



The Crane

Volume 67 Number 3 January – February 2026

FIELD TRIPS

JANUARY

New Year's Big Day!

Thursday, January 1st, 2026 · 7:00am – 5:00pm
NAS/AAS members **ONLY** sign-up event.

Ready to kick off your birding year with the biggest of big days? Join Tim Hardin's fifth annual Alachua County New Year's Big Day. To offer the best birding experience, this event will be limited to 50 people. You must be an Alachua Audubon member or a National Audubon member residing in Alachua County. To join Alachua Audubon, visit our website [here](#). You may sign up for the event [here](#):

We will be visiting multiple locations that will be announced via email to registered participants. For questions about accessibility, please message organizers.

Tim anticipates that participants of this free guided birding trip can tally at least 100 different bird species by the end of the day but don't be surprised if the day ends up with 120+ bird species seen or heard throughout the day. Last year's (1/1/2025) version of this event tallied 127 total species for the day (<https://ebird.org/tripreport/189723>)!

St Marks National Wildlife Refuge

January 10, 2026, 8:30am – January 11, 2026, 12:00pm
OVERNIGHT TRIP
1255 Lighthouse Road, St Marks, FL

Join us for a great day of birding at St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge in Wakulla County, Florida. Established in 1931, this historically and ecologically important property encompasses ~83,000 acres, includes 43 miles along the Gulf Coast, and spans 3 different counties. Offering spectacular views of quintessential Florida vistas, St. Marks has many distinct habitats and ecosystems and is a

permanent home or a migration stop for a large number of species, avian and otherwise.

We are excited to have Don Morrow as our guide once again. We will meet at the Visitor Center parking area and proceed from there. Carpooling is encouraged, but if you do so, make sure you have everything you need for the day with you. Bring lunch, snacks, and plenty of water, as neither potable water nor food is available in the park. (There are restrooms with running (non-potable) water.)

We will drive the 7-mile trip from the Visitor Center to the Lighthouse, making stops along the way. One or two stops may include 1–3-mile hikes, usually along flat, even trails in full sun, but most will have minimal walking.

If local reports have been good, we will try to visit Bottom's Road just before dusk, as a Short-Eared Owl sometimes overwinters in that area.

Expect to see anywhere from 50 to 75 species during the Saturday field trip.

Entrance fee is \$5 per vehicle, a national park pass or current duck stamp.

Day 2: We will meet early at Bottoms Road before moving further west to explore Otter Lake and its beautiful long-leaf pine habitat, Mashers Sands Beach area, and possibly

Inside this issue:

Evening Programs	p. 3
GREBEs; Birding Class	p. 4
Gainesville CBC Report	p. 6
Birding Etiquette...Please	p. 8
Melrose CBC Report	p. 9
FLIS CBC Report	p. 10
Pints & Predators	p. 11
County Birding & John Hintermister	p. 12

Bald Head Island.

Please see our [website calendar](#) for lodging and camping options.

Lake Pithlachocco (Newnans Lake East) Trail—Bird Ramble (weekday walk at an easy pace)

Thursday, January 15, 2026 · 9:00 – 11:00am

Trailhead: 29.661111, -82.254444

1404 NE 55th Boulevard, Gainesville

This group-led trip will be a 2.8 mile walk through Newnans State Forest property. The gum and bald cypress swamps extending from the Newnans Lake are the most intact natural systems in the State Forest and host a variety of wading birds and other wildlife. Halfway in, the trail opens up to a view of the lake with an ancient dugout canoe replica and picnic tables. There we will rest and have a snack before continuing the trail back to the parking lot. No restrooms are available.

Huguenot Memorial Park with Duval Audubon

Saturday, January 24, 2026 · 8:00am – 12:00pm

10980 Heckscher Drive, Jacksonville, FL

Meet at 30°24'44.2"N 81°25'10.7"W

Co-leaders: Maggie Paxson & Tim Hardin (Alachua Audubon) with William Hoeck & Jessica Dyszel (Duval Audubon)

Meet at the parking lot to consolidate cars and head to the beach. 4WD is preferable for beach driving to get to the north side of the park. Please ONLY drive on the beach if your vehicle is appropriately equipped. and at your discretion.

Winter birding can be especially productive with an excellent diversity of birds and much lower traffic on the beach. Targets include overwintering gulls, terns, waterfowl, and shorebirds, including the rare-in-Florida Purple Sandpipers and the rare-but-local Saltmarsh Sparrows. Other potential targets include Scoters, Northern Gannets, Piping and Snowy Plovers, Nelson's Sparrow, and the Ash-throated Flycatcher.

Entry to Huguenot Park is \$5 per vehicle. Non-members are welcome. Wear comfortable, preferably waterproof, footwear for walking in soft, sometimes wet, uneven sands.

Optional: If you choose to stay after Huguenot, we will break for lunch at noon.

There are multiple options nearby Huguenot for afternoon trips within a 15-minute drive radius, including Big

Talbot/Spoonbill Pond, Little Talbot, Fort George Island/ Kingsley Plantation, and Heritage River Road. Spoonbill Pond may have a chance for Marbled Godwits and Marsh Sparrows during high tide. Fort George Island is a nice drive-through for Painted Buntings. A ferry ride (\$6 per person) can take you across the river, or you can drive around for access to Hanna Park, Jax Arboretum, Theodore Roosevelt Park, Spanish Pond, and Fort Caroline. Jax Beach Pier is a further drive but a good location for sea ducks.

Gainesville Young Birders Club – Cofrin Nature Park

Saturday, January 31, 2026 · 9:00am- 10:30am

4810 NW 8th Ave, Gainesville

Join trip leader Maggie Paxson for an easy, beginner friendly birding walk in one of Gainesville's newer parks. We'll hike the 0.5 mile wooded trail, stopping to look for songbirds and other winter residents. We'll pay special attention along Beville Heights Creek, looking for woodpeckers, vireos, warblers, and Hermit Thrush that rely on the stream for water and insect food sources.

The Gainesville YBC is open to students aged 9-18, but younger siblings are welcome with parental supervision. Students should wear closed-toe shoes and sunscreen and bring water for the walk. This is a mostly wooded trail, but bugs will likely not be bad in January. Loaner binoculars are available.

FEBRUARY

Blues Creek Ravine Preserve – Bird Ramble

(weekday walk at an easy pace)

February 19, 2026 · 9:00am · 11:00 am

6710 NW 69th Avenue, Gainesville

This will be a group-led trip. Park on the side of NW 71st Street near NW 69th Ave. From there, we will walk down 69th Ave to the trailhead as a group.

This is a beautiful preserve brought to us by Alachua Conservation Trust. It follows Blues Creek along numerous rolling ravines. This 160-acre preserve is an almost pristine example of a North Florida upland habitat.

No restrooms. No entrance fee.

Additional field trips may be organized. Please check the field trip schedule on our website [here](#) for the most current information.

Alachua Audubon's Code of Conduct was created to foster a safe, welcoming, and respectful environment for all. Please view the full document on our website [here](#).

EVENING PROGRAMS

Ending Parrot Poaching in the Americas

by LoraKim Joyner—Affiliated program offering
Friday, January 9, 2026, 7 pm at Unitarian Universalist Fellowship,
4225 NW 34 St., Gainesville.

LoraKim Joyner will lecture and share slides and videos about One Earth Conservation's efforts to end parrot poaching and deforestation in the Americas in collaboration with Indigenous peoples. Alachua Audubon members and their guests, as well as the public, are invited to attend.



Linking Science, Citizen Conservation, and Land Management to Recover the Southeastern American Kestrel in Florida

by Dr. Ken Meyer, Senior Research Ecologist and Executive Director, and Gina Kent, Senior Conservation Scientist, Avian Research and Conservation Institute, Gainesville, Florida
Thursday, January 29, 2026, 6:45 – 8:00 pm at Cypress and Grove Brewing, 1001 NW 4th St, Gainesville

The American Kestrel breeds in the continental United States. This falcon's preference for open habitats has made it a symbol of wildlife on rural American lands. Unfortunately, the American Kestrel population has declined by 82% since the 1970s. This includes the nonmigratory genetically distinct subspecies known as the Southeastern American Kestrel (SEAK), one of only 32 birds listed as Endangered or Threatened by Florida Fish and Wildlife. Our state harbors most of the remaining SEAK population. Causes of this species' decline include loss of mature pine forests, declines in insect prey, suppression of wildfire, insufficient prescribed fire, urban development of farm and pasture lands, and elimination of dead trees and the cavities they provide. Our project aims to answer unaddressed questions about parental feeding rates, nesting success in natural cavities vs nest boxes, nest predators and predation rates, first-year survival rates and dispersal, home range areas, landscape habitat relationships, and the best strategies for deploying and maintaining nest boxes to promote increased reproductive success. Vital opportunities for public involvement occur at all stages of the SEAK recovery process.



The Bald Eagle: Symbol and Species in American History

presented by Jack Davis
Thursday, February 19, 2026, 6:45 – 8:00 pm at Cypress and Grove Brewing, 1001 NW 4th St, Gainesville

Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Jack Davis will share insights from his book *The Bald Eagle: The Improbable Journey of America's Bird*. He will recount the era when Americans pushed the Bald Eagle—the living species behind one of the country's most distinguished symbols—to the brink of extinction, which was followed by collective efforts that ultimately brought the species back. Davis's talk will highlight the pivotal role Bald Eagles in North-Central Florida played in regionwide restoration, while telling the story of a unique monument, supported by the Alachua Audubon Society, that honors those birds today.



Update from GREBE—Florida Audubon Campus Chapter



Dear Alachua Audubon Society Members,

We're excited to share what we've been up to here at the University of Florida Audubon Campus Chapter! GREBE, or Gator Ready for Exceptional Birding Experiences, has been a proud partner with Alachua Audubon for nearly a decade, and throughout this time, we have greatly benefited from the wealth of resources, know-ledge, and support shared by the Society and its members. This long-standing collaboration has been essential to our growth and success in promoting bird conservation on campus and in the surrounding community. It has been a pleasure for our team to nurture a love for birds among all who are interested and help to advance upcoming avian conservationists in their career prospects throughout this last semester.

Obviously, like many of you, we love to experience all the birds we possibly can, and getting to show a new species to people just starting out birding is one of the most rewarding and exciting things that we get to do. This semester Alachua Audubon and long-time member Glenn Israel have helped us immensely in this goal by offering a few spotting scopes for us to use! We cannot thank all of you enough! Without a scope, many birds would have been out of our reach. Even within the county, we have seen quite a few great birds already. One of our favorite places to use them over the past semester has been Palm Point Park, where we have seen Redhead, Red-breasted Merganser, Greater Scaup, and so many more ducks and gulls. This certainly would have been quite the task without a scope and for several members, it was the first time seeing these birds at all. A very memorable moment was when we woke up one morning to see that a Black Scoter had been spotted in Bivens Arm Lake and several of us rushed out to see it. We did not realize how far it was in the middle of the lake, and as we went to both sides of the lake, it felt like it



The GREBEs (Gator Ready for Exceptional Birding Experiences).

was purposely avoiding us! We were finally able to get it in the scope with the help of some other birders before we had to go to class – it was a wonderful start to the day.

Our favorite trip this last semester would have to be our October Big Day where we loaded eight of us into a car to spend the whole day birding, driving all the way to Jacksonville to see some shorebirds and migrants. Much of the day was spent at Huguenot, looking through what we now dub 'The Pirate Scope' trying to practice our shorebird ID until a king tide cut our session short. We managed to squeeze in some last-minute birding in Gainesville before grabbing dinner after a fun but exhausting day. Of course, that didn't stop us from arguing over some pictures at the table as we tried to add new species to our list. Though we certainly didn't break any records, we saw a ton of birds and made some great memories. Scopes are such a great tool, especially for new birders, as they give them time and clarity to really see a bird. Many members have expressed their excitement about getting to see new birds up close, and more people are able to come out and see clearly with our new optics! As we head into the new semester, we're excited to test out our scoping skills, especially with our upcoming trip to Merritt Island and our annual weekend camp at Ocala National Forest. We're hoping the Scrub Jays and ducks will help us make it through another semester. With Global Big Day approaching, we'll have to see how much we've learned since our last attempt.



GREBEs at the Big Sit with AAS board member Maggie Paxson (left).

It is truly a privilege to be a part of such an experienced and welcoming Audubon Society, and without all of your help, we would not be able to do many of these fantastic events and create so many memories. Whether you've helped us spot a bird in the field or supported us with your generous donations, we are deeply grateful. Thank you!

Jackson Martin, GREBE President, & The GREBE Team

Birding Class Offered

REGISTER NOW!

BIRD WATCHING COURSE

with Alachua Audubon and Santa Fe College

Develop your skills in identifying the birds in our region. Whether you are a beginner or have some experience in birding, *Introduction to Birds and Birding* will increase your knowledge and experience.

Santa Fe College Community Education in partnership with Alachua Audubon is offering this bird watching course (.1B6) on Saturday mornings from February 7–28. A second course (.2B6) will be held from April 4–25. The course consists of 4 field trips to local natural areas, guided by experienced birders. Field trips begin at 8:30 AM and last 2-2.5 hours.

Register online at the Santa Fe College Community Education website. For assistance, call 352-395-5193 and mention the course name above. Course Fee: \$49.00. Bring binoculars; they are essential for birding. Please register early as this class fills quickly.

The 2025 John Hintermister Gainesville Christmas Bird Count

Often, the factors that determine the success of a Christmas Bird Count (CBC) are those that happen *before* count day, like finding and staking out rarities, placing our army of hot-shot birders in the best places to find them, and, of course, figuring out whatever weather Mother Nature will throw at us. In 2025, however, it seemed to be events *after* count day for that cast light on how well we did. On Sunday night, after our long but pleasant day in the field, we gathered to count and compile our results. We found that we had reached a very respectable 169 bird species, just six off our all-time record of 175 species found in 2019 and 2024. Monday morning, we found out that two species – a flock of Least Sandpipers on Kanapaha Prairie and a lone swift species (likely Vaux's Swift) – had not been included at our compilation. As a result, we stood at an even more respectable 171 species.

But that same day, four excellent but tardy birds, not seen at all the day before, were discovered right in the heart of our count circle: first a Groove-billed Ani was photographed and audio recorded by an out-of-town birder at Sweetwater Wetlands (only about twelve previous county records and none in the past ten years). Birders searching for the ani then found a Barn Swallow at Sweetwater and a Western Kingbird at nearby La Chu Trail. Lastly, as the sun set at dusk that Monday, a second county record of Lesser Nighthawk swooped above Sweetwater Wetlands, found by birders extraordinaire Luis Gles and Mariah Hryniewich. The previous county record was a specimen found dead on Payne's Prairie. Luckily, most members of our huge Alachua County birding community got to enjoy this nighthawk on subsequent days, with extra-hours tours provided by rangers at Sweetwater Wetlands Park to see this crepuscular specialty.

Even if we missed those species on count day that would have pushed us into record-breaking territory, it ended up being a quite successful count. This was especially true considering that north-central Florida has been suffering through a lengthy drought, and almost the entire Paynes Prairie is now carpeted with vegetation with very little water anywhere.



As a result, waterbird numbers were quite down, and the dry upland habitats seemed to hold fewer birds than normal.

Nonetheless, we did see record-breaking numbers of some of our most common birds, likely continuing our tradition of setting national highs (see below). Our high counts this year were 224 Pileated Woodpeckers, 23 Barn Owls, 84 Great Horned Owls, 593 Carolina Chickadees, 749 Tufted Titmouses, 386 House Wrens, 734 Carolina Wrens, and 27 Grasshopper Sparrows. On the other hand, numbers were especially low for most waterfowl, shorebirds, and our giant apple snail specialists: we saw only 23 Limpkins and just one Snail Kite.

In 2025 we recorded a nice chunk of rare birds



(defined as occurring on fewer than 30% of counts in the past ten years): 3 Gray-headed Swamphens (Sweetwater Wetlands), 1 swift species (Prairie Creek), 1 Short-eared Owl (Cones Dike), 2 Least Flycatchers (both on Cones Dike), 6 LeConte's Sparrows (Paynes Prairie Basin, Cones Dike), 5 Lincoln's Sparrows (near Paynes Prairie Visitor Center, Bolen Bluff, Cones Dike, Morningside Nature Center), 4 Bachman's Sparrows (Morningside Nature Center, Boulware Nature Park), 2 Ash-throated Flycatchers (Cones Dike, Hickory Ranch), 2 Golden-crowned Kinglets (Camps Canal), 1 Dickcissel (Cones Dike), 1 Rufous Hummingbird (SW Gainesville), 1 Black-chinned Hummingbird (Palacio de Parulidae), 1 Magnolia Warbler (Chapman's Pond), 1 Nashville Warbler (Kanapaha Lake), 1 Winter Wren (Split Rock Park), 1 Northern Rough-winged Swallow (Butler Plaza), 1 Western Tanager (north Gainesville), 1 Red-breasted Merganser (Newnans Lake), and 1 Greater Scaup (Newnans Lake).

We recently learned that our 2024 CBC once again had the highest count in Florida – amazing since we are an inland count. In fact, we had the most species of any inland count in the United States. In addition, the Gainesville CBC set national high counts of 17 species, truly showing off our CBC muscle. Only one other count had more national highs, the Kendall count in south Florida, with its barely legitimate introduced species and numbers of wintering passerines on the fringes of their winter distributions.



Our national highs were: 285 Mottled Ducks, 33 American Bitterns, 27 Least Bitterns, 112 Snail Kites (compare with this year's 1!), 235 Red-shouldered Hawks, 124 Soras, 168 Limpkins, 179 Pileated Woodpeckers, 1 Bell's Vireo (tied with eight other counts), 82 Blue-headed Vireos, 330 House Wrens, 550 Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, 175 Black-and-White Warblers (setting an all-time national high for the US), 325 Common Yellowthroats, 1200 Palm Warblers, 610 Swamp Sparrows, and 42 Baltimore Orioles.

Thanks to all the 120+ birders that participated and made this such a productive event. Thanks especially to the ten other team captains that organize the masses into a cohesive

machine of birding excellence. Anne Casella is my co-compiler, crunching the numbers to make the data make sense, making sure we have a great place to meet after the count, and making sure all our t's are crossed and our i's are dotted.

Species list (bold-faced species = rarity; bold-faced count = high count):

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck 993, Snow Goose 2, Muscovy Duck 135, Wood Duck 103, Gadwall 151, American Wigeon 25, Mallard 6, Mottled Duck 119, Blue-winged Teal 301, Northern Shoveler 20, Northern Pintail 103, Green-winged Teal 901, Ring-necked Duck 328, Lesser Scaup 18, **Greater Scaup 1**, Bufflehead 30, Hooded Merganser 301, **Red-breasted Merganser 2**, Ruddy Duck 12, Northern Bobwhite 30, Wild Turkey 71, Pied-billed Grebe 119, Horned Grebe 1, Rock Pigeon 37, Eurasian Collared Dove 1, Common Ground-Dove 21, Mourning Dove 359, White-winged Dove 1, Whip-Poor-Will 3, swift sp. , Ruby-throated Hummingbird 6, **Black-chinned Hummingbird 1**, *Archilochus* sp. 1, **Rufous Hummingbird 1**, King Rail 30, Virginia Rail 45, Sora 114, Purple Gallinule 4, Gray-headed Swamphen 3, Common Gallinule 431, American Coot 235, Limpkin 23, Sandhill Crane 3286, Killdeer 221, Least Sandpiper 38, Wilson's Snipe 79, American Woodcock 9, Spotted Sandpiper 4, Greater Yellowlegs 34, Lesser Yellowlegs 10, Bonaparte's Gull 18, Laughing Gull 1, Ring-billed Gull 248, American Herring Gull 1, Forster's Tern 50, Wood Stork 121, Double-crested Cormorant 636, Anhinga 344, American White Pelican 18, American Bittern 13, Least Bittern 25, Great Blue Heron 293, Great Egret 220, Snowy Egret 124, Little Blue Heron 247, Tricolored Heron

82, Cattle Egret 165, Green Heron 13, Black-crowned Night-Heron 48, White Ibis 1126, Glossy Ibis 155, Roseate Spoonbill 18, Black Vulture 379, Turkey Vulture 3149, Osprey 18, Snail Kite 1, Bald Eagle 108, Northern Harrier 108, Sharpshinned Hawk 6, Cooper's Hawk 23, *Accipiter* sp. 2, Red-shouldered Hawk 217, Red-tailed Hawk 60, Barn Owl **23**, Eastern Screech-Owl 34, Great Horned Owl **84**, **Short-eared Owl 1**, Barred Owl **107**, Belted Kingfisher 52, Red-headed Woodpecker 30, Red-bellied Woodpecker 501, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker 72, Downy Woodpecker 216, Northern Flicker 57, Pileated Woodpecker **224**, American Kestrel 75, Merlin 5, Peregrine Falcon 1, Eastern Phoebe 595, Vermilion Flycatcher 6, **Least Flycatcher 3**, **Ash-throated Flycatcher 2**, Loggerhead Shrike 22, White-eyed Vireo 65, Blue-headed Vireo 63, Blue Jay 300, American Crow 1015, Fish Crow 58, Crow, sp. 53, **Northern Rough-winged Swallow 1**, Tree Swallow 119, Carolina Chickadee **593**, Tufted Titmouse **749**, Brown-headed Nuthatch 16, House Wren **386**, **Winter Wren 1**, Sedge Wren 28, Marsh Wren 42, Carolina Wren **734**, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher 453, Ruby-crowned Kinglet 631, **Golden-crowned Kinglet 2**, Eastern Bluebird 291, Hermit Thrush 91, American Robin 806, Gray Catbird 315, Brown Thrasher 15, Northern Mockingbird 128, European Starling 12, Cedar Waxwing 84, House Sparrow 25, American Pipit 8, House Finch 174, American Goldfinch 181, Ovenbird 10, Northern Waterthrush 10, Black-and-White Warbler 134, Orange-crowned Warbler 143, **Nashville Warbler 1**, Common Yellowthroat 267, Northern Parula 2, **Magnolia Warbler 1**, Palm Warbler 919, Pine Warbler 149, Yellow-rumped Warbler 1977, Yellow-throated Warbler 50, Prairie Warbler 7, Wilson's Warbler 1, Eastern Towhee 109, Field Sparrow 2, Chipping Sparrow 711, Vesper Sparrow 20, Savannah Sparrow 668, Bachman's Sparrow 5, Grasshopper Sparrow **27**, Henslow's Sparrow 7, **LeConte's Sparrow 6**, Song Sparrow 65, Swamp Sparrow 483, **Lincoln's Sparrow 6**, White-throated Sparrow 36, White-crowned Sparrow 52, **Dickcissel 1**, Summer Tanager 1, Western Tanager 2, Northern Cardinal 923, Painted Bunting 16, Red-winged Blackbird 8631, Eastern Meadowlark 52, Rusty Blackbird 35, Common Grackle 2279, Boat-tailed Grackle 1351, Brown-headed Cowbird 824, Baltimore Oriole 29, **Grand Total 46156 individuals**. Count week birds: Redhead, **Lesser Nighthawk**, **Groove-billed Ani**, **Western Kingbird**, **Barn Swallow**.

By Andy Kratter

Photos by Tedd Greenwald

Watch Your Manners, See More Birds

Alachua County birders have earned a national reputation for passion and excellence—our ability to find, accurately identify, and document rarities has made us the stuff of legend in the wider birding community. And a large reason for our success is our longstanding partnerships with rangers, property owners, and land managers at our favorite sites. Our recent after-hours trip to Sweetwater Wetlands to see the Lesser Nighthawk is a great example of this partnership—working together, AAS leadership and city parks staff organized the outing on less than a day's notice, a collaboration that allowed close to 60 birders a rare opportunity to see this bird locally.

Unfortunately, overeager or thoughtless birders jeopardize these relationships. Park staff have reported unpleasant confrontations with birders about after-hours access, and it's easy to see how this could make them hesitant to collaborate with us in the future.

We get that you really, really want a lifer, but after-hours access to public parks is a privilege, not a right. And bad behavior towards rangers (or other parkgoers, or, for that matter, even towards birds) doesn't just reflect badly on you, but on all birders—one birder's bad behavior can cause all of us to lose access to special places and birds.

We also get that it's not always easy to know when you've crossed a line, especially in the heat of a chase. For this, review the [American Birding Association's short but useful guide to birding ethics](#) – and enjoy our birds and natural spaces with kindness and consideration for others.

Results from the Melrose CBC

Birdwatchers with eyes, ears, binoculars, telescopes, and cameras took to the roads, fields, forests, and lakes on December 19, 2025, for the 36th annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) of the Melrose Circle.

Volunteers surveyed the same area (a circle centered at the intersection of SR 100 and CR 219 and covering over 175 square miles) that has been surveyed by local volunteers on a single day each December since 1990 as a part of a National Audubon Society project that “constitutes the longest running and geographically most wide-spread survey of bird life in the Western hemisphere.”

This year 71 volunteers tallied 122 species and 24,922 individuals. It was the fifth highest number of species counted locally and the fourth highest number of individual birds.

American Crows, Mourning Doves, Sandhill Cranes, Turkey Vultures, Black Vultures, Red-Bellied Woodpeckers, Pileated Woodpeckers, American Robins and American Kestrels were reported by at least 90% of the teams.

On the other hand, the White-Throated Sparrow (seen in 82% of prior surveys) was absent. House Sparrows (seen in 80% of prior surveys, but in declining numbers) were also absent.

We had four species not seen often before. Two Western Kingbirds were seen for the fourth time in 37 counts. We had our third sighting ever of a Canvasback. And we set a modern-day record for Hairy Woodpeckers with three birds – tied with the three reported back in 1907. Our count of 15 Redheads broke the prior record of six set in 1997 (and tied in 2021) and was our ninth ever sighting.

Other species that we see regularly broke our old records: Red-Headed Woodpeckers, Loggerhead Shrikes, Carolina Chickadees, Tufted Titmice, Brown-Headed Nuthatches, Gray Catbirds, Black and White Warblers and Brown-Headed Cowbirds. Ring-Necked Ducks with 1900 birds, broke the old record of 1500, with over 1500 individuals found on a parcel of private property. Brown-Headed Cowbirds with 1000 individuals broke the old record of 627.

And if Sandhill Cranes seem to be everywhere, our count of 1700 is the fourth highest in our 37 counts.

American Robin, with 7,963 birds tallied, set the record for the species with most individuals identified during the 2025 CBC. A distant second was the 1,922 total for Ring-Necked Ducks with more than 75% of them found on a private lake.

The CBC has grown continuously from its initial twenty-five to nearly 2,000 count circles across the US and its territories, southern Canada and, increasingly, Latin America. It provides valuable long-term data for researchers studying winter bird populations and for other agencies making decisions related to birds. More than 300 peer-reviewed articles have resulted from analyses of the information gathered by over 50,000 observers who contribute their time.

This extraordinary example of citizen science began in 1901 when Florida’s iconic water birds were nearly hunted to extinction in the name of fashion. Melrose, interestingly, had one of the earliest counts, led by the Rev. Walter I. Eck in 1907. However, consistent annual local counts began in 1990, when 35 species and 1,145 individual birds were recorded in our circle by far fewer observers with much less sophisticated equipment than today’s.

Santa Fe Audubon Society thanks all participants, including employees at some restricted properties and volunteers from the wider region - Gainesville, Eustis, Palatka, Orange Park, Penney Farms, and others – who join local observers. Thanks, also, to the numerous private property owners who allow us to cover their properties from parts of Gold Head Branch State Park and Camp Blanding to the Lake Region from Keystone Heights, Florahome, Melrose, Earleton, and Grandin to Melrose Landing.

More information on the Christmas Bird Count is available [here](#).

By Laura Berkelman



CBC team counting gulls on Lake Santa Fe. Photo by Debbie Segal.

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

The 17th running of the Ichetucknee/Santa Fe/O'Leno Christmas Bird Count (FLIS CBC) was held on Tuesday, December 16th, 2025. This year's 15-mile-wide circle, centered near the town of Fort White, involved 40 participants who birded by car, foot, and canoe/kayak. Participants included birders from the Four Rivers Audubon, Alachua Audubon, Florida Park Service, and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Many of the birders participated in Alachua County's CBC just two days prior AND woke up bright and early the next morning to participate in the Lake City CBC.

The FLIS CBC covers many natural and state-managed lands including Ichetucknee Springs State Park (ISSP), O'Leno, River Rise Preserve, Gilchrist Blue Springs State Parks, Fort White Wildlife and Environmental Area, multiple Suwannee River Water Management District properties, the lower Santa Fe River, the entire Ichetucknee River, and private lands of varying uses (commercial, residential, agricultural, and silvicultural). Three of the five teams concentrate their efforts on public lands while the other two focus on the remaining rivers, uplands, private lands, and neighborhoods.



Vesper Sparrow. Photo by Tedd Greenwald.

The number of volunteers this year allowed for great effort in the ground covered. At the end of the day, the count-up supper was held at the Ichetucknee Springs State Park's Education Center, and the birders enjoyed socializing, bringing together their counts, figuring out how to implement eBird trips, and enjoying pizza.

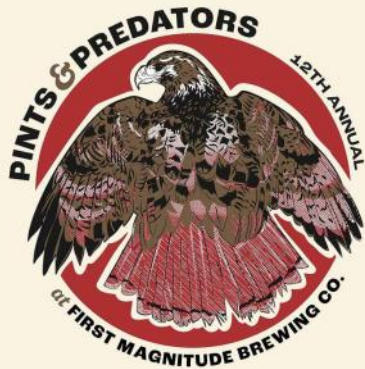
This year's participants experienced moderate fog with cloudy weather that cleared in the late morning. The weather station at ISSP recorded a daily low of 38° F and a high of 70° F. Surface winds were mostly light-breezy and variable, ranging from 0 to 7 mph from NE and N.

The FLIS CBC recorded 6,130 birds, down from 6,813 last year. A total of 94 species were observed, including 1 count week species. These birds included 1 high record, 1 tie record, and 3 species that are new to the count. The high count was observed for the Carolina Chickadee (241), and the tied high count was the Green Heron (4). The Count group was excited to see the uncommon Sora (1) and the debut of a Lincoln's Sparrow (1), and several American White Pelicans (18).

Many thanks to the dedicated Team Leaders and birders who continue to make the FLIS CBC a success! We are super thankful for a GREAT group of volunteers who schedule this day into their active holiday season.

Please mark your calendars for Tuesday, December 22nd, 2026 to join us on our 18th anniversary!!

By Sarah Nauman



12th Annual Pints & Predators

Wildlife rehabilitators do the hard work of rescuing sick and injured wildlife. Many of those birds and other animals live through their trauma but are not healthy enough to be released back into natural environments. They become educational ambassadors that rehabilitators and educators care for indefinitely. Pints and Predators is an opportunity for you to see ambassador birds of prey like Great Horned Owl, Barred Owl, Red-shouldered Hawk, American Kestrel and creatures of the night like Virginia Opossum and bats. There will be a spider exhibit, an American Alligator, and there are always a few snakes, including a venomous rattlesnake in a fully-locked safety enclosure.

This event will also feature multiple arts and crafts exhibitors.

Note: dogs are **NOT PERMITTED** for the safety of all animals.

For more information and to purchase advance tickets, please visit the [website](#).

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What's Up with WhatsApp?

AAS has recently received some questions about how to be added to our WhatsApp account. Unfortunately, the internet is infested with scammers and automated bots that are constantly searching for ways to hack into accounts or put spam in front of people via social media, email, or other forums like WhatsApp. For this reason, the link must be changed intermittently; if it stayed the same, scammers would be continually requesting to be added to the group. For addition to our WhatsApp account, please contact Field Trip Committee member [Danielle Zukowski](#) until further notice. Thanks for your understanding!

Tim Hardin

No Backyard Birding Tour for 2026

Please note that due to some difficulty securing enough homes for the February 2026 Backyard Birding Tour, we have decided to refocus our efforts toward planning a wonderful event for Spring 2027. It will be worth the wait!



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SCAN TO SIGN UP

County Birding and John Hintermister

In 2007, during a fortuitous and memorable birding trip to Palm Point, John Hintermister pointed out a Yellow-throated Warbler. Although I had been observing birds for several years, it was then that I began to discover a whole new level of beautiful birds and their fascinating natural history. John called out more birds, patiently explained their diagnostic features, and enriched me with tidbits on their natural history. And he introduced me to listing.

As I learned from my new mentor, bird listing manifests itself in many forms, one of which is county listing. Florida's 67 counties extend from Escambia at the far western end of the panhandle, across to Nassau County at its opposite northeastern corner, and all the way down to Monroe which stretches to Key West and outward to the Dry Tortugas.

Many county listers set goals – to tally 50 or 100 or 150 species from all 67 Florida counties, while the most ambitious county listers strive to reach the top tier in a sizeable number of counties. Still others set their sights on birding rural and under-birded counties, which greatly adds to the scientific database in those regions where bird observations are lagging.

As I tagged along on birding trips with John and his friends, I noticed the notebook with his hand-kept bird lists organized by county. And his excitement when he discovered at the end of a day's outing, which new species he had observed in that particular county. eBird was in its infancy then and not yet embraced by that earlier cohort of birders.

One day I announced to John that I, too, was going to start county birding, and I set my goal at 100 species in all 67 counties. That was about 16 years ago.

Multiple birding trips with John as he led field trips for Alachua Audubon to Cedar Key, Ft. DeSoto, Ft. Clinch State Park, and other prominent out-of-town hotspots jumpstarted my county listings. Consulting jobs in Polk, Columbia, and Liberty Counties bumped up those particular counties. And attending numerous field trips with expert leaders at the Space Coast Birding Festival pumped up the species list for a slew of counties along the Treasure Coast.

Once I became solidly hooked on this county style of seeking out birds, I accompanied Dotty Robbins, the most accomplished of all county birders, on birding trips. She picked the counties and announced her targets, and I excitedly tagged along, with my targets being "everything". I admired Dotty's level of planning, and how she targeted specific habitats and locales to seek out those few species that had yet to be checked off her extensive list of sightings. And I was especially impressed by the notes she maintained on her Florida Gazetteer; spots marked on every page signifying notable bird locations.

Several years into my quest for county birds, I finally reached a milestone when I had recorded at least some birds in all 67 Florida counties. While many counties barely reached 50 species, I had finally accomplished or surpassed the magic 100 in a few counties – Levy with Cedar Key; Wakulla with St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge; Pinellas with Ft. DeSoto Park, Brevard with Black Point Drive, and of course, my home county of Alachua.

As the years progressed, the birding trips focused more on seeking out types of birds and chasing after large congregations. I ventured to the Florida panhandle during spring migration in search of migrant songbirds that congregated along the coast after having just completed their marathon ocean crossing; with John and others to the agricultural fields surrounding Lake Okeechobee in August to marvel at the large gatherings of shorebirds, terns, swallows, and other fall migrants while seeking out those crown-jewels, Upland and Buff-breasted Sandpipers; further south to the Florida Keys to witness the mass migration of Peregrines and other fall migrating



raptors as well as a slew of colorful songbirds; and to Daytona Beach to sort through the thousands of gathering winter gulls along the beach while also searching for Northern Gannets and other wintering pelagics. While the true enjoyment of those trips was in finding, admiring, and savoring those fascinating and diverse groups of birds, I gained an added satisfaction of checking off more county finds.

Perhaps the most impactful aspect of county birding has been discovering each county's unique natural areas, a lesson I initially learned from John. I explored so many stunning state parks in search of birds – Torreya, Ochlocknee River, Bald Point, Falling Waters, St. George Island, Highlands Hammock, Kissimmee Prairie, Fakahatchee Strand, Curry Hammock, and others. Ocean watching from beaches and piers in numerous coastal counties, scanning lakes and ponds, and hiking through all types of forests.

Many exciting bird discoveries transpired during my big 100 quest. On a hot August evening, Gigi DelPizzo, Stephanie Hornbuckle and I sat parked between two sugarcane fields in Hendry County scanning the darkening sky and hoping for a Barn Owl to fly from a nearby cypress stand. We spotted a few red-wings along the ditch and some wading birds winging to their evening roost, but no owls. And then a “kee kee kee” broke the silence. We rejoiced at hearing our lifer Black Rail.

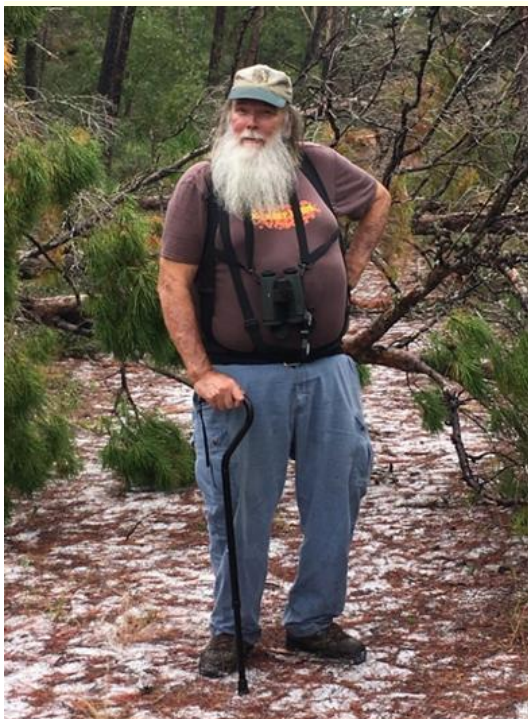
While gathered for a family reunion near Melbourne in October during the peak of fall migration, I slipped over to Sabastian Inlet State Park for a few hours of quiet birding. When I detected chip notes, I “pished” several times and out from the mangroves popped four warblers – a Common Yellowthroat, Tennessee Warbler, Cape May Warbler, and a brightly plumaged, tail-pumping bird with blue and yellow and streaks of black, and prominent eye arcs. I mentally ran through the possibilities as I strained my binoculars on this mystery bird. Not a Magnolia, nor a Parula, nor a Prairie or a Canada Warbler. As soon as the birds disappeared, I called my mentor and described the characteristics from my mental photo. After a long silence, John replied, “Girl, you just found yourself a Kirtland’s Warbler.” I excitedly stacked rocks on top of a log next to the trail, estimated the distance from the road, and reported the sighting and the carefully marked location. I was thrilled to learn that a few local birders relocated the Kirtland’s the next morning.

The Kirtland’s sighting was just two years before John succumbed to pancreatic cancer in 2019 and left a huge void in the Gainesville birding community.

At the start of 2025, only a few counties lacked my 100 species goal. So, in January, my husband and I set our sights on the last three panhandle holdouts that still hovered around 90 species – Washington, Holmes, and Walton. We fanned out across those counties, exploring the Choctawhatchee River floodplain, Morrison Spring, Grady Brown Park, and numerous rural roads where we found a slew of awesome wintering birds, including Snow Goose, Horned Grebe, Purple Finch, Golden-crowned Kinglet, and an abundance of sparrows. As we entered Grayton Beach State Park and started over the boardwalk towards the beach, a mockingbird-looking bird popped up from a scrub oak. I squinted in the sun trying to decipher this bird, which could best be described as a pale, diminutive thrasher. I snapped some photos, pondered the bird’s identification, and then lost it in the scrub dunes. I shared the photos with one of John’s best birding buddies, Don Morrow, and Don confirmed my suspicions of a Sage Thrasher. I was stoked with this find but oh how I wish I could have shared the excitement with John.

I officially reached or surpassed the 100 species mark in all 67 Florida counties on December 1st after birding in the Everglades of Collier County at Big Cypress, Fakahatchee Strand, Ten Thousand Islands, and Collier-Seminole State Park. Coincidentally, the completion date of this 16+ year project that started with John’s enthusiasm and





encouragement, would have been his 81st birthday.

While John remains a local birding legend, many birders new to Alachua County may be unaware of him other than perhaps knowing he has been memorialized by the “John Hintermister Gainesville Christmas Bird Count.”

In 1960, when John was just 16 years-old and already an accomplished birder, he stood with other legends – Marjorie Carr, Oliver Austin, and J. C. Dickinson Jr. – to sign the charter documents that began the Alachua Audubon Society. And for almost six decades, he remained committed to this conservation organization that he helped create.

A decade or so later, John attended a presentation by Roger Tory Peterson at the University Auditorium. After the presentation, John handed his tattered and well-used field guide to Peterson to sign, and Peterson replied, “Now *this* is the way I like to see my field guide used.”

In 1972 at the age of 29, John became the official compiler of the Gainesville CBC. After reading in Peterson’s Book, *Birds over America*, about the methodical way in which the Bronx CBC was conducted, John sought to emulate it for the Gainesville count. He instituted dark-to-dark counts. He cut up a topographic map of the count circle to make territories, appointed team leaders, and assigned them important birds to find in their particular tracts. John served first as compiler of our Gainesville CBC from 1972 – 1981 and then as co-compiler with Howard Adams from 2003 until 2014.

John once said, “There are birdwatchers and there are people who put their lives on hold in order to bird.” We know which category defined John. John shaped the birding culture in Alachua County. He taught, inspired, and mentored countless people, and he led an untold number of field trips for Alachua Audubon. He was truly in his element while in the wilds of Florida, gazing at birds, and savoring their beauty. I am thankful for the influence he had on me by opening up a big, beautiful world of birds that started with that lovely Yellow-throated Warbler at Palm Point.

Now that this county listing project is officially complete, I have set my sights on seeing at least 50 species in 50 states. I am well on my way with 32 states completed, six states started, and 12 states not yet birded. Like county birding, discovering nature’s lovely landscapes and their unique avian treasures is the foundation of this next birding goal.

By Debbie Segal

Sweetwater Wetlands Park & Aachua Audubon Society

Present

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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, January 4th, at 4:15 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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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.

Your introductory membership amount 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](#). The state registration does not imply endorsement, approval, or recommendation by the state.

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Contact us at contact@AlachuaAudubon.org

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 Jan – Feb issue: December 15th.

For advertising information, contact the editor at

Contact@AlachuaAudubon.org