



# The Crane

Volume 67 Number 4 March – April 2026

## FIELD TRIPS

### MARCH

#### **Young Birders Club – Longleaf Flatwoods Reserve,**

Saturday, March 7<sup>th</sup>, 9:00 – 11:00 am

Co Rd 325, South of State Rd 20, Hawthorne

Meet trip leader Maggie Paxson in the parking area of Longleaf Flatwoods Reserve, Co Rd 325, South of State Rd 20, Hawthorne, at 9am. We'll hike the shorter loop trail through well-managed longleaf pine forest. This trail is one of the best places in Alachua County to see the threatened Bachman's Sparrow, along with Brown-headed Nuthatch, Red-headed Woodpeckers, and other pinewoods specialists. This trail is unpaved and can be uneven in places, and there are no bathrooms or water access on site, so please plan accordingly!

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. You may also wish to apply bug spray. Loaner binoculars are available.

Questions? Email [gnvyouthbirding@gmail.com](mailto:gnvyouthbirding@gmail.com)

#### **March Walk with The Flock at San Felasco's North**

**Trailhead,** Saturday, March 7<sup>th</sup>, 9:00 – 11:00 am

13201 San Felasco Parkway, Alachua

What is the Flock? Gainesville's all-female bird watching group! Our goal is to provide a fun, welcoming and safe environment for women to come together and enjoy nature. Although the group is reserved for women, we encourage our members to bring guests (of any gender) who share a love of nature!

Meet in the first parking lot by the restrooms. Trail conditions are easy, mostly flat with some gentle elevation. We will walk approximately 2 miles round trip. We'll enjoy a relaxed morning walk along semi-shaded trails bordered

by shrubby fields and tree lines. Keep an eye out for sparrows, woodpeckers, and bluebirds along the way. After the walk, we'll be close to Cellon Creek Road, which often has great views of meadowlarks and other birds. If we're not too tired—or too hungry for brunch—we may take a short drive to check it out.

#### **Bird Ramble to Little Awesome Preserve**

Thursday, March 19<sup>th</sup>, 9:00 – 11:00 am.

5682 SW County Road 138, Fort White

On this 195-acre ACT preserve, piney uplands gently slope towards the lower Santa Fe River. The pristine bottomland forest that winds along one of the wildest sections of the river is a sight to behold. In addition to towering pines, there are enormous live oaks, Florida maples, and American elms on higher limestone hummocks. Giant cypress, locust and gum trees, flowering dogwoods, sparkleberries, saw palmetto and grasses complete the picture. The loop trail is approximately 1.5 miles but can be shortened by using a cut through. Learn more [here](#). No restrooms on site.

#### **Chinsegut Conservation Center with Orange**

**Audubon: Sign up and fee required.**

Saturday, March 14<sup>th</sup>, 8:00 – 11:00 am

#### **Inside this issue:**

Evening Programs; New AAS video	<a href="#">p. 3</a>
The Loons Are Coming!	<a href="#">p. 4</a>
AAS Prez Wins National Award	<a href="#">p. 5</a>
Birding Class; Gopher Tortoise Day	<a href="#">p. 6</a>
Audubon News	<a href="#">p. 7</a>
Birdability	<a href="#">p. 8</a>
The Great Blue Heron; Book Review	<a href="#">p. 10</a>

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23212 Lake Lindsey Rd., Brooksville, FL

Some of you may know this lovely conservation area from when a Scott's Oriole visited last year. Located 1.5 hours from Gainesville, the nature center is reason enough to visit with multiple water features and feeders. Last year, in January, we saw 27 species just by the nature center: View the eBird checklist [here](#).

This is a joint trip with Orange Audubon Society. Leaders are Alan Shapiro and Matt Richardson of Orange Audubon and Danielle Zukowski of Alachua Audubon. Chinsegut is a wonderful place for viewing and photographing many species such as Pine Warblers, Yellow-throated Warblers, Chipping Sparrows and more. We will also explore the various trails that loop through the sandhills, hardwoods and freshwater wetlands. Birds we may observe include Northern Bobwhite, Yellow-throated Vireo, Eastern Towhee, Red-headed Woodpeckers, Chipping Sparrows, Orange-crowned Warblers, Sandhill Cranes, Red-tailed and Red-shouldered Hawks and much more. Learn more about Chinsegut Wildlife and Environmental Area [here](#).

Participant Limit: 15. \$15 for members of Orange Audubon Society and Alachua Audubon Society; \$20 for non-members. Sign up [here](#), and select yes to the membership question.

Orange Audubon is fundraising for the Orange Audubon Nature Center and Apopka Birding Park (opening in 2026). Read more [here](#).

## APRIL

### **The Flock Walk at Sweetwater Wetlands Park**

Saturday, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 9:00 – 11:00 am  
325 SW Williston Road, Gainesville

Let's enjoy this wide-open, wildlife-rich park before it gets too warm. We'll walk about 1.5-2 hours. The trails are flat and easy to walk; mostly gravel with some paved sections. Sweetwater is an incredible spot for birding, especially as we head into warmer months. We'll likely see a wide variety of species, including waterfowl, wading birds, and more. The trails are very open with expansive views and little shade, making it a great place for spotting birds and a reminder to come prepared for the sun.

Carpooling is encouraged. There is a parking fee for the park, payable through the Passport app. We recommend downloading the app and setting up your account ahead of time or arriving a bit early. Come enjoy great birding, big skies, and a beautiful walk.

### **Hogtown Creek Headwaters Nature Park – Presentation and Walk**

Sunday, April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1:00 – 3:30 pm  
1500 NW 45<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Gainesville

From 1-2 pm, Danielle Zukowski will present *An Introduction to the World of Birds*. Are you ready to join the 96 million Americans who are birding? Learn where to start, different ways to bird, and how to get involved with the birdwatching community.

After the presentation, we will walk around this City of Gainesville park. The land was previously a dairy farm. The farmhouse was renovated into a nature center using funds from Wild Spaces Public Places. We will walk the paved trail surrounding the playground/pavilion to the looped nature trail through fern-covered wetlands and mixed upland forest and then head back to the nature center. We can take time to explore the nature center and see what birds are visiting the feeders!

### **Barr Hammock Preserve South**

Saturday, April 11<sup>th</sup>, 8:00 – 10:30 am  
300 SE 175<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Micanopy

The Land Conservation program of Alachua County Environmental Protection Department (EPD) and GREBE – University of Florida's Audubon Campus Chapter – have invited AAS to join their spring migration birding trip to Barr Hammock. More details to be announced.

### **Young Birders Club – Sweetwater Wetlands Park**

Sunday, April 19, 9:00 – 11:00 am  
325 SW Williston Road, Gainesville

Meet trip leader Maggie Paxson at the entry pavilion at 9am. We'll start by exploring Cell 1 and the boardwalk looking for breeding herons, egrets, and bitterns, alongside migrating visitors making brief stopovers--including the fun-named and even more fun-sounding bobolink flocks that feed on the rice grasses in mid-April. Time permitting, we'll continue on to the spillway to talk about how the wetlands help conserve Gainesville water quality while looking out for lingering ducks and arriving swallows.

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. You may also wish to apply bug spray. Loaner binoculars are available.

Questions? Email: [gnyouthbirding@gmail.com](mailto:gnyouthbirding@gmail.com)

Save the dates: Cedar Key, Sunday, April 12; Fort de Soto, Saturday, April 18. Details to be announced.

## EVENING PROGRAMS

### Capturing Jewels of the Skies – a Bird Photography Trip to Costa Rica

by Rob Gilbert

Thursday, March 19, 2026, 6:45—8:00 pm at Cypress & Grove Brewing, 1001 NW 4th Street, Gainesville

Join UF/IFAS faculty and bird photography enthusiast Rob Gilbert as he presents a photo journey of a trip he took to Costa Rica in Jan-Feb 2025. Highlights of the trip include Resplendent Quetzals, Fiery-throated Hummingbirds, Keel-billed Toucans, a Rufous-tailed Jacamar enjoying a beautiful snack, and much more! He will also discuss his photographic journey and tips as well as hard-earned lessons from the field.



### Tracking Hope: A Journey with the Everglade Snail Kite

by Hilary Flower and Gina Kent

Thursday, April 16, 2026, 6:45—8:00 pm at Cypress & Grove Brewing, 1001 NW 4th Street, Gainesville

The Everglade Snail Kite is an endangered raptor that shocked scientists by adapting to invasive prey and human-altered wetlands. Hilary Flower, author of *The Kite and the Snail* (University Press of Florida), traced this comeback story from the Everglades to Paynes Prairie and beyond. Gina Kent, Senior Conservation Scientist at the Avian Research and Conservation Institute (ARCI), has been trapping and tracking snail kites for nearly twenty years. Together Flower and Kent reveal what these remarkable birds can teach us.



### Alachua Audubon Video Airs on WUFT

WUFT's Greater Good is a weekly, 30-minute public television program that highlights local non-profit organizations and community groups. Airing on Friday evenings at 8:30 PM, it showcases the history, mission, and impact of organizations in North Central Florida.

Alachua Audubon recently contracted with WUFT Greater Good to produce a 6-minute informational video. On January 14<sup>th</sup>, the video crew met at Sweetwater Wetlands Park where they interviewed participants of the Audubon-led Wednesday bird walk and videoed lovely bird scenes at Sweetwater. Several current and former AAS board members were also filmed as they discussed the many conservation and educational programs that Alachua Audubon is engaged in.

The video premiered on February 20<sup>th</sup> on WUFT and we are thrilled with how well the Greater Good video and editing crews showcased Alachua Audubon's important programs. Please check out our new video [here](#).



## The Loons Are Coming!

The 2026 loon season is fast arriving! Time to exercise your long-range vision muscles, dust off your clipboards, shine up your binoculars, and sharpen your pencils! The season is 15 March to 20 April.

There are plenty of spaces available to sign up for loon watches at the seven sites:

- 1a) Marjorie A. Hoy Memorial Park at Orange Lake Overlook on 441,
- 1b) a private residence south of Micanopy;
- 2) Barr Hammock north entrance
- 3) 441 overlook on Paynes Prairie;
- 4) Fred Cone Park on E. University Ave.,
- 5) airport viewing area at north end of Gainesville Regional Airport
- 6) Walmart parking lot at NW 34th street at 441. [I would like to change this site if anyone has recommendations for an open site in the vicinity.]

Loon watches can also be done outside the confines of these sites. If you see any loons, for each group note the place, number of loons, exact time, and direction of flight, and send the information to me. I can use flight direction, time, and group size to check for any double-counting with the stations.

If you are new to loon watching or want additional training, come join me at Fred Cone Park during the first few days of the season. The park is at 2801 E. University Ave. I will be on the east side of the running track from 8:20 – 9:35 AM starting on March 15. If it is raining steadily, counts are cancelled.

Like past years, there is a Google doc sign-up sheet [here](#) where you can sign up for sites and dates. It has start and end times for each date, and a brief description of the seven loon watch points. Let me know if you have trouble signing in and I will share it with you. The data sheet to record data is in Google docs [here](#).

I have an updated loon primer [here](#) that has basic info on the project. I also gave an hour-long presentation on our project to the Florida Museum of Natural History in September 2025 viewable [here](#).

You can sign up for as few as one slot, or if you are completely loony-tunes like me, put yourself down for 35. Please let me know if you are interested this year and ask any questions. [kratter@flmnh.ufl.edu](mailto:kratter@flmnh.ufl.edu)

Andy Kratter, Florida Museum of Natural History



*Photo by Trina Anderson*



*Photo by Rex Rowan*

Loons flying overhead can look like either one of these two pictures, or they can be even higher up.

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## Alachua Audubon President Debbie Segal Receives National Award

The National Audubon Callison Award is a prestigious recognition given to two individuals annually who have made remarkable contributions to conservation through creativity, coalition building, creative thinking, outreach, and perseverance. The award was established in 1994 by National Audubon to honor outstanding efforts to continue Audubon's mission for birds and habitat conservation. Recipients are nominated by their peers including Audubon Chapter and state board members and Audubon staff. Only one national award is given annually in the volunteer category and this year AAS President Debbie Segal was recognized.

Kristen Kosik, current Chapters Conservation Manager for Audubon Florida, commented "The Callison Award recognizes outstanding leadership and service within the Audubon network, honoring individuals who have made a lasting impact by strengthening their local chapter, advancing conservation, and building a more engaged and effective Audubon community. Florida has a rich history of Callison Award recipients, and Debbie stands out in her own right, continuing that tradition with remarkable leadership and dedication." Kristen suggested Debbie for the award to Jacqui Sulek, retired Chapter Conservation Manager at Audubon Florida, who completed the nomination.

### Callison Award Nomination – 2025

Debbie Segal has transformed Alachua Audubon Society from a traditional birding club into a highly respected, community-centered conservation organization. Under her leadership, the chapter engages in a wide range of activities that broaden its reach, including hands-on habitat restoration and conservation projects, bird banding and community science initiatives, and educational programs and social events like "Birds & Brews" that welcome new members and foster a love of nature. This diversity of programming reflects the chapter's commitment to connecting people of all backgrounds to birds and conservation.

Debbie has strengthened Alachua Audubon's collaborations with the City of Gainesville, Alachua County Environmental Protection Department, Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission, Sweetwater Wetlands Park staff, University of Florida and UF/IFAS, Alachua Conservation Trust (ACT), and several local conservation nonprofits. She has also fostered a thriving relationship with UF GREBE, their local Audubon Campus Chapter, bringing student voices and emerging leaders directly into conservation planning. These partnerships reflect her dedication to community building, shared stewardship, and inclusive leadership.

Debbie's leadership is marked by integrity, thoughtfulness, and an unwavering commitment to Audubon's mission. Beyond her own chapter, Debbie frequently partners with smaller nearby chapters and shares thoughtful advice and lessons learned to strengthen the broader Audubon Florida chapter network. She consistently seeks guidance from Audubon Florida and thoughtfully incorporates statewide priorities into her chapter's work, demonstrating persistence, optimism, and a long-term commitment to progress.

One of Debbie's most distinctive achievements is her role in shaping Sweetwater Wetlands Park into a premier birding and ecotourism destination. While her professional responsibilities brought her to the project as part of the team developing the wetlands for water treatment, Debbie brought a unique perspective rooted in her deep connection to Audubon. She recognized that Sweetwater could become more than an engineered solution, serving as a model for habitat conservation, public access, and community engagement.

Today, Sweetwater Wetlands stands as a nationally recognized model of how conservation infrastructure can serve multiple community needs. Its success reflects Debbie's creativity in using resources effectively, her ability to unite diverse partners, including city staff, biologists, educators, Audubon volunteers, and ACT, behind a shared vision, and her generosity in sharing her expertise to advance Audubon's mission.

Through her transformational chapter leadership, dedication to partnerships, and visionary contributions to projects like Sweetwater Wetlands, Debbie Segal has had a profound and lasting impact on conservation in

Florida. She embodies Audubon's values of community building, habitat conservation, inclusive leadership, and collaborative problem-solving, making her an exceptional nominee for this award.

Editor's Note: Upon learning of the award and sharing it with the AAS board of directors, Debbie, in her typical modest, generous and inclusive fashion, stated, "I didn't realize the significance of the award until Jacqui Sulek added that only one person is selected nationally each year for the award. I believe this award should go to the entire AAS board because I have the absolute best and most engaged Board of Directors and we couldn't accomplish what we do without your immense involvement."

### Birding Class Offered



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. *Introduction to Birds and Birding* (.2B6) will be held on Saturday mornings 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. Must be at least 18 years old to register. Bring binoculars; they are essential for birding.



### Gopher Tortoise Day at Goethe State Forest *Join us for a peek underground into the Gopher Tortoise's world!*

#### Event Highlights:

- Get an exclusive camera view inside a Gopher Tortoise burrow.
- Take a leisurely walk in the unique habitat of a Gopher Tortoise .
- Learn all about their food preferences.
- Discover practical ways you can contribute to protecting these incredible creatures.

When: April 10th, 2026, at 10:00 am

Where: Goethe State Forest Office, 9110 SE Co Rd 337, Dunnellon, FL

Questions? Contact Hailee Quintero at [hailee.quintero@fdacs.gov](mailto:hailee.quintero@fdacs.gov) or 352-566-5218.



## AAS Annual Membership Meeting & Potluck

Please join Alachua Audubon for our annual membership meeting and potluck dinner. Join your birding friends in welcoming our new board members. The meeting will take place on Tuesday, April 7<sup>th</sup>, at 6:30 pm at the Mill Pond Clubhouse at 240 NW 48th Blvd, Gainesville. All members are encouraged to attend.

Please bring some food to share and your drink of choice and enjoy visiting with other Alachua Audubon members and the board of directors and celebrating our many accomplishments.



## Get a life! A life membership in Alachua Audubon, that is

Alachua Audubon recently increased opportunities for obtaining a lifetime membership. There are now three ways to become a life member:

- a single \$1,000 donation at the Whooping Crane membership level,
- two consecutive annual donations of \$500 at the Sandhill Crane level, or
- four consecutive annual donations of \$250 at the Swallow-tailed Kite level.

The multi-year life membership options are intended to encourage more people to join AAS as life members. Your investment in Alachua Audubon also helps us to expand projects that support our mission to foster appreciation and knowledge of birds and other native wildlife, to protect and restore wildlife populations and their habitats, and to promote sustainable use of natural resources. To use any of these methods of becoming a life member, please send an email to [AlachuaAudubonMembership@gmail.com](mailto:AlachuaAudubonMembership@gmail.com).

*Alachua Audubon Society is a 501(c)3 charitable organization.*

Correction: The photo on page 10 of the January-February issue of *The Crane* was later determined to be a Savannah Sparrow, and not a Vesper Sparrow. The photo appeared in the Ichetucknee/Santa Fe/O'Leno Christmas Bird Count (FLIS) Christmas Bird Count article. Thank you to Adam Kent for spotting this misidentification.

## Sign up for The Advocate Newsletter

Stay up-to-date on the  
legislative session to learn  
when you can use your  
voice for birds!

Visit [fl.audubon.org/advocate](http://fl.audubon.org/advocate) to sign up

 Audubon | FLORIDA



SCAN TO SIGN UP



## Evaluating Birding Trails for Accessibility

My mom is a very adventurous lady, and she has traveled throughout the United States. She enjoys a good walk on leaf littered woodsy paths and finds peace in feeding her backyard birds. However, she has been living with cancer for over 14 years, which has impacted her ability to get out into nature. She is strong though and has leaned into her new lifestyle using different mobility devices to do the things she enjoys, refusing to give in. Not many things slow her down, but long outings on uneven surfaces with her compromised mobility are more than a challenge.

With this in mind, I researched the accessibility of trails in Maine for our family vacation that could meet both of our needs, namely scooter-friendly birding trails. I discovered that finding accessible trails was not easy. Few trails have accessibility descriptions and even fewer have pictures of actual trail surfaces or conditions. Finding trails with varying degrees of accessibility was hard. It was this quest that led me to Birdability.

Birdability is a non-profit organization dedicated to identifying the accessibility of birding locations, whether they be trails or designated eBird Hotspots. Through education and mapping they strive to make birding accessible to people of all abilities. Birdability has partnered with National Audubon to develop resources that allow people to determine if the documented condition of a trail is compatible with their level of mobility.

One of the target resources is the [Birdability Map](#). The map is a crowd-sourced collection of trails and eBird Hotspot reviews, where members of the public detail site-specific birding experiences. This is accomplished by describing trail accessibility based on 18 different questions such as surface and slope of the trail, presence of benches, unobstructed viewing locations, and the availability of parking and accessible restrooms. The best reviews include pictures. As the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words.

Descriptions of location or trail accessibility help people make informed decisions based on their level of mobility. Trails don't necessarily have to meet Federal ADA standards; however, an accurate description of the trail helps users decide if the trail is accessible for them and their specific needs.

Hoping to have my mom join me on our local trails, I researched the Birdability map in greater depth and realized Alachua County has very few trails or eBird hot spots that have been assessed for their Birdability. I was shocked, especially since Alachua County birding is nationally known, Alachua County birders make the news for Christmas Bird counts, and local birders routinely find rare species. Our crown jewels, Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park and Sweetwater Wetlands Park are mentioned in books and podcasts, yet the Birdability of those popular access areas has not been evaluated. The birding prowess of Alachua County birders is too grand for our county to be lacking in Birdability assessments. So I decided to help fill that gap by conducting Birdability assessments of local trails and eBird hotspots in Alachua County.

To date I've conducted four trail and eBird Hotspot reviews – at Devil's Millhopper Geological State Park, two trails at San Felasco Park, and Greentree/Kiwanis Challenge Park. My goal is to evaluate two sites each quarter and report those assessments on the Birdability website.

I encourage you to help fill in that gap by also evaluating and reporting the accessibility of some of our local trails so people with disabilities can be better informed on the access condition of more of our local birding spots. It has been an enjoyable experience knowing that I am providing information that contributes to making areas more accessible for mobility-challenged people, and it has helped me see our favorite trails with a different eye. So, how can you get involved? Contribute to the Birdability Map [here](#). They offer guidance, videos, and the site review checklist, as well as other information on how to get involved.

Soon, with your help, we'll have enough site reviews to make Alachua County stand out as a friendly community to accessibility-challenged folks, too.

By Christine Zamora

Editor's note: Christine further demonstrated her commitment to birding by recently reaching a milestone: *She has logged 1,500 consecutive daily eBird listings despite frequently traveling for work. Wow!*

## The Great Blue Heron: Witness at the Water's Edge

Across the bay, a kayak split the mist.  
A heron, cloaked in cobalt reverie,  
stood still as time upon a granite stone.  
One leg tucked tight, the other poised in thought,  
its eye fixed on the glassy, dimpled tide.

He waited—not for fish, but for the breath  
of something deeper, surfacing at last—  
a truth too slow to rise, too sharp to flee.  
The river held its secrets just below,  
while fog returned to swaddle what we know.

The Great Blue Heron often appears motionless in shallow water—focused, poised between patience and movement. To encounter a heron in this state is to feel the pace of solitude: space to breathe, to meditate, and to ponder thoughts and ideas carried quietly within. For a moment, the world slows, as if attention itself has been invited—or granted.

The life of the Great Blue Heron is inseparable from water. It depends on healthy wetlands—quiet shorelines, floodplains, estuaries, and shallow rivers where fish and amphibians remain abundant and waters retain ecological balance. Because of this reliance, the heron has long been regarded as an indicator of environmental health. Where herons thrive, wetlands are often functioning well. Where they disappear, the loss usually signals deeper disruption long before it becomes obvious elsewhere.

Yet the heron's significance extends beyond biology.

Across many ancient cultures, herons were regarded with reverence long before modern science provided explanations for natural systems. In Indigenous traditions across North America, herons were associated with wisdom, patience, and self-reliance; their presence often signaled abundance and the assurance of sustenance. In ancient Egypt, herons were linked to the soul and the passage between worlds. In Chinese and Japanese art, folklore, and literature, they appeared as emblems of balance, longevity, purity, and the ability to move between elements—water, earth, and air.

These traditions were not grounded in data, but in sustained observation and lived experience with the natural world. Reverence fostered social cohesion and psychological steadiness at a time when nature's uncertainty could not be explained scientifically. The heron's quiet self-reliance served as an example to individuals and families facing sickness, scarcity, and despair—particularly in the production and gathering of food.

Today, science has given us extraordinary insight into how ecosystems function and why species like the Great Blue Heron depend on ecologically sound wetlands. What science cannot compel, however, is care. No legislation or dataset can require people to notice a bird standing at the water's edge, or to feel responsibility for the habitat that sustains it. Laws can protect wetlands, but their effectiveness ultimately depends on human behavior—on attention, restraint, understanding interdependence, and a willingness to coexist thoughtfully with other forms of life.

As wetlands deteriorate through development, pollution, and climate-driven change, herons often respond quietly. Their absence can speak as clearly as their presence. In this way, the Great Blue Heron becomes both witness and messenger, revealing change not through alarm, but through silence.

Perhaps what is needed now is not a return to ancient belief, but a rational reverence—a way of seeing informed by science and experience, guided by respect. Modern knowledge can explain why wetlands matter; reverence gives us reason to care. Together, they offer a framework for stewardship that serves birds, forests, waters, and people alike.

To watch a Great Blue Heron fish is to observe patience as survival. Nothing holds its attention except the present moment. Nothing is rushed. In that quiet discipline lies a lesson. When we learn to notice the heron clearly, we may also begin to notice the health of our wetlands—and our own responsibilities—more honestly. Care, like balance, begins with attention.

By Sepala Weliwitigoda

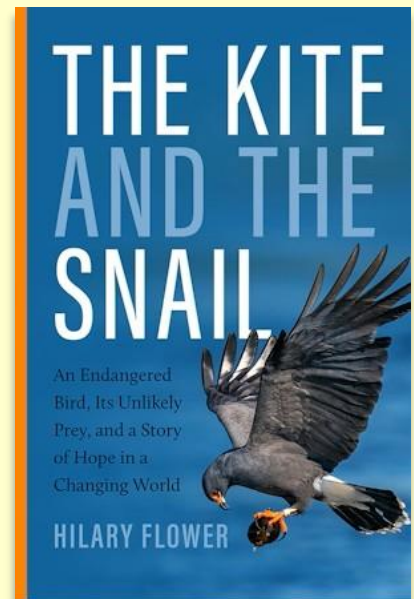
*The Kite and the Snail* by Hilary Flower,  
Book Review by Danielle Zukowski

Hilary Flower is an ecohydrologist and a professor of environmental studies at Eckerd College. She studies the relationship between water and the larger ecosystem. In her classes, she teaches students about snail kites because their success depends heavily on water conditions. She came to cherish each time she saw a kite at Everglades National Park. She did not know that in 2013 she would see her last kite at the park. When she learned their population had skyrocketed in the state, she wondered why they weren't in the Everglades. Her book *The Kite and the Snail* takes readers on an adventure to understand the snail kites' story, which can't be told without telling the story of apple snails and Florida's wetlands.

Her first stop was here at Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park in 2023 where she saw her first snail kite in 10 years. In 2016, the first snail kite arrived here – the third ever in the county – and then another. After Hurricane Irma, the landscape flooded and then came a “boom” of apple snails and kites with dozens of nests reported at Paynes Prairie by 2019. Her book comes to us at a time when snail kites are no longer a common sight at La Chua trail – the boom now a “bust.” If you want to understand why the snail kites left and how our story fits into the big picture, look no further than *The Kite and the Snail*.

The story unfolds organically, as we follow Hilary's questions to visit the places and people important to the snail kite. This includes a few from our own community – Caroline Poli, Gina Kent, and Chris Cattau. Ecohydrology becomes accessible to the general audience as Hilary connects the dots between changing water conditions, the opportunistic nature of the invasive apple snail, and a very adaptive snail kite. She helps us make sense of a story with many ups, downs, and unknowns. Publishing soon after news from Audubon Florida that only 30 nests were successful in all of Florida last year, this book offers a much-needed glimmer of hope, celebrating the resiliency of kites and the success of their advocates.

Published by [University Press of Florida](#), *The Kite and the Snail* will be released on March 17th, 2026. Hilary Flower and Gina Kent will be presenting our April evening program on April 16th at 6:45 PM at Cypress and Grove Brewing to see what we can learn from the snail kites.



Sweetwater Wetlands Park & Aachua Audubon Society

Present

Wednesday Bird Walks at the Wetlands



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



Scan the code to join!



Alachua County LIBRARY District

**BORROW A BIRDING KIT!**

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](http://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, April 5th, at 5:45 pm





Native plant restoration  
Biological Monitoring  
Invasive/exotic plant surveys & control  
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**Alachua Audubon** (AAS) is an official chapter of **National Audubon** and **Audubon Florida**. If you belong to National Audubon and live in this area, you are automatically a member of AAS.

To join National Audubon, please go to [AlachuaAudubon.org/Join/](http://AlachuaAudubon.org/Join/) where you will be directed to their membership page.

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*.

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Please send any membership questions to [AlachuaAudubonMembership@gmail.com](mailto: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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*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 May – June issue: April 15th.  
For advertising information, contact the editor at [Contact@AlachuaAudubon.org](mailto:Contact@AlachuaAudubon.org)