



# The Crane

Volume 57 Number 3 January February 2016

## January and February Field Trips

**Saturday and Sunday, January 9-10, 8:00 a.m.**

**St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge:** Meet John Hintermister at the St. Marks visitor center on Saturday at 8 a.m. for a trip to one of Florida's premier winter birding spots. Expect a large number and wide variety of birds. Bring a lunch. Overnight option: Sunday's meeting time and location will be decided on Saturday. Call Wild Birds Unlimited (352-381-1997) to register. Limit 20 people. Difficulty: 3.

**Saturday, January 16, 8:00 a.m.**

**Gainesville Ponds:** Meet Ron Robinson at the Home Depot parking lot on Tower Road to search for waterfowl and other birds at various ponds in southwest Gainesville, including Chapmans Pond. Difficulty: 1.

**Sunday, January 17, 7:00 a.m. at the Tag Agency or 8:00 a.m. at Alligator Lake**

**Alligator Lake:** Meet Bob Carroll at the Gainesville Tag Agency and carpool to Alligator Lake Park. We will walk the grassy berm around the large marsh looking for waterfowl, wading birds, and woodland species. This site has often produced new and unique birds. Difficulty: 3.

**Saturday, January 23, 8:00 a.m.**

**Kanapaha Prairie:** Meet trip leader Rex Rowan in the Public parking lot at Archer Rd. and Tower Rd. (SW 75th St.). The Kanapaha Prairie is a cattle ranch and also a privately-owned conservation property whose 700+ grassy acres are dotted with marshes. We'll see Sandhill Cranes, Eastern Meadowlarks, Loggerhead Shrikes, and Eastern Bluebirds in the pastures, and ducks, raptors, American Bitterns, and other waterbirds in the marshes. Difficulty: 3

**Saturday, January 30, 8:00 a.m.**

**La Chua Trail:** Meet trip leader Felicia Lee at the trailhead of La Chua Trail on Camp Ranch Road. La Chua is one of

the area's best birding hotspots and it supports a tremendous bird population including wading birds, waterfowl, raptors, warblers, sparrows, and others. Entrance fee: \$4 per vehicle. Difficulty: 3.

**Saturday, February 6, 6:30 a.m.**

**Northeast Florida Coast:** Meet trip leader John Hintermister at the Tag Agency and carpool to the east coast. We'll start at Fernandina Beach and work our way south. Possible Purple Sandpipers and scoters at Ft. Clinch State Park (entry fee \$6 per vehicle). Then to Amelia Island for Red-throated Loon, scoters, Horned Grebes, and gulls. We'll finish at Jacksonville's Huguenot Park (\$4 per vehicle + \$1 for each additional person) for shorebirds and other winter birds. Expect a full day of birding and some walking at various coastal sites. Bring a lunch and warm clothes. Difficulty: 3.

**Saturday, February 27, 8:00 a.m.**

**Magnolia Parke:** The wetlands at the back of this commercial/medical complex contain a surprising number of birds, often including the rare-in-Florida Rusty Blackbird. Meet trip leader Sam Ewing, one of Alachua County's top youth birders, in the parking area adjoining the wetland. Difficulty: 2

**Saturday, March 12, 8:00 a.m.**

**Prairie Creek Lodge:** The 500-acre Prairie Creek Preserve encompasses a variety of uplands and lowlands. Ivor Kincaide will lead us as we sample several of them on this trip. Wear rubber boots or old shoes you don't mind getting wet, as the trail can be soggy or even flooded. The woods should be greening up, and the resident birds should be singing. Difficulty: 2

**Trip Difficulty 1:** Trip within easy access to the vehicle and/or level terrain one mile or less **2:** May involve uneven terrain one to two miles **3:** May involve elevation change, uneven terrain, and/or greater than two miles

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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 sustainable use of natural resources.*

Content of **The Crane** is the sole responsibility of AAS and fulfills stated objectives and goals of AAS. Annual subscription to **The Crane** is included in AAS dues. Non-Audubon members may subscribe to **The Crane** for \$10 annually. All checks for subscriptions or changes of address should be mailed to Paul Moler, Membership Chairman: see back page for address. Submissions to **The Crane** are welcomed. **The Crane** is printed on recycled paper.

**Deadline for  
Mar. Apr. Crane:  
Feb. 15<sup>th</sup>**



The first half of winter saw a flurry of interesting birds come our way. Many of those turned up at the new Sweetwater Wetlands Park. Tom Tompkins kicked off our season there October 31st by finding and photographing a White-faced Ibis. A late afternoon visit by Jonathan Mays on November 6th re-

vealed a large numbers of blackbirds using the westernmost cell as a roost. Among them Jonathan picked out a Yellow-headed Blackbird. John Hintermister found a Lincoln's Sparrow near the entrance on the 11th. While the wetlands attracted large numbers of ducks (mostly Blue-winged Teal and Black-bellied Whistling Ducks) and a nice selection of other marsh birds, a great sensation was caused by the unexpected back-to-back sightings of a Fulvous Whistling-Duck found November 17th by Sandy Burford and Danny Shehee, and a Gray-headed (Purple) Swamphen discovered by Andy Kratter two days later. This was our first Fulvous Whistling-Duck in six years, and the swamphen was a new county record! Another great bird was reported by Dotty Robbins, a Yellow Rail on November 30th, but unfortunately it could not be relocated.

Much of Paynes Prairie basin was flooded and inaccessible this early winter, but that didn't keep Lloyd Davis from finding an Ash-throated Flycatcher on October 30th along Cones Dike, and better yet, a Groove-billed Ani on November 4th at La Chua trail.

The Hague Dairy had its share of goodies. John Hintermister had a Yellow-headed Blackbird there on November 7th, and Steven Goodman, visiting November 13th, found a Bronzed Cowbird and a very photogenic Western Kingbird. On November 28th Andy Kratter discovered a Dickcissel, and while looking for that bird on December 2nd, Matt O' Sullivan and I stumbled upon an Ash-throated Flycatcher on the backside of one of the ponds, and spotted a very pale hawk that could well have been a "Kriger's" Red-tailed Hawk.

Chapman's Pond/Veteran's Park received a lot of attention after Trina Anderson reported the first of what would be TWO Nashville Warblers. One Nashville would have been more than enough to cause a stir! Matt O'Sullivan checked Newnans Lake several times this season and his persistence was rewarded November 24th with a blue-phase Snow Goose, and more unexpectedly on December 3rd, nine Black Scoters! This was only the third record of that species in the county.

One of the most amazing birding spectacles of the year was a Chimney Swift migratory-roost discovered in late October at a chimney on the downtown Seagle Building. The chimney hosted over 15,000 swifts, and was one of the biggest (*continued on Page 11*)

## Gainesville Christmas Bird Count

The Gainesville Christmas Bird Count began in 1957, missed 1958, and has been annual since 1959. That's 58 years. If you add the three husband-and-wife Gainesville Counts done in 1924, 1927, and 1949, this year's was the 61st ever. And it was the best, or at least tied the best, with either 162 or 163 species recorded by 103 participants comprising eleven teams.

The most exciting birds seen this year were those that were new to the Count. One of them, a Lesser Black-backed Gull at Newnans Lake, was not only new to the Count, it was new to the county, unreported in Alachua County until December 20, 2015. Andy Kratter tells the story of its discovery: "The morning circuit of the lake in our boat captained by Terry Cake, was dismal. Cold, with almost no ducks, grebes, loons, terns, or gulls. But in the afternoon we often find different birds so Pete Polshak, John Mangold, and I had high hopes. In the center of the lake about 50 Ring-billed Gulls had congregated and we started digging into our cache of white-cheddar popcorn. As we threw handfuls, the gulls began to accumulate and soon we had what I thought was a first-winter Herring Gull among the milling mix. As they swirled around I noted that the 'Herring' had solid dark wings lacking the pale inner primary window, and I remarked that it may be Lesser Black-backed. We concentrated on that bird and got great views and photos, noting the small bill, white head, crisply marked coverts, nearly white rump and extensive white bases to the tail feathers. The bird was nearly identical to one of the illustrations on the Sibley app. We continued chumming and soon realized there were two Herrings, one Lesser Black-backed, and a Laughing Gull adult. Soon a Forster's Tern appeared, our first of the day, and a Bonaparte's Gull joined the fray for a five-gull-species afternoon. We stayed with the birds for over an hour, until the popcorn was gone."

Also new to the Count was a bird that most local birders have seen by now, Purple Swamphen, two of which have been present at Sweetwater Wetlands Park since November 19th.

A third bird new to the Count, if accepted, is Chestnut-sided Warbler, found at Lake Alice but not seen well enough for observers to be absolutely certain of its identity. Efforts to relocate the bird in the days after the Count were unsuccessful. Since the Chestnut-sided would be the record-setting species #163 for the Count, we may have to be content with tying the record of 162, set in 2012.

Other remarkable sightings included 14 Vaux's Swifts by Tom Webber, first detected in mid-November (Sam and Ben Ewing got a round of applause for finding the swifts' roost site at UF's Dauer Hall, which allowed birders to stake them out for the Count); a Brown Creeper at the Tusawilla Prairie by Mitch Walters; a Whooping Crane seen flying over downtown Gainesville by Anthony Rue; a Western Tanager by Dot Fagan in NW Gainesville; four Least Bitterns at Sweetwater Wetlands Park by Paul Sykes; two Ash-throated Flycatchers at Persimmon Point by Bubba Scales; a Nashville Warbler and an Indigo Bunting by Scott Robinson at Chapmans Pond; a Black-throated Green Warbler by Andy Kilmer on the west side of Paynes Prairie; a Northern Rough-winged Swallow, a Least Flycatcher, and seven Northern Waterthrushes by Jonathan Mays and Adam Zions on Cones Dike; and a Ruby-throated Hummingbird and a Summer Tanager in NW Gainesville by Dean, Ben, and Sam Ewing.

The Gainesville Count had a notable visitor this year. Paul Sykes, from north Georgia, holds the record for participating in the highest number of CBCs. With 13 CBCs on his schedule this season, he plans to complete his 500th CBC.

Though we set a new record, or at least tied the old one, we missed several species that we normally get. We saw no Common Loons, no Common Ground-Doves, and no White-crowned Sparrows. Here's the complete list (**boldface** indicates a new species for the count or a historically high count for an individual species): Black-bellied Whistling-Duck **551**, Snow Goose 1, Muscovy Duck 266, Wood Duck 191, Gadwall 15, American Wigeon 1, Mallard 12, Mottled Duck 87, Blue-winged Teal 690, Northern Shoveler 17, Northern Pintail 3, Green-winged Teal 16, Redhead 1 Ring-necked Duck 354, Lesser Scaup 60, Bufflehead 7, Hooded Merganser 98, (*Cont. on Pg 11*)

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Drawing by  
Andre Frattino



### Youth Christmas Bird Count

We are looking for youths who would like to participate in the annual Kids' Christmas Bird Count on Saturday, January 16. Please share this date with interested youth in your neighborhood, school, or church. Let us know if you would like to lead a team. Kindly register for this event at [alachuayouthbirding@gmail.com](mailto:alachuayouthbirding@gmail.com)

### Scouts Enjoy Bird Camp

On Sunday, November 15th, Alachua Audubon once again hosted the *Bird Camp for Kids* at the lovely Tusawilla Lake property of Alachua Conservation Trust. Twenty three elementary-aged kids took part in learning about birds. Most of the youth were members of a scout group at The Rock church and were accompanied by their troop leader, Jim McKenzie, who is also the elementary school principal. Three other families also participated..

Adam Kent presented his *Bird Detective* power point presentation that focuses on identifying local birds. Ted and Steven Goodman taught children about binoculars and scopes, Mike Manetz helped children listen for bird sounds, and Sharon Kuchinski explained the use of field guides. Thank you to this team plus helpers Diana Manetz and Mercedes Panqueva.

By Emily Schwartz

Photographs on the right were taken by Mercedes Panqueva at Alachua Audubon's *Bird Camp for Kids*.

### Family Birding at Paynes Prairie

Join volunteers Neil and Joan MacLeod for family birding events on the first Saturday of each month, November through April. These field trips are sponsored by Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park. Call 352-466-4100 for more information and register at [www.prairiefriends.org](http://www.prairiefriends.org). Families and kids are encouraged to participate. Children must be accompanied by an adult.

#### Saturday, January 2, 9:00 – 11:00 am *Cranes and Winter Birds on the Prairie*

Meet Neil and Joan MacLeod at La Chua parking lot.

#### Saturday, February 6, 9:00 – 11:00 am *How to Identify Birds and their Songs*

Meet Neil and Joan MacLeod at Lake Wauberg parking area by the boat ramp.



## Speakers Corner

**Tuesday, January 12th** at Prairie Creek Lodge (7204 SE County Road 234, Gainesville, FL) 6:00 social time, 6:30 program. ***Imperiled Birds of Central Florida.***

Presented by Adam & Gina Kent of the Avian Research and Conservation Institute, Alachua Audubon Society and Florida Ornithological Society. Central Florida is one of the best places in the US to find rare birds! Come join us to learn about some of these fascinating rare and imperiled species that can be found within a few hours' drive of Gainesville. Why are there so many rare birds in Florida? What's the difference between a rare and an imperiled species? In addition to a half dozen federally Threatened and Endangered species, we'll also talk about birds listed as imperiled by other agencies and organizations. We'll discuss factors that contribute to the scarcity of these birds, what's being done to protect them, and top it off with some conservation success stories. Come learn what you can do to help!



Photograph taken of Lesser Scaup flying over Swan Lake during the Melrose CBC. Photograph taken by Sallie Carlock.

## Melrose Christmas Bird Count

On December 17<sup>th</sup>, 42 participants from Santa Fe Audubon, Alachua Audubon, Duval Audubon, and others fanned out in boats, cars, and on foot to survey all the birds that could be seen and heard for the 25<sup>th</sup> annual Melrose Christmas Bird Count (CBC). This dedicated effort resulted in locating 103 species of birds. The Melrose CBC covers a 15-mile diameter circle centered at the intersection of SR 219 and SR 100, and encompasses parts of Clay, Putnam, Alachua, and Bradford Counties. Many bird-rich natural areas occur in this circle and include Lake Santa Fe, Santa Fe Swamp, Gold Head Branch State Park, the Ordway Preserve, and numerous lakes.

At the end of the day-long survey, participants congregated at Betty's Pizza in Melrose to tally the results, to share stories of the day's birding highlights, and of course to feast on the local cuisine. Laura Berkelman compiled the list of birds that were surveyed by eleven birding groups. Interesting sightings included seven woodpecker species - Pileated, Red-bellied, Red-headed, Downy, Flicker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and new to the count, Hairy Woodpecker, found at Santa Fe Swamp. Seven species of sparrows were also tallied. The most abundant ducks were 350 Lesser Scaup and 249 Ring-necked Ducks.

Begun 116 years ago in New York City, Christmas Bird Counts provide important insight into the health of the environment. Since birds are the most visible of our wildlife and the easiest to survey, bird survey data provide an indication of the overall health of the less visible wildlife species. An abundant and diverse avian community can reflect healthy ecological habitats, while declining bird populations can signify disturbing trends in our land development patterns and their detrimental effects to natural areas. Changes in the range of some bird species have implications in assessing results of climate change. National Audubon has identified 314 species of birds in the U.S. that will be affected by climate change. Results from the Melrose CBC combined with data from hundreds of other CBC surveys throughout the country allow ornithologists to assess bird trends on a national and international scale.

By Joyce King

## Wednesday Bird Walks at the *Sweetwater Wetlands Park*

Alachua Audubon leads weekly bird walks at the Sweetwater Wetlands Park. The weekly walks are scheduled on Wednesday mornings at 8:30 am, starting November 4th. The Sweetwater Wetlands Park is now open daily. Admission is \$5 per car. An annual pass can be purchased for \$75 from the Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs administrative office, which is located on the third floor of the Thomas Center, Building B, 306 NE Sixth Ave. The office is open Monday-Thursday from 7 a.m.-6 p.m. The annual pass is valid from Oct. 1, 2015 to Sept. 30, 2016.

## Plum Creek Update

On November 18th, the Alachua County Planning Commission, which provides advice to the Alachua County Board of County Commissioners, voted to recommend adopting the latest version of Plum Creek's proposed Sector Plan, in spite of the testimony of county staff, which was entirely in opposition to the plan. The proposed Sector Plan, which is a revision of the original plan, calls for a major development in the flatwoods forest adjacent to Lochloosa Creek in one of the most rural and environmentally valuable parts of the county. It would also put thousands of acres of flatwoods and swamp forest into conservation easements.

The revised plan differs from the original in several ways. One difference is that the development plans for Plum Creek-owned land near Hawthorn have been removed from the plan, and these parcels have been annexed into the City of Hawthorn. A second difference is that lands near SR 26 have been removed from the plan. Those acres will now continue to be governed by the County Comprehensive Plan. What remains in the revised plan is the proposed development classification of lands near Lochloosa Creek and the proposed new conservation easements. Also, the proposed wildlife corridor along Lochloosa Creek has been significantly widened, and the proposed conservation easements are to be held by multiple parties, thus making them much more reliable. Alachua Audubon advocated for both (*continued on Page 10*)

## Pints and Predators—Live Birds of Prey Festival

Join Wild Birds Unlimited at First Magnitude Brewery on Saturday, January 30th from 12-4 pm for an afternoon with live birds of prey from the Apopka-based Avian Reconditioning Center. This year's event will feature a Bald Eagle and four other species of raptors and owls. In addition to the main feature, there will be a birding fair designed to educate attendees about the hobbies of birding and backyard bird feeding, opportunities to join local Audubon guides on birding field trips, citizen science initiatives such as eBird, Project Feeder Watch, and more.

Even though First Magnitude is a brewery, kids are welcomed and encouraged to attend and families will find plenty for kids to do. You may bring your own food and drink but there will be a food truck with high quality, hot meals in the parking lot in addition to the excellent craft brews that are always on tap in First Magnitude's tasting room.

Follow our updates on the Gainesville Wild Birds Unlimited Facebook page or website. Learn more about ARC on their website [The Avian Reconditioning Center](#)



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## Florida's State Parks Costs, Benefits, and Threats

Yes, threats! Our parks are under siege! For fiscal year 2014/15, the operating expense for the Division of Recreation and Parks was \$78 million, of which the parks contributed \$64 million from entrance fees, camping fees, etc. The difference, paid by the taxpayer was \$14 million. Every year funding from the legislature goes down and staffing of the parks is reduced, even as the visitation to and revenue from the parks increases. The estimate of the annual economic benefit to Florida's economy of our state parks is \$3 billion. For every dollar spent by the tax payer in FY14/15, the parks returned over \$200 to the businesses that benefit from people visiting our state to see the unique flora, fauna, and ecology of Florida protected in our state parks.

Our parks are the best in the country, they provide environmental protection, and they return \$200 for every dollar spent, yet our elected leaders want to change the system. Florida Senate Bill 570, which would eliminate state park entrance fees for one year, has been introduced for the 2016 legislative session. How would this affect the parks? First, it would reduce the funds used to hire park staff, thus reducing staff even more. Second, it would make the parks less safe. Parks with no entrance fee tend to attract inappropriate users who cause trouble and pose a danger to others. The trails into both Gumroot Swamp off of SR26 north of Gainesville and Biven's Nature Park off South Main Street in Gainesville were closed for this reason. The Bolen Bluff Trail at Payne's Prairie off of US 441 south of Gainesville had constant inappropriate use and law enforcement problems until a pay station was installed. Eliminating fees would be bad for the parks, bad for the visitors who want to use the parks for passive recreation, and bad for the bottom line – the 3 billion dollar benefit to our economy. When parks become unsafe, visitors stay away.

(There is a petition on line regarding this issue at [Http://petitions.moveon.org/sign/our-](http://petitions.moveon.org/sign/our-)

[parks-are-not-for?](#)  
[source=s.inc.em.cp&r\\_by=2733178\)](#)

Another change being proposed is to introduce multiple use management involving timber production, cattle grazing, and hunting. The idea is to enable the parks to pay all of their own operating budget. The Department of Environmental Protection, which governs the parks, is serious about this. A contract has been signed for a timber inventory of the entire state park system and for the writing of a management plan for the parks based on the timber survey data. People come to the parks to see nature, not commercial forestry or cattle ranching. And if hunting is added to the mix, the wildlife that visitors hope to see will stay out of sight.

If implemented, these management changes will have a significant negative impact on the park experience, which will result in a negative impact on the economic benefit of the parks far exceeding any hoped for budgetary reduction. This is very foolish. We need to stand up for our parks. We need to let our political leaders in Tallahassee know that we care about this. Please call, write, or e-mail your state senator, representative, or anyone else you think might be willing to listen to reason.

By Bob Simons and  
Anne Casella

## Receive the Crane Electronically

Help Alachua Audubon reduce our costs of paper, printing, and mailing and help the environment by receiving the Crane electronically. You will receive only one email per newsletter that will contain a link to the Alachua Audubon Website. To start receiving the Crane electronically, send an email to [AAS-thecrane@att.net](mailto:AAS-thecrane@att.net). In the subject line put the word Newsletter and include your name & address.

## **Ichetucknee, Santa Fe, O'Leno Christmas Bird Count**

The Ichetucknee/Santa Fe/O'Leno Christmas Bird Count held its seventh annual bird count on Tuesday, December 22<sup>nd</sup>. The CBC covers many natural and state-managed properties including Ichetucknee Springs State Park, O'Leno State Park, the Ichetucknee River, 25 miles of the Santa Fe River, Fort White Mitigation Park, and areas of private, residential, and agricultural use.

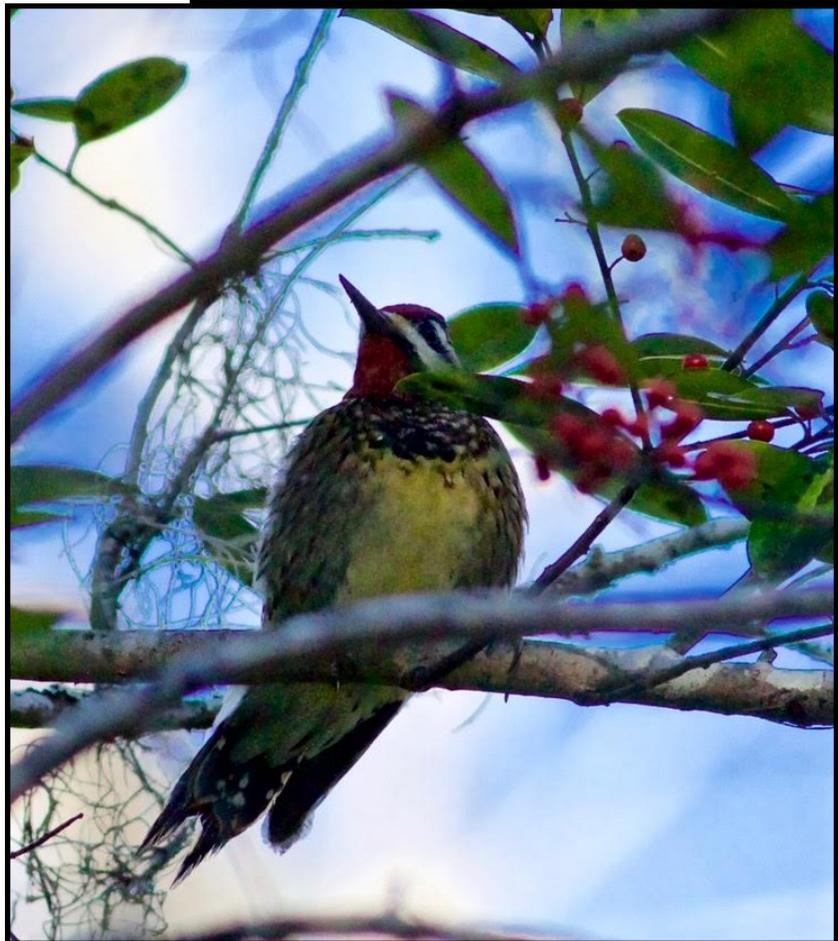
This year's 15-mile wide circle, centered near the town of Fort White, involved 30 participants assembled into five main teams. Many of the participants are members of the Four Rivers Audubon, Alachua Audubon, Florida Park Service, and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. The group was pleased to have six new faces join the CBC this year.

Three of the five birding groups concentrated their efforts on state lands; specifically within the state parks and conservation areas. The other two teams focused on other river sections and traveled through uplands and neighborhoods. The group's efforts were achieved by car and foot, as well as by paddling on the Santa Fe River. The day began mostly cloudy and warm, which progressed into the mid-70's with several rain showers. At the end of the day the five teams assembled for an enjoyable evening to summarize the data, swap stories, and eat pizza.

The CBC recorded 6,881 birds comprising 88 species. These observations included six new high count records, in addition to two new species. Record high counts were observed for Turkey Vulture (1966), Ameri-

can Goldfinch (470), Wild Turkey (82), Common Gallinule (13), Wilson's Snipe (5 –tied), and Northern Harrier (2-tied). Bird species new to the Count Circle were the American Pipit (55) and American Bittern (2). Particularly interesting were the 1,400+ Turkey Vultures that Debbie Segal and Bob Knight observed streaming south in a narrow band over a 10-minute period. The seven years worth of CBC data are serving well to document the common and unique species of the area. The participants look forward to next year when they can spend another beautiful (yet drier!) day in north-central Florida counting birds.

By Ginger Morgan



Photograph of Yellow-bellied Sapsucker taken by Tedd Greenwald during the Ichetucknee, Santa Fe, O'leno Christmas Bird Count.

## Sweetwater Wetlands Park – Gainesville’s Newest Attraction

*Reprinted from a Gainesville Sun article (12/27/15 or 1/3/16)* Kudos to Gainesville Regional Utilities and the City of Gainesville Public Works for designing and constructing the Sweetwater Wetlands Park! This new environmental venue, which is now open daily, is attracting local and distant bird watchers, nature photographers, and outdoor enthusiasts. The park has become Gainesville’s newest environmental learning center and hosts classes ranging from 3rd grade up to university graduate-level. Two weekly field trips are open to the public so visitors can view waterfowl, wading birds, wild horses, alligators, and other wildlife that occupy the marshy habitat. The Alachua Audubon Society leads a birding walk at the Sweetwater Wetland each Wednesday morning at 8:30 while a City staff ranger leads a nature walk every Saturday morning at 9:00.

What many visitors don’t realize is that the prime wildlife habitat they are viewing is actually a constructed treatment wetland. The Sweetwater Wetland is a state-of-the-art water quality enhancement system that is designed to cost-effectively remove nutrients and pollutants – over 125,000 pounds of total nitrogen annually – in wastewater and storm water that flows from Gainesville to Paynes Prairie and ultimately recharges the Floridan Aquifer via Alachua Sink. There are no pumps, chemicals, or other industrial processes necessary to operate the Sweetwater Wetland nutrient polishing process. Nutrient concentration reduction is all accomplished naturally by gravity, sunlight, and photosynthesis of wetland plants that collectively create the ideal conditions for the millions of microscopic organisms that actually cleanse the water. What may also not be apparent is that the clear water that discharges from the constructed Sweetwater Wetlands is hydrologically enhancing about 1,300 acres of Paynes Prairie wetlands that were formerly dehydrated and degraded by drainage canals.

At a time when environmental degradation in Florida is frequently front page news, it is reassuring that our local and state leaders chose to invest in the public good. Thanks to the new Sweetwater Wetlands Park, cleaner water is now recharging our drinking water aquifer, our community has a new and exciting opportunity for passive outdoor recreation, students of all ages have a hands-on environmental learning center, aquatic and wetland-dependent wildlife are prospering, and out-of-town visitors are contributing to Gainesville’s growing ecotourism economy. With the Sweetwater Wetland

Park as an example, perhaps other municipalities in North Florida will consider converting their groundwater-polluting wastewater discharge systems to treatment wetlands. The benefits are wide-reaching to our drinking water supply, our natural environment, our educational development, and the entire public-at-large.

The Sweetwater Wetlands Park is located at 325 SW Williston Road (one half mile east of Highway 441). Look for the sign on the south side of Williston Road. Admission is \$5 per car or \$2 for walk-ins. An annual park pass for \$75 is available from the City of Gainesville. The park is open daily from 7:00 am to sunset.

By Debbie Segal and Bob Knight



Photograph of Sandhill Cranes flying over Levy Prairie during the Gainesville CBC. Photograph taken by Sallie Carlock.

## Plum Creek

(Continued from Page 6)

wider conservation easements that would be held by multiple owners. The arguments pro and con are much the same as before. One difference is that the proponents have come out in much larger numbers to support Plum Creek’s revised plan. This issue will likely come before the Alachua County Commission in January or February. It is a very important issue for the future of Alachua County and one that Alachua Audubon will continue to follow.

By Bob Simons

## Gainesville Christmas Bird Count

(Continued from Page 3)

Ruddy Duck 16, Northern Bobwhite 11, Wild Turkey 30, Pied-billed Grebe 142, Horned Grebe **31**, Wood Stork 68, Double-crested Cormorant 521, Anhinga 178, American White Pelican 1, (Continued from Page 3), American Bittern 7, Least Bittern 4, Great Blue Heron (including 1 Great White Heron) 147, Great Egret 166, Snowy Egret 216, Little Blue Heron 374, (Tricolored Heron 87, Cattle Egret 93, Green Heron 17, Black-crowned Night-Heron 103, White Ibis 2,865, Glossy Ibis 154, Black Vulture 426, Turkey Vulture 983, Osprey 6, Northern Harrier 44, Sharp-shinned Hawk 12, Cooper's Hawk 7, *Accipiter*, sp. 2, Bald Eagle 75, Red-shouldered Hawk 190, Red-tailed Hawk 48, King Rail 10, Virginia Rail 11, Sora 60, **Purple Swamphen 2**, Purple Gallinule 2, Common Gallinule 485, American Coot 2,892, Limpkin 66, Sandhill Crane 963, Whooping Crane 1, Killdeer 333, Spotted Sandpiper 2, Greater Yellowlegs 15, Lesser Yellowlegs 8, Least Sandpiper 34, Wilson's Snipe 147, American Woodcock 10, Bonaparte's Gull 2, Laughing Gull 1, Ring-billed Gull 286, Herring Gull 2, **Lesser Black-backed Gull 1**, Forster's Tern 3, Rock Pigeon 77, Eurasian Collared-Dove 21, White-winged Dove 1, Mourning Dove 370, Barn Owl 3, Eastern Screech-Owl 12, Great Horned Owl 35, Barred Owl 50, Eastern Whip-poor-will 1, Vaux's Swift 14, Ruby-throated Hummingbird 1, Belted Kingfisher 36, Red-headed Woodpecker 15, Red-bellied Woodpecker 304, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker **111**, Downy Woodpecker 118, Northern Flicker 64, Pileated Woodpecker 124, American Kestrel 44, Merlin 2, Least Flycatcher 2, Eastern Phoebe 453, Ash-throated Flycatcher 2, Loggerhead Shrike 26, White-eyed Vireo 101, Blue-headed Vireo 103, Blue Jay 260, American Crow 609, Fish Crow 107, crow, sp. 140, Tree Swallow 170, Northern Rough-winged Swallow 1, Carolina Chickadee 232, Tufted Titmouse 359, Brown-headed Nuthatch 6, Brown Creeper 1, House Wren 177, Sedge Wren 60, Marsh Wren 69, Carolina Wren 395, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher **493**, Ruby-crowned Kinglet 627, Eastern Bluebird 245, Hermit Thrush 54, American Robin 1,143, Gray Catbird 145, Northern Mockingbird 168, Brown Thrasher 15, European Starling 24, American Pipit 2, Cedar Waxwing 410, Ovenbird 6, Northern Waterthrush 7, Black-and-white Warbler **106**, Orange-crowned Warbler 104, Nashville Warbler 1, Common Yellowthroat 191, American Redstart 1, Northern Parula 7, Palm Warbler 758, Pine Warbler 221, Yellow-rumped Warbler 2,111, Yellow-throated Warbler 50, Prairie Warbler 7, Black-throated Green Warbler 1, Wilson's Warbler 2, Eastern Towhee 97, Chipping Sparrow 593, Field Sparrow 9,

Vesper Sparrow 14, Savannah Sparrow 60, Grasshopper Sparrow 1, Henslow's Sparrow 4, Fox Sparrow 2, Song Sparrow 32, Lincoln's Sparrow 3, Swamp Sparrow 233, White-throated Sparrow 8, Summer Tanager 1, Western Tanager 1, Northern Cardinal 627, Indigo Bunting 1, Painted Bunting 4, Red-winged Blackbird 5,857, Eastern Meadowlark 169, Rusty Blackbird 3, Common Grackle 86, Boat-tailed Grackle 948, Brown-headed Cowbird 840, Baltimore Oriole 49, House Finch 94, American Goldfinch 451, House Sparrow 22.

By Rex Roxan

## Around the County

(Continued from Page 2)

roost sites in the southeastern United States. Rex Rowan's vivid and informative November 15th blog describing this roost is a must-read ([fieldguide.blogs.gainesville.com](http://fieldguide.blogs.gainesville.com)). Chimney Swifts usually depart from our area by early November, but with so many swifts around, late lingering birds might be expected. By the middle of November, however, they should certainly be gone, so when Ben and Sam Ewing began noticing swifts passing south over Hogtown Creek Greenway every evening after November 15th, they knew this was unusual. At one point Sam heard one call note that, to him, didn't sound like a Chimney Swift, so thoughts immediately turned to the possibility of the Chimney Swift's rare look-alike western cousin, Vaux's Swift. On the evening of November 25th the brothers ascended to the top of Ben Hill Griffin Stadium for a better sky-view and determined the birds were using the chimney at Dauer Hall on the University campus. On the evening of the 30th, Andy Kratter and Matt O'Sullivan staked out the chimney and heard them calling...Vaux's Swifts. This was the first reliable roost site documented in Florida since 1997, and for the next several days and weeks large numbers of birders from all over the state and beyond gathered in evening vigils hoping to add this species to their lists. Gainesville is lucky to have a good selection of accommodating chimneys as well as alert and determined birders such as Sam and Ben! Thanks to those who shared their sightings through December 9, 2015.

Alachua Audubon Society  
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*The Crane*  
Jan.—Feb. 2016



Photograph taken by Mercedes Panqueva at Alachua Audubon's *Bird Camp for Kids*.

## Join Audubon!

To join Audubon on 3 levels (National, Florida, and Alachua), fill in application and mail to:

Paul Moler 7818 Highway 346 Archer, Florida 32618

Make check payable to National Audubon Society

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Questions? Contact Paul 352-495-9419 or  
paulmoler@bellsouth.net