



# The Crane

Volume 56 Number 4 March-April 2015

## March and April Field Trips

**Saturday, March 7, 8:00 a.m.-Morningside Nature Center – CLEP\*;** Meet City Naturalist Geoff Parks at the Morningside parking lot. MNC contains more than seven miles of trails that wind through sandhills, flatwoods, cypress domes, and habitat restoration areas. The resident breeders - Pine Warblers, Eastern Towhees, and White-eyed Vireos among them - should be busy singing and building nests. Difficulty: 3

**Saturday, March 21, 7:30 a.m.; Watermelon Pond** Join trip leader Rex Rowan for a ramble over the grassy fields and marshy potholes of southwest Alachua County's interesting "upland wetland." Meet at the county park at the south end of SW 250th Street (directions on the AAS web site). Difficulty: 2

**Sunday, March 29, 7:30 a.m.-Ocala National Forest;** Meet trip leaders Bob Simons and Rex Rowan in the Winn Dixie (formerly Sweetbay) parking lot at the corner of SW 20th Avenue and SW 34th Street. Come and admire the longleaf sandhills and scrub in the marvelous 383,000-acre remnant of aboriginal Florida, while we search for Florida Scrub-Jay, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Bachman's Sparrow, Brown-headed Nuthatch, and other specialty birds. Difficulty: 3

**Saturday, April 11, 8:00 a.m. - Wildflowers with Dana Griffin;** Meet retired UF botany professor Dana Griffin at the Winn Dixie parking lot at the corner of SW 20th Avenue and SW 34th St. (formerly Sweetbay). Dr. Griffin will lead a caravan to several locations near Gainesville where the wildflowers are at their best. Dr.

Griffin's "Local Flora" class was legendary and you'll get to find out why without paying tuition or taking tests. Diff:2

**Sunday, April 12, 8:00 a.m.-San Felasco Hammock (south entrance);** Meet trip leader Bob Carroll at San Felasco's Millhopper Road parking lot (\$4.00 per vehicle parking fee). Sandhills, meandering streams, forested slopes, and sinkholes set the stage for the diversity of birds we hope to find, such as Yellow-throated and Red-eyed Vireos, Hooded Warbler, Acadian Flycatcher, and the locally-rare Wood Thrush. Diff: 2

**Saturday, April 18, 8 am; Mill Creek—CLEP\*** In 2002, the Alachua County Forever program made its first conservation land purchase—the 1,190 acre Mill Creek Preserve. Meet leader Steve Hofstetter at the parking lot of Hitchcock's Grocery Store in Alachua on the south side of US 441, and carpool to Mill Creek Preserve to bird through the pine and hardwood forests. Difficulty: 2

**Saturday, April 18, 12:45 p.m. Cedar Key by Boat** Join AAS trip leader Scott Flamand and the Tidewater Tour crew on a canopied pontoon boat ride into some of the better known shorebird haunts of the Cedar Key area. Tidewater Tour owners offer a special Alachua Audubon price of \$25.00 per person for this trip. Call Wild Birds Unlimited (352-381-1997) to reserve a spot and for details on where to meet. Difficulty:1

*Field Trips Continued on Page 5*

**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.*

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**Deadline for  
May-June Crane:  
Apr. 15<sup>th</sup>**



When the Christmas Count season ended did Alachua County birders hang up their binoculars, kick back, and wait for spring? No way! Beginning early in January an impressive run of rare to very uncommon species were uncovered, and sparrows, which had made a lackluster showing in December, led the

way. Adam Zions picked up a Henslow's Sparrow at Gum Root Park on January 3rd. Another popped up on an Alachua Conservation Trust field trip at Prairie Creek Lodge January 17th, and was stunningly photographed in flight by Rob Norton. Rob had earlier found and photographed a Lark Sparrow, our first in a few years, on January 9th at the Hague Dairy. That bird remained well into February and was seen by many local and out-of-town birders. Our only Fox Sparrow of the winter was discovered in a subdivision off Millhopper Road on January 3rd by Rex Rowan and Matt O'Sullivan while they were searching (unsuccessfully) for a reported Dark-eyed Junco. Not a bad consolation prize! Rex and I were out at Tusawilla Prairie one evening in January waiting to see American Woodcocks flying out onto the prairie when we were puzzled by a thin downward-inflected sparrow *seep* call reminiscent of Le Conte's Sparrow. Rex returned there on February 6th and indeed discovered a Le Conte's Sparrow in the same area.

Early this winter it looked like Pine Siskins were going to be plentiful, but by the first of January they seemed to evaporate. Then in February they began to re-emerge here and elsewhere in the state. Rex and I found four at O'Leno State Park (Alachua County section) on February 3rd along with two Purple Finches, which is a species I had only seen once before in the county. John Hintermister and Phil Laipis visited O'Leno later that day and added a very rare-in-winter Louisiana Waterthrush.

Birders from all over the state continued trekking to Gainesville to see the Whooping Crane at the Beef Teaching Unit, the flock of Rusty Blackbirds at Magnolia Parke, and the Bullock's Oriole at the Goodman's residence. All three species remained remarkably cooperative and easy to see. The Sheetflow Restoration Wetland at the north end of Payne's Prairie remained closed to the public through the winter, but a few supervised field trips there continued to confirm expectations that this will be a major birding destination in our area. Large numbers of ducks, shorebirds, and wading birds have settled in, and the number of very uncommon species continues to grow. Outstanding birds seen this winter at the Sheetflow Wetland included White-faced Ibis, Roseate Spoonbills, Great White Heron, Horned Grebe, and Red-breasted Merganser. (Continued on Page 9)

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Drawing by  
Andre Frattino



### Kids' Christmas Bird Count

On January 17th, I participated in my third Kids' Christmas Bird Count. I was on Team #2, our team leader being Adam Kent. We had four kids on our team, including myself. We began at Camp Canal, on the eastern edge of Paynes Prairie, and from there walked out on the Cones Dike Trail. We had some nice activity in the woods along Camp Canal and saw good numbers of songbirds, including Blue-headed Vireo, Orange-crowned Warbler, and Black-and-white Warbler. We proceeded out onto Cones Dike Trail and the habitat began to open up, with water on both sides of the trail. Some highlights were several Marsh Wrens, a Northern Waterthrush, and stellar views of a male Yellow-bellied Sapsucker feeding in a hackberry tree along the trail. In the late morning we finished up on Cones Dike and headed back to our cars. We then drove to the count-up where over a lunch of pizza, the three teams tallied up the species they had seen. The count was excellent, with many great birds seen and good participation from many excited young birders!

By Sam Ewing, Age 14

### Breeding Bird Atlas Help Needed for Columbia, Suwannee, and Hamilton Counties

Want to survey birds during the breeding season? If so, please plan to attend a planning meeting at Jacqui Sulek's home in Ft. White on March 3rd. (For more info call Jacqui at 386-497-4185).

Photograph of Jessica Waddington installing a kestrel nest box. Jessica is Alachua Audubon's intern for the spring semester. See article on page 9. Photograph taken by Bob Simons.

### 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. Register at 352-466-4100 or [www.PrairieFriends.org](http://www.PrairieFriends.org). Families and kids are encouraged to participate. Children must be accompanied by an adult.

**Saturday, March 7, 9:00-11:00 a.m. Attracting Birds to Your Backyard.** Meet Neil and Joan MacLeod at the Lake Wauberg boat ramp at Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park and learn how to attract birds to your backyard with plants, water features, feeders, and birdhouses. We will provide material and guidance in making simple backyard bird feeders.

**Saturday, April 4, 9:00 – 12:00 Bird Migration and Keeping a Checklist.** Meet Neil and Joan MacLeod at the La Chua Trail Trailhead and walk together out to the observation tower. Learn about bird migration patterns and tracking the birds that you see.



## Annual Meeting and Pot Luck Dinner Celebration and *Welcome New Board Members*

Come join us on Wednesday, April 15th at 6:00 pm for Alachua Audubon's annual pot luck dinner celebration and help us welcome our newest AAS Board Members. This event will be held at Bubba and Ingrid Scales' house at 3002 SW 1st Way, Gainesville, located in the Colclough Hills neighborhood between south Main Street and Wiliston Road. (Look for the Audubon signs!) Bring some food to share, a drink of choice, and enjoy visiting with Alachua Audubon members and the Board of Directors. This will be a fun gathering and an opportunity to share our more recent spring migration observations!

The Alachua Audubon Society is a volunteer-based organization. The Board of Directors is comprised of four officers and 16 members. Officers of Alachua Audubon are: President—Anne Casella, Vice President—Scott Flamand, Secretary—Felicia Lee, and Treasurer—Dotty Robbins. Returning board members are Bob Carroll, Mike Manetz, Rex Rowan, Emily Schwartz, Debbie Segal, Barbara Shea, Sharon Kuchinski and Bob Simons. Our newest board members are Marie Davis, Will Sexton, Katie Sieving, Charlene Leonard, Ted Goodman, Adam Zions, John Sivinski, and Trina Anderson. ***Please join us as we celebrate Alachua Audubon and welcome our newest board members.***

## The Conch

On Tuesday, April 7th from 7—9 pm, Alachua Audubon and Alachua Conservation Trust will co-sponsor *The Conch* at Satchel's Pizza. The Conch, a true storytelling project, is a production of Grow Radio, Gainesville's community internet radio station at [www.growradio.org](http://www.growradio.org). On the first Tuesday of each month, people are asked to share a five-minute story on the month's theme. The stories are recorded and broadcast on Grow Radio. The theme for April 7th is The Great Outdoors. Join us at Lightnin' Salvage at Satchel's Pizza and share your stories!

## Earth Day Luncheon Honors Marjorie Carr

The Cultural Arts Coalition of Gainesville, the St. Johns/Suwannee Chapter of the Sierra Club, the Association of Women in Science, Florida Defenders of the Environment, and the Alachua Audubon Society are sponsoring an Earth Day luncheon and silent auction in honor of Marjorie Carr. This Earth Day Celebration will be held on April 22nd from 11:30-1:00 at Kanapaha Botanical Gardens.

Marjorie Carr was a member of Alachua Audubon during the 1960s and a strong supporter of conservation. She helped get Paynes Prairie set aside as a state park and was a fierce advocate for the Ocklawaha River. For 35 years, she led a coalition of citizen activists in the campaign to protect and restore the Ocklawaha River, and was successful in having the Army Corps of Engineers Cross Barge Canal project cancelled. Peggy McDonald, author of *Marjorie Harris Carr: Defender of Florida's Wildlife*, will be the keynote speaker. Tickets are \$30 and can be purchased by contacting Nkwanda Jah at the Cultural Arts Coalition at 352-372-0216 or [www.culturalartscoalition.org](http://www.culturalartscoalition.org).

## Birding Class Offered

Would you like to learn more about bird identification? SFC's Community Education Program, in collaboration with the Alachua Audubon Society, is offering a 4-week course in Field Bird Identification. Classes will be on April 11, 18, 25, and May 2nd. Classes are on Saturday mornings and last two hours. The final class will be a longer trip to Cedar Key. Each class is led by a local birding expert.

The course costs \$49 and generates revenue for AAS. Registration is through SFC. For more information and registration, go online to Santa Fe College Community Education or call 352-395-5193. Registration for the class begins on **March 18th**. Class is limited to 12 students so register early as this class fills quickly. Hope to see you in class.

By Barbara Fennelly, Class Coordinator

## Kanapaha Botanical Gardens Spring Garden Festival

The Alachua Audubon Society will sponsor an educational table at the upcoming Kanapaha Botanical Gardens Spring Garden Festival on March 21—22. ***We need helpers at our table to share with others our excitement for birds, conservation, and natural areas.*** You don't have to be a birding expert, just friendly and enthusiastic. Would you like to sign up for a 2 or 3-hour morning or afternoon shift on Saturday or Sunday? To sign up, please contact Barbara Shea at [acubarbarashea@juno.com](mailto:acubarbarashea@juno.com).

### Fieldtrips (continued from Page 1)

**Sunday, April 19, 6:30 a.m.-Cedar Key;** Meet trip leader Rex Rowan in the Target parking lot on Archer Road at I-75. The emphasis on this trip will be migrants – mainly warblers and shorebirds. We'll also look for some uncommon and/or coastal nesting species: Gray Kingbird, Swallow-tailed Kite, and possibly Short-tailed Hawk. Some people stick around after the trip for lunch. Difficulty: 2

### **Saturday, April 25, 8:00 a.m. Bolen Bluff Trail at Paynes Prairie**

Meet trip leader Debbie Segal at the trailhead on US-441 at the south rim of Paynes Prairie. Bolen Bluff is one of Gainesville's perennial favorite birding locations, especially during the peak of songbird migration. Difficulty: 2

### **Sunday, April 26, 6:00 a.m. Hickory Mound WMA and Surrounding Area;**

Meet trip leader John Hintermister at the Tag Agency on NW 34th St. across from the new Walmart to carpool. We will spend most of the day exploring this wonderful mix of salt and freshwater marshes and coastal hardwood swamps. We hope to see spring migrants plus the local nesters—Swainson's Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Short-tailed Hawk, Acadian Flycatcher, Sea-

side Sparrow, King and Clapper Rails, and others. Bring a lunch, water, and bug repellent. Difficulty:2

### **Saturday, May 2, 8:00 a.m. Loblolly Greenway**

Meet Sam Ewing, one of Alachua County's top youth birders, at the Loblolly Woods Nature Park for a birding stroll through the forest that winds along Hogtown Creek. We'll be looking for spring migrants as well as the local nesting species such as Red-eyed Vireo, Hooded Warbler, and Wood Thrush. Difficulty:1

### **Sunday, May 3 8:00 a.m. Powers Park and Palm Point;**

Meet trip leader Barbara Shea at Powers Park to check for birds in the trees along the boat channel and scan the lake from the fishing pier. Then travel to nearby Palm Point – a local migrant trap – to search for migrant activity. Difficulty: 1

*\*The Conservation Lands Educational Program (CLEP) is designed to bring attention to local land conservation efforts. These trips are conducted on properties purchased to protect natural resources and will be led by a representative who will discuss ecological features and history. CLEP trips will be educational experiences, so the emphasis will be on much more than birding.*

Photograph below of John Hintermister while leading an AAS field trip to St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. John leads AAS field trips to regional birding hotspots, and consequently, his field trips are popular, well anticipated, and sure to find exciting birds. Photograph taken by Brenda Springfield.



## Speakers' Corner

**Monday, March 23, Millhopper Library. Social at 6:30 p.m. and program at 7 p.m. *Seabirding in Alachua County? The Cross-Florida Common Loon Migration.* Presented by Dr. Andrew Kratter, Collection Manager in the Ornithology Division at Florida Museum of Natural History.** Common Loons are an iconic bird in much of North America. In their stunning breeding plumage, they breed across the northern US and Canada. In their drabber winter plumage, they undertake a great migration to winter on the Pacific, Atlantic, and Gulf of Mexico coasts. They are a well known migrant at coastal observations points. So why is this an interesting topic here in the middle of Florida, far from either coast and a long way from mist shrouded northern lakes? In the mid-1990s it was discovered that a few Common Loons could be seen flying over Gainesville in late March and early April. Dr. Kratter thought it would be fun to document this migration and discovered that this migration is much more extensive than he could ever have imagined and likely involves a large percentage of the population wintering in peninsular Florida. He will give details of this discovery and explain the pattern, extent, and timing of this unlikely migration route.

**Wednesday, April 22– Millhopper Library. Social at 6:30 p.m. and program at 7 p.m. *Our Wildland Security Advisory System: Cracking the Anti-Predator Code of Tufted Titmice* Presented by Dr. Katie Sieving, Professor Wildlife Ecology and Conservation, UF**

The delightful Paridae (chickadees and titmice) are highly social birds that exhibit exceptional vocal complexity. Capable of encoding 2/3 of the information that the English language can, the sophisticated information encoded in parid calls is used by numerous species to avoid danger and enhance survival. Dr. Sieving will discuss how we decode meaning in parid calls and how we are beginning to map landscapes of animal information.

## Sheetflow Wetland Park Update

A huge THANK YOU to all who attended the City Commission meeting on February 5th and who sent letters and emails to City Commissioners advocating to open the Sheetflow Wetland on a daily basis starting in May when the park is projected to be completed. Your letters, emails, and attendance at the meeting helped tremendously, and as a result, the commissioners overwhelming support opening the Sheetflow Wetland Park on a daily basis. However, there are several challenges that could potentially delay the opening. The City has not budgeted for opening the park during this fiscal year (FY 2015) so operational funds are uncertain for either a week-end or daily operation. However, a few commissioners feel confident they can find sufficient unspent funds in this year's budget to open the park. But funding for this fiscal year is still an uncertainty.

During the February 5th commission meeting, the commission voted to solicit bid proposals from outside entities to run the park. However, the Request for Proposals (RFP) is a time-consuming process that takes many months to complete. Unfortunately, the RFP process was causing City staff to divert their attention from preparing to open the park, to addressing their new RFP mandate. The result was that in all likelihood, the park's opening date would be delayed by several months.

In response, Alachua Audubon and Alachua Conservation Trust again contacted City Commissioners and this time requested that they discontinue the RFP process, and instead concentrate on opening the wetland park with City staff instead of with an outside entity. We were successful in our plea, and consequently City staff dropped the RFP process and are now focused on securing funds and staffing to open the Sheetflow Wetland as soon as construction is completed. Our quest to open the wetland park on a daily basis during this fiscal year from May through September may not have been successful, but the commissioners are now much more aware of the long-term educational, ecotourism, and recreational opportunities that the Sheetflow Wetland Park will provide to this community. Consequently, the commissioners will likely be much stronger long-term advocates for the wetland park, or at least for the duration of their term in office. Thus, the commissioners will likely be more willing to commit sufficient funds for daily operations in FY2016 when those budget plans begin this summer. The likely scenario now is that the Sheetflow Wetland will open on the weekends from this May through September, and then daily beginning October 1st.

By Debbie Segal



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## Orange Lake Wading Bird Rookery Enhancement Plan

Alachua Audubon was invited by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC) to participate in the review of a proposed Wading Bird Rookery Enhancement Plan at Orange Lake. Thick tussock vegetation covers much of Orange Lake including around several islands where wading birds have previously nested. Since the vegetation is so thick, it provides a means for predators such as raccoons to access these islands. The goal of the Wading Bird Rookery Enhancement Plan is to create an open water zone around each of four islands so raccoons and other predators that would prey on eggs and chicks cannot access the islands without risk of alligator attack.

FWC plans to remove the thick tussock vegetation in a 200 to 300 ft zone encircling four islands by mechanical shredding of the vegetation during February. To keep the open water zone free of vegetation over the long term, FWC proposes to conduct follow-up herbiciding on an as-needed basis from a boat during the non-nesting season.

Alachua Audubon reviewed the proposed enhancement plan and toured the four islands at Orange Lake. We applaud FWC's initiative and foresight to enhance wading bird rookery habitat and their desire to act quickly before nesting activities commences. And Alachua Audubon supports the enhancement plan at three of the four islands—Bird, Red Bird, and North Island. However, we recommended that FWC take a more cautionary "wait-and-see" approach before implementing enhancement activities at Grassy Island because Grassy Island differs from the other three islands as it has no previous records of breeding wading birds and it would require eradication of over 80 acres of native aquatic vegetation, which is more habitat alteration than the other three islands combined. Before attempting such expensive and habitat-altering activities at Grassy Island, Alachua Audubon recommended assessing the results of the 2015 breeding bird activities on the three islands where rookery enhancement activities will be implemented. FWC rejected Alachua Audubon's recommendation to delay enhancement activities at Grassy Island primarily because FWC plans to follow their Habitat Management Guidelines, which indicates an over abundance of "floating marsh" habitat and a deficit of rooted "shallow marsh" habitat in Orange Lake.

By Debbie Segal

## FRACKING IN FLORIDA

Fracking, or hydraulic fracturing, is the process of extracting gas by injecting chemicals, sand, and millions of gallons of water into underground shale to fracture it and release entrapped gas. Fracking is not common in Florida, but is legal and it has been done. There are companies who are interested in conducting more fracking in Florida and the Department of Environmental Protection almost never turns down a permit application. Books could be written as to why fracking is harmful to the environment, but the following is a summation:

Toxic chemicals and carcinogens used in the process remain in the wastewater brought back to the surface after the shale fracturing. Some also remain underground and may invade groundwater used for drinking water. Millions of gallons of water are necessary to frack a well, which on average can be fracked about 20 times. Only some of this can be reclaimed -- much can not. Methane (CH<sub>4</sub>), a powerful greenhouse gas, leaks underground and into the atmosphere, where it is 72 times more potent than coal producing carbon dioxide. Earthquakes and explosions often result from fracking, and permanent jobs sustained by this industry are only about one third of that of solar power. The result of all of this is that natural gas, often claimed to be the cleanest of the fossil fuels, is turning out to be more harmful and environmentally damaging than coal.

What can we do about fracking? First, we must inform our government officials, county commissioners, and legislators who are not aware of fracking and its problems. We need to make sure they know what the facts are, how dangerous and destructive it is, that it is never safe, that it is not necessary, and most importantly, that we do not want it here. Of late, great progress has been made in this direction. On the local level, Columbia and Alachua Counties are working on ordinances banning it, and Our Santa Fe River is actively presenting information to the county commissioners in the seven-county Santa Fe River basin. On a state level, Sen. Soto and Rep. Jenne have introduced Legislative bills, sponsored by other legislators to ban fracking throughout the state.

At this moment in Florida, many of our leaders are receptive to improving and preserving our environment and there are a lot of hard-working people pushing in the right direction. And you know this since many of the readers here are among them. Keep up the good work.

By Merrilee Malwitz-Jipson and Jim Tatum

## AAS Field Trip to Tall Timbers

With nary an orange blossom in sight, in late January a dozen AAS members converged at Tall Timbers just north of Tallahassee for an AAS-sponsored field trip. We came in part to see this fabled "the way north Florida used to be" site but also for a peek at the Wade Tract – one of the oldest longleaf pine stands in the southeast.

As we arrived late on Saturday afternoon and introduced ourselves to each other and to AAS group leader Adam Kent and Tall Timbers researcher Jim Cox, the increasingly seductive sounds of the forest became an overlay to the spoken word. We searched for birds first behind the lodge where great birds, including Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, Brown-headed and White-breasted Nuthatches, and Golden-crowned Kinglets were located and observed. After a brief introductory talk on Tall Timbers and the Wade Tract and the role that fire has played in the long-term management, we loaded into a trailer that Jim pulled behind his truck for our next birding expedition around Tall Timbers.

Birding began early the next morning. After observing a family of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, we began our sparrow drive in hopes of flushing these elusive species. Upon visually noting the landing point of a flushed sparrow, Jim quickly set up a mist net in the vicinity of the hidden sparrow. As a group we would then walk towards the hidden sparrow in an attempt to encourage the sparrow to fly towards the mist net. We captured four Henslow's Sparrows and one Bachman's Sparrow during our sparrow drive, and Jim banded, weighed, and evaluated each captured bird. He also marked the capture location with a GPS. All of these data were later entered into a large database that tracks the birds over the multi-year study. One finding that this sparrow banding experiment has revealed is that Henslow's Sparrows have high winter site fidelity. Of the four birds we caught, two had been previously caught and banded.

By Pat Bartlett



Photograph of a Henslow's Sparrow that was captured during the AAS field trip to Tall Timbers. Photograph taken by Santiago Salazar.

## Around the County (Continued from Page 2)

Elsewhere on Paynes Prairie, Lloyd Davis spotted our first Snow Geese of the year on February 15th, and a Least Flycatcher continued along Cones Dike at least through that date. Adam Zions discovered a second Least Flycatcher on January 31st on Levy Lake Loop at Barr Hammock.

There were at least six different Painted Buntings in our area, at Chapmans Pond, Tuscawilla Prairie, Hague Dairy, and three private residences. We didn't have quite the hummingbird hysteria as last year, but there were a few Rufous hummers around, in the yards of Greg and Linda Hart, Ron Robinson, and Dalcio Dacol. Ron Robinson also had visits from a wintering female Ruby-throated Hummingbird.

One of the first avian signs of spring is the arrival of Purple Martins. This year's earliest was reported February 1 by Carmine Lanciani. By the time this issue of the *Crane* reaches you, Northern Parulas will be singing, and it will be time to start watching for Ruby-throats, so hang on to your binoculars...here we go again! Thanks to those who shared their sightings through February 15, 2015.

***Alachua Audubon has an Intern!*** As a class requirement, Jessica Waddington is spending 80 hours this spring semester helping Alachua Audubon with a slew of different projects. Jessica is a senior at UF and is majoring in Natural Resource Management within the College of Tourism. Jessica has been building and installing kestrel nest boxes, assisting with the SFC birding class, and staffing the AAS booth at gatherings. She is looking into setting up an AAS Instagram Account and promoting Alachua Audubon at various UF classes and clubs.

## Rusty Blackbirds: Looking Forward, Looking Back

Rusty Blackbirds pose both a conservation challenge and an environmental mystery. This species has experienced one of the most precipitous declines of any once-common landbird, losing up to 95% of its population over a 40-year span. Until the late 1990s, no one noticed this decline, much less understood it. Today, although some of the bird's habits remain unstudied, our new understanding of Rusty Blackbird breeding and wintering ecology enables scientists to formulate conservation strategies on both ends of its migratory range. However, we know little about Rusty Blackbird migration ecology, a critical element to ensure that the species is protected throughout its full annual cycle.

To identify migratory hotspots, understand migration timing, and inspire the public to support Rusty Blackbird conservation, the International Rusty Blackbird Working Group and their partners developed and launched a three-year Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz in March 2014. The Blitz challenges birders to search for Rusty Blackbirds during their northward migratory journey. Here in Florida, our peak Blitz date is the entire month of March when the majority of Rusties will travel north. To participate, birders scour the landscape for Rusties and report their data to eBird under the "Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz" observation type. These data will be used to identify Rusty Blackbird hotspots across the landscape and assess whether critical stopover areas are adequately protected. The ultimate goal is to ensure that Rusty Blackbirds have access to high-quality habitat throughout a journey that is energetically costly and already fraught with peril.

Although Florida is at the extreme southern end of the Rusty's winter range, there are still opportunities to document this bird. In 2014, all eBird Blitz reports of Rusties came from North Florida, but in 2013, several people found them near Crystal River. Let's try to fill in the gaps for Florida this migration! Is this species just found at low densities across the panhandle and into peninsular Florida? Or are there bigger flocks yet to be discovered? To learn more about the Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz and how to participate, visit our website at <http://rustyblackbird.org/outreach/migration-blitz/> or contact Cathy Ricketts at [cathrine.ricketts@myfwc.com](mailto:cathrine.ricketts@myfwc.com)

By Judith Scarl, International Coordinator, &  
Cathy Ricketts, Florida Coordinator

## Keeping Your Yard Bird Friendly

As spring fast approaches many of us plan to enhance our gardens, add to our landscaping, and beautify our yards. We want to encourage all of you who haven't included wildlife in your landscaping to start this spring! Here are a few things to keep in mind as you prepare to get your hands dirty.

**Planting native plants** offers so many benefits. It provides natural cover, nesting areas, and food for birds and wildlife. It decreases pesticide, herbicide, and water use which makes maintaining your bird-friendly yard easier. Remember to plant your yard in levels—open areas with ground cover, then low bushes, then short trees like native dogwood, and then larger trees. A greater variety of plants promotes a greater diversity of wildlife. The Native Plant Sale, held twice a year at Morningside Nature Center, is a great place to get ideas and plants for your spring and fall projects. The Florida Museum of Natural History also sells native plants, especially those plant types that attract butterflies.

**Be aware of bird activity** while trimming, pruning and mowing those overgrown areas since nest building may already be underway. Rabbits could be nesting on the ground and birds at different levels in the overgrown foliage. Always check before you cut!

**Check your nest boxes** and remove the old spiderwebs and debris. Some of our cavity nesters include the woodpeckers, Great-crested Flycatcher, Eastern Bluebird, Tufted Titmouse, Purple Martin, Carolina Chickadee, Southeastern American Kestrel, and Eastern Screech Owl.

**Keep your chimneys open** and clean for returning Chimney Swifts. Swifts return from Chile in March to scout out the site of last year's nest. If that is not available they will look nearby. Since dead hollow trees are rare these days, chimneys have become the substitute. They are BIG mosquito eaters and do no harm to your chimney.

Thank you for caring about the wildlife that depend on neighborhood yards like yours and including them in your landscape.

Florida Wildlife Care has more information about wildlife including what to do with injured or orphaned wildlife. [www.floridawildlifecare.org](http://www.floridawildlifecare.org)

By Leslie Straub  
Florida Wildlife Care

## Plum Creek Sector Plan and “Envision Alachua”

*Alachua Audubon continues to follow the Plum Creek large-scale development that is proposed for the east side of Alachua County. Provided below is the letter that AAS sent to the Board of County Commissioners on January 18th.*

Dear Commissioners:

The Alachua Audubon Society would like to express an opinion regarding the Sector Plan application filed by Plum Creek, Inc. for the purpose of creating a large development east of Newnan’s Lake. We took a position on this issue in April, 2014 but considerable time has passed and the situation has evolved. Therefore, our position has changed somewhat as follows. We believe that any plan for the real estate development of lands in Alachua County should either follow the Alachua County Comprehensive Plan or be as protective of the environmental, social, and other values of Alachua County as if it did follow the Comprehensive Plan. Therefore, if there is to be a Sector Plan that requires significant deviation from the Comprehensive Plan, it should at the minimum, do the following:

The conservation easements on Plum Creek lands, both those being proposed and those that already exist, should be held by multiple parties, including at least one governmental agency and one non-governmental conservation organization (such as the Nature Conservancy). (This is to help ensure the permanence of these easements.) The management plans associated with these conservation easements should ensure that all plantings are of species that are native to Alachua County, that no additional bedding be done, and that Florida’s Forestry Best Management Practices be followed. For the Lochloosa Creek corridor, the floodplain of this creek should remain in mature native forest.

The development footprint should be very similar to the map drawn by Jason Teisinger. This map changes the proposed Sector Plan by significantly widening and strengthening the wildlife corridor that extends north from SR 20 along Lochloosa Creek. In addition, the development area designated RES-A on this map should be added to the wildlife corridor to better connect to the conservation lands to the south of SR 20.

Future development should not increase the phosphorus or nitrogen loads to Newnan’s Lake, Lochloosa Creek, Lake Lochloosa, Orange Lake, or their tributaries.

Finally, the more intensive development parts of the Sector Plan should occur in and near the US 301 corri-

dor, either near or north of Hawthorne.

If these requirements are not acceptable then our position is that the Alachua County Comprehensive Plan should be applied and adhered to for any development that takes place.

Sincerely,  
Anne Casella, President  
Bob Simons, Conservation Committee  
AAS Board of Directors

## Circumventing Environmental Protections—A Call To Action

The Boundary Adjustment Act for Alachua County was enacted by the state legislature at the request of the citizens of Alachua County about 20 years ago to prevent municipalities from annexing large chunks of rural land without regard for environmental protections or how services might be provided for residences. This act is essential for preventing developers from circumventing the strong environmental protections and urban sprawl regulations contained in the Alachua County Comprehensive Plan. About 20 other counties in Florida have adopted similar legal protections.

Representative Keith Perry is proposing introducing a bill in the state legislature to repeal the Boundary Adjustment Act for Alachua County. The mayor of Hawthorn is strongly in favor of this as a way to support Plum Creek’s large planned development. The Alachua County Commission, the City of Gainesville, and most other municipalities are opposed to repealing the Boundary Adjustment Act, and I suspect the vast majority of citizens of Alachua County would be opposed also if they knew it was happening. If you think this would be a bad idea, please contact the following:

Senator Rob Bradley – 904-278-2085;  
2233 Park Avenue, Suite 303, Orange Park, FL 32073

Rep. Clovis Watson, Jr. – 352-264-4001;  
2815 NW 13<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 202, Gainesville, FL 32609-2865

Rep. Keith Perry – 352-448-9958; P.O. Box 12112,  
Gainesville, FL 32604

By Bob Simons

**Alachua Audubon Society**  
**P. O. Box 140464**  
**Gainesville, Florida 32614-0464**

**Non-profit Organization**  
**U.S. Postage Paid**  
**Gainesville Florida 32601**  
**Permit No. 18**



*The Crane*  
Mar-Apr 2015

Thanks to Paul Moler for sending in this link to an Audubon page with all of Audubon's Birds of America paintings. Check it out.  
<https://www.audubon.org/birds-of-America>

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no National or State Publication

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Alachua Audubon Society

Questions? Contact Paul 352-495-9419 or  
[paulmoler@bellsouth.net](mailto:paulmoler@bellsouth.net)