investigate anonymous complaints (where the identity of the Complainant is not revealed) to minimize the potential for intentionally false, frivolous, and/or malicious reporting of violations; to provide adequate information for the Respondent to respond to the substance of the Complaint, which may include who filed a Complaint against them on a case-by-case basis; and as AAS cannot secure records, documents, or other evidentiary materials independently and cannot accept materials from an unknown source where credibility cannot be ascertained.
- b) Society Affiliates who wish to remain anonymous can submit their concern in writing to the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee will not consider such communications as a formal, filed Complaint as described in this Policy, but the stated concern will be discussed and tracked.

3. Confidentiality

- a) All participants in the investigation must respect the confidentiality of the investigatory process to the extent possible while a complaint is being reviewed, investigated, and resolved as long as the rights of others or the ability to conduct an appropriate investigation are not compromised. Failure to maintain confidentiality as outlined above is a serious violation of this Policy.
- b) Disclosures will be made at the discretion of the Executive Committee or its designees and/or in the interests of safety or law; therefore, confidentiality is not guaranteed.

4. Retaliation and Bad Faith Reporting

- a) The Society will not tolerate any form of retaliation against individuals who in good faith file a Complaint or assist in an investigation of reported misconduct or ethics violations covered by this Policy. Similarly, bad faith

accusations in which there have been intentionally false, frivolous, and/or malicious reporting of violations will not be tolerated. Retaliation and bad faith reporting violate this Policy and will be subject to investigation and the same types of disciplinary action for other forms of misconduct.

C. How to submit a Complaint

1. AAS must have received a written Complaint before initiating a review or investigation. An email can be sent to contact@alachuaudubon.org to contact the Executive Committee or a written Complaint can be submitted to an individual board member who shall forward the Complaint to the Executive Committee. If the Complaint pertains to Executive Committee member(s), the involved parties will be excluded from the preliminary review. AAS encourages individuals to file Complaints as near in time as possible to the occurrence of the underlying conduct violation to facilitate an investigation.
2. Details Required of a Complaint
 - a) The name and contact information of the Complainant. If the violation is witnessed by and/or reported independently by an individual who was not directly involved in the underlying violation, include how they became aware of the misconduct and the name(s) and contact information of involved parties or witnesses/others with pertinent information if known.
 - b) The name and contact information of the Respondent if known.
 - c) As much detailed information as is available of the Policy violation, including the date, approximate time, location/setting/activity, and all known relevant facts and circumstances.
 - d) A clear statement of any facts that may indicate any ongoing concern of imminent threat to safety of any person(s), animals, or property, and the sources of such facts, with contact information if known.
 - e) Any relevant supporting documents available to the person filing the complaint (e.g., emails, notes, publications, posts, etc.), if available.
 - f) Any other information that would help the Society understand the full nature of the Complaint.

D. Preliminary review

1. Evaluation of the Complaint
 - a) When the Society is informed of a reported violation of the Policy, the Executive Committee or its designee(s) will conduct a preliminary review to evaluate the Complaint and determine whether to initiate an investigation.
 - b) Considerations for evaluating a Complaint for Investigation:
 - (1) The Complaint pertains to a violation(s) of the Policy of the Society.
 - (2) The Complaint is "timely," although there is no specific time limitation for a Complainant to file a Complaint.
 - (3) The Complaint is attributed to an individual or group of individuals; it is not anonymous.
 - (4) The Complaint does not allege misconduct that is or may be the subject of outside legal or institutional proceedings. In such circumstances, the

Executive Committee or its designee(s) may be notified of the Complaint but may defer proceeding with the Complaint until the conclusion of the other legal or institutional proceedings or may decide not to consider the Complaint.

- (5) The Complaint is deemed credible.
- (6) AAS is the entity with primary jurisdiction over the matters raised in the Complaint and is the primary entity where investigative and/or corrective measures are best taken.

c) Interim Steps

- (1) The Executive Committee or its designee(s) may take interim steps prior to evaluation or investigation of a complaint. For example, if a Complaint is received concerning misconduct during a Society meeting/event, the Executive Committee or its designee(s), at its discretion, may require a Respondent to leave the meeting/event before or during an open investigation to avoid disruption of the meeting/event, or to ensure the safety of other participants. The Executive Committee or designee(s) may also decide to notify meeting or event participants or others of a pending investigation in the interests of safety or to require the Respondent to maintain a distance and separation from other participants during the period of the event.

d) Designation of Investigators

- (1) If proceeding with an investigation, the Executive Committee or appointed designee(s) will act as Investigator(s).

(2) Conflicts of Interest

- (a) A conflict of interest includes any circumstance where a member of the Executive Committee or its designee(s) have professional, financial, or other personal interests that might directly or potentially interfere with their ability to act as an impartial investigator or decision maker.
- (b) Prior to participating in an investigation, individuals must disclose any direct or potential conflicts of interest. Upon such disclosure, the Executive Committee or its designee(s) shall determine whether a conflict exists. If a conflict of interest is identified, the conflicted individual shall be recused from the investigation or any decision-making role.
- (c) The Complainant or Respondent may raise issues about potential conflicts of interest with investigators at any point during the investigative process for review and resolution.

e) Notification of investigation or dismissal

- (1) The Executive Committee or its designee(s) will notify the Complainant when their Complaint has been evaluated and if the Complaint will be investigated; if being investigated, they will provide an outline of the investigative procedures.

- (2) The Board of Directors also will be advised at the next scheduled board meeting or sooner, as the Executive Committee deems appropriate.

E. Investigation

1. Scope

- a) The investigation of a Complaint will be conducted as determined by the Executive Committee or its designee(s). The designated Investigator(s) will determine the scope and nature of the investigation. The investigation will generally involve interviews of the Complainant, the Respondent and relevant witnesses, and the review of relevant documents and of other materials and communications provided by the Complainant and witnesses. The Respondent will receive sufficient information about the Complaint and its allegations, as determined by the 1, to allow an adequate opportunity to respond to the Complaint and to present their own evidence to the Investigator.

2. Timeline

- a) The Investigator(s) shall establish a proposed timeline for completion of the investigation and submission of an investigation report. Where possible, the investigation will be completed no more than 30 days after the complaint where possible.
- b) The Investigator(s) will inform the Board of Directors of their recommendations, which will be implemented upon a majority vote to accept or reject the recommendations.

F. Report

1. The investigation report will generally include the following content:

- a) A summary of the investigation process and the Investigator's findings, including: the alleged violations of the Policy; whether the investigation finds that the Respondent violated any provision of the Policy; the basis for such findings; any recommended actions
- b) The written Complaint and any written response of the Respondent.
- c) Notes summarizing the interviews conducted by the Investigator.
- d) Written documentation provided by the parties and any witnesses.
- e) Written documentation independently gathered by the Investigator.

2.

- a) The Investigator will inform the Complainant and Respondent in writing of its determination and provide a summary of the investigation process and findings adopted by the Executive Committee. Information may be redacted to protect confidentiality or if not relevant to the above parties (e.g., recommendations for policy or procedural changes). This is the final decision of the Society, except on appeal of the Complainant to the Executive Committee.
- b) The investigation summary and findings shall be retained as a permanent record in the Society's minutes.

G. Recommendations

It is the intent that the range of available actions are as broad and flexible as possible so that they may be employed to remedy and redress any violation that has occurred. Actions may be private or public. The Society may, at its discretion, notify relevant entities of any disciplinary action taken in response to a Policy violation. Such action will only be taken if imposed in accordance with the Society bylaws and applicable law.

1. Mediation and Informal Resolution

- a) When reporting a violation or at any other point during the investigative process, Complainants may seek an informal resolution. Informal resolutions vary depending on the nature of the complaint and the perspective of the individual making the complaint. For example, the Executive Committee may be made aware of a breach where the Complainant's goal is to raise awareness of an issue that may be addressed and resolved by leadership through changes in program or operational procedures, practices, or policies rather than an investigation of the Respondent.
- b) An informal resolution may be appropriate when (1) no laws were broken, (2) a misunderstanding occurred and was corrected, (3) lessons have been learned by those in need of education; (4) there has been an authentic commitment to avoid a repetition of the cause of the Complaint; (5) such a resolution is consistent with the values of the Society and goals of this Policy, and (6) considering the above and the nature of the Complaint, a sense of safety and inclusion was successfully restored without the need for further action. In such cases, the final outcome will be reported to the Board of Directors and the Complaint will be considered resolved.
- c) At any point during the process, mediation may be requested or suggested by the Complainant as well as the Executive Committee or its designee(s) and would be employed only with the consent of the Complainant and the Respondent. If mediation is successful, the resolution will be made in writing and signed by the Complainant, Respondent, and the Executive Committee. No further action will be taken on the Complaint except as set forth in the mediation resolution.

2. Disciplinary Action

- a) No Sanction. A ruling that no disciplinary action or sanction is appropriate.
- b) A written letter. A written private or public letter to the Respondent that may be educative or reprimanding in nature concerning the allegations or related matters. An educative letter may be issued whether or not there is a finding of a violation of the Policy.
- c) Probation or expulsion from AAS Activities. A ruling that the Respondent is prevented from participating, compelled to leave, or be removed from an AAS activity or event, at their own cost, or is barred from participating in

future AAS activities or events (in person or virtual), whether a member or an affiliate, for a specified period of time or permanently. Conditions may be established that, if satisfied, will result in the lifting of the bar on participation at AAS activities or events. The applicant bears the burden of demonstrating with appropriate documentation that conditions that led to the barring of participation have been rectified and that, on lifting of the bar, the applicant will abide by the Policy.

- d) Removal from an elected, appointed, or volunteered position of Society leadership for the remainder of their leadership term. Removal will be public if allowed by applicable law.
- e) Termination of membership. AAS bylaws permit the Society to terminate the membership of any Member. Termination will be public if allowed by applicable law. When membership is terminated, AAS shall not be required to refund or reimburse membership fees or dues.

3. Restorative Remedies

- a) The Society is under no obligation to provide restorative remedies but may opt to do so if appropriate in context of the violation, if the Respondent takes responsibility for their conduct and demonstrates sincere commitment to betterment, or if deemed beneficial to the community, the Society, or individuals harmed by the Respondent's actions. Remedies would be enacted after consulting the harmed parties (if different than the Complainant), the Respondent, and the Complainant, whenever possible or practical. Remedies may be initiated in order to
 - diminish the effect of previous unethical conduct,
 - elevate understanding of harm caused by such conduct,
 - enhance relationships,
 - improve conduct,
 - serve the restorative justice wishes of any harmed parties,
 - advance safety for those affected; and
 - prevent recurrence of any undesirable conduct, eventually enabling positive participation.

H. Appeals

- 1. The Respondent or the Complainant may submit a written appeal to the Executive Committee or its designees following the final decision if (1) newly surfaced, consequential facts are discovered that were not previously available when the decision was made; (2) consequences appear grossly disproportionate (in leniency or stringency) to the violation found, considering how similar situations were handled, if any, under current Society Policy (i.e., not under prior policies); (3) there are a lack of facts to support the decision; (4) there exists a conflict of interest by a decision maker; or (5) there was a failure, which hindered the appellant's ability to address critical concerns.

2. If a written appeal is submitted, the Executive Committee or its designee(s) will determine if the appeal is valid and, if so, determine what further action shall be taken.