



The Crane

Volume 52 Number 5 March-April 2012

March and April Field Trips

Saturday, March 3, 8:00 a.m.—Watermelon Pond Wildlife Area; Meet FWC biologist Norberto Fernandez in the Jonesville Publix parking lot (corner of Newberry Road and County Road 241). This large complex of upland woodlands, grasslands, and marshy ponds recently received a 1300-acre addition specifically for conservation of Sherman's Fox Squirrels and Gopher Tortoises. We'll be watching for those, as well as for upland birds like Common Ground-Dove, Eastern Meadowlark, Northern Bobwhite, and the threatened Southeastern American Kestrel. Difficulty: 2

Sunday, March 4, 9:00 a.m. *Family Birding*

Audubon members will host children accompanied by their parent or grandparent for a fun morning of identifying birds. Meet at the parking lot west of the bat house at Lake Alice. If you would like to borrow binoculars for your child or grandchild phone Emily at 372-0754.

Saturday, March 10, 8:00 a.m.- Hatchet Creek Tract; Meet trip leader Adam Kent at the Hatchet Creek Tract on State Road 26 (parking lot is on the left, 1.9 miles east of the flashing light at the junction of 26 and County Road 222). Hatchet Creek is the northernmost section of the Newnans Lake Conservation Area and includes over 2,000 acres of mainly pine-woods and creek bottom. By mid-March, pinewoods residents like Pine Warbler, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Carolina Chickadee, Common Yellowthroat, Eastern Towhee, and newly-arrived Yellow-throated Vireos should be singing and even nesting. A rare Hairy

Woodpecker was seen at this time last year. Wear comfortable shoes and bring water – it's a long hike! Diff.3

Saturday, March 17, 8:00 a.m.- O'Leno State Park; Meet trip leader Jerry Krummrich at the High Springs Winn-Dixie on US-441 to carpool to the park, which has a \$5.00 per vehicle admission fee (\$4.00 single-occupant vehicle). The park should be beautiful, with lots of spring greenery and wildflowers (possibly including wild azaleas). Your chances of a Vireo Grand Slam – White-eyed, Blue-headed, Yellow-throated, and Red-eyed, all singing – should be quite good. Diff: 2

Saturday, March 24, 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. We might see newly-arrived Summer Tanagers and Great Crested Flycatchers, but the resident breeders – Pine Warblers, Eastern Towhees, Brown-headed Nuthatches, and Red-headed Woodpeckers should be busy singing and building nests. Difficulty: 2

Saturday, March 31-Wildflowers with Dana Griffin; *Sign up require.* Call Wild Birds Unlimited to make a reservation [352-381-1997]. Retired UF botany professor Dana 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.1 (Fieldtrips cont on pg. 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.

Content of ***The Crane*** is the sole responsibility of the editor and fulfills stated objectives and goals of Alachua Audubon Society. Annual subscription to ***The Crane*** is included in National Audubon dues. See back page for subscription information. Submissions to ***The Crane*** are welcomed. ***The Crane*** is printed on recycled paper.

**Deadline for
May-June Crane:
Apr. 15th**



Typically, late winter birding is fairly predictable, with our usual winter residents settled into their territories and habits and most rare and unusual species already discovered. This winter was a little more interesting. While the rapidly receding Newnans Lake provided many memorable sightings in December, much of

the action in January shifted to Orange Lake. Judy Bryan refocused our attention there by reporting three Snow Geese January 16 near the south end of the lake at Heagy-Burry Park. Chris Burney followed up by finding at least seven White-fronted Geese and later a couple of Canada Geese. Huge numbers of White Pelicans were massing there as well; from a lookout point near Boardman as many as 1,100 were noted, along with an interesting assortment of ducks including Canvasbacks, Ruddies, Mallards, and Shovelers. A Lincoln's Sparrow was discovered there in the brush. A little farther north on private property near Evinston Bob Knight found an Ash-throated Flycatcher. At Sportsman's Cove near McIntosh the unprecedented numbers of LeConte's Sparrows continued to delight local birders, and it was there February 12 that Caleb Gordon and Julia Willmott spooked up a Short-eared Owl, the first reported in the county in many years. Surprisingly, few shorebirds were evident on the muddy edges but Long-billed Dowitchers were an exception. Glenn Israel counted 89 south of the Windsor boat ramp at Newnans Lake.

Not to be completely forgotten, La Chua trail remained strong on sparrows, with most of the usual species, but more numerous than usual were Vespers and Grasshopper Sparrows. Sweetwater dike was the only reliable spot for American Bittern, and a Limpkin was seen there periodically.

Elsewhere, Lloyd Davis relocated a wintering flock of Rusty Blackbirds in the wetlands behind the Magnolia Parke Center, while Ted and Steven Goodman uncovered at least two locally rare Henslow's Sparrows in the old pasture at Gum Root Park. Another great sighting was a Hairy Woodpecker reported by Keith Collingwood from his yard near Melrose. Laura Bedinger alerted us to a Brown Creeper in her neighborhood near Chapman's Pond. Other good birds at Chapman's during January included a gorgeous drake Goldeneye and, in the brushy edge just west of the pond, a Painted Bunting discovered by Adam Zions. This was one of a veritable rash of Painted Bunting reports in the area. Caleb Gordon and Julia Willmott had one at their worksite near the Duckpond neighborhood, and there were sightings from the yards of John Martin, Kris Campbell, Evelyn Perry, and Barbara Shea. Barbara also enjoyed a brief and stunning appearance of a male Black-throated Blue Warbler at her

birdbath! There was a flurry of hummingbird sightings, several in the wake of the wonderful presentation by hummingbird bander Fred Bassett. We had as many as eight Rufous or selasphorus hummers visiting area feeders, as well as two probable lingering Rubythroats.

In closing, we still have room for a few more participants on our Birds and Conservation Tour in Costa Rica. On this Audubon fundraiser you will experience the excitement of great tropical birding, observe the endless wonders of rainforest flora and fauna, and learn about conservation efforts that make it all possible. Please check the website and consider joining us...www.birdsandconservation.weebly.com

Thanks to those who shared their sightings through February 12, 2012

Housing Crisis Averted!

One of many interesting aspects of Purple Martin behavior is the timing of their migration. Small numbers of males return to our area from South America in late January, at least a month before the main waves of martins arrive. One theory is that these early individuals, known as “scouts”, are searching for nest cavities; and because martins in the eastern U.S. are totally dependent on man-made martin houses, that means they are on the lookout for the white pole-mounted miniature condominiums. Once a martin house is chosen and breeding occurs successfully, the birds become loyal to the site and will return to breed year after year at the same location. One such thriving local site has been at George’s Hardware, next to Hogtown Creek at the intersection of NW 34th Street and University Avenue. For decades birders have marked the beginning of “spring” by the arrival of the first Purple Martin scout at George’s Hardware.

Toward the end of this January, however, someone noticed that George’s Hardware had closed down, and the Purple Martin houses had disappeared! This set off a wave of panic for fear that if scouts returned and didn’t find their house, one of our area’s most venerable martin colonies could be in trouble. With less than a week to act, Alachua Audubon received authorization to re-install new martin houses at the vacant George’s Hardware store. Linda Hensley generously purchased the only available martin house

in town and Alachua Audubon ordered a second house. The first house was installed at the end of January, and for the next several days we anxiously awaited the arrival of martin scouts. Sadly, none seemed to appear. Did they find the new house unsuitable? Did we get the house up too late? The second new house arrived and was assembled on February 4th. When Ivor Kincaid and Mike Manetz arrived to install the second nest box they were delighted to find two martin scouts circling overhead. Before assembling their tools, they placed the house on the roof of the old George’s, Hardware building and immediately the scouts descended and began circling it, chirping excitedly, even attempting to land on it! Within an hour the second martin house was up on its pole, bringing the number of available nest holes to twenty between the two houses.

In the near future Alachua Audubon is planning to install a third martin house along the shore of a nearby section of Hogtown Creek, a few hundred yards west of the old George’s Hardware store. The dentists at the dental office of Thaler and Townsend have given Alachua Audubon permission to install a Purple Martin nest box just outside their office—another site that looks suitable for Purple Martins..

Thanks to some quick action and help and advice from Linda Hensley, Ivor Kincaid, Ron Robinson, Rex Rowan, and Debbie Segal, we have high hopes the entire colony will expand and con-

tinue to fill the sky along Hogtown Creek for years to come.

By Mike Manetz

Photo by Diana McKinnon Manetz



Fred Bassett's Hummingbird Presentation

Gainesville Audubon Society was proud to host master bird bander, Fred Bassett, on January 22nd at the new Senior Center. Mr. Bassett, who is a member of the non-profit Hummer/Bird Study Group (HBSG), regaled a large audience of 220 people with descriptions of his personal exploits as a migrating hummingbird chaser. He described the personalities and peculiarities of one of the world's most beloved families of feisty little birds. Fred has spent over 20 years in a passionate pursuit of these jet setting birds following their contrails all over the southeast US and up into Idaho. During his impressive career he has banded over 2,000 hummingbirds.

A rapt and enthusiastic audience was treated to a slide show of different hummingbird species, provided with details on nesting, color patterns, mating habits, plus information on how to attract and feed hummingbirds in backyard environments. Details were also provided regarding those species of hummingbirds likely to be encountered in a North Florida neighborhood.

Following the flight pattern of banded birds Fred and his colleges have determined that hummingbirds from the North Florida area fly across the Gulf of Mexico rather than over land. During the spring migration in March, this requires an 18 hour return trip from the Yucatan peninsula, flying non-stop to ports of call such as Cedar Key without piggybacking on any steamers or Canada geese along the way. The males are generally the first to arrive back in the spring, settling into the area they were originally fledged, and establishing a territory. The females arrive later and are treated to aerial and plumage displays by competing males. After a brief tryst with the most desirable suitor, the female hummer builds a tiny quarter-sized nest on the downward slope of a tree branch. The nest is composed partly of plant down and spider webbing allowing it to insulate and expand as her babies grow. She then lays two eggs. Because she is a good mother and completely on her own (having been long deserted by a handsome but flighty husband), both babies have a good likelihood of survival. But emergent fledglings aren't distinguishable by their small size. Just the opposite is true. Actually the babies debut from the nest larger than their mothers, which are somewhat shrunken after 3-4 weeks of tireless care. Hefty 3 gram porkers emerge from the nest, bewildered but equipped to locate a feeder on their own.

Many species of hummers have been banded

in the Gainesville area besides the well known ruby-throated variety. Thirteen other species have been banded east of the Mississippi, and species such as the rufous and blackchinned are not uncommon during fall migration. Hummers may actually reside throughout the winter in Florida, prompting the suggestion to keep feeders filled all winter. Despite their delicate appearance, Mr. Bassett reported that hummers are actually able to stand sub-zero temperatures if food is available.

To that end, Mr. Bassett offered suggestions for attracting hummers to backyard feeding stations. Table sugar and water are the only ingredients necessary to prepare nectar for a hummingbird feeder. Sugar provides the energy necessary in the pursuit of insects which furnish the remaining nutrients of life. Honey is actually toxic to the birds. Therefore, he recommends 1 part sugar to 4 parts water—holding up his right hand as a visual reminder. One thumb's worth of sugar and 4 fingers worth of water. Boiling is not required and neither is sterilization, since a dilute solution of bleach will sanitize the feeder, and sugar will inactivate the bleach. Red dyes are not required either. Furthermore, an inexpensive plastic red feeder is tougher, less likely to leak, and often more durable than many of the stylish custom crafted feeders. Regardless of pedigree, all hummingbird feeders should be cleaned every 3-4 days in the summer and every 7-10 days in the winter.

Mr. Bassett suggested that the range of hummingbirds may actually be expanding geographically due in part to backyard feeders. Data show that individual birds banded in Florida have been recaptured as far away as Alaska. Moreover, information on life span of the tiny birds revealed that certain individuals have returned to the same nesting area over 8 consecutive years, suggesting that the tiny fluttering heart is as resilient as the hummer's spirit.

Banding hummingbirds is a free service and Mr. Bassett encourages folks to contact him or colleague Fred Dietrich (Tallahassee) for banding hummingbirds in their backyards at Fhound@aol.com or 334-244-0227 or Fred Dietrich fdietrich@Yahoo.com or 850-591-7430. For more information, please visit the website of the Hummer/Bird Study Group: www.hummingbirdsplus.org

By Elaine Robinson

Fieldtrips (continued from Page 1)

Sunday, April 1, 7:30 a.m.-Ocala National Forest; Meet trip leader Bob Simons in the Sweetbay parking lot at the corner of SW 20th Avenue and SW 34th Street. Bob knows pine forests better than almost anyone, and he's a great guide to the longleaf sandhills and scrub of this marvelous 383,000-acre remnant of aboriginal Florida. Birdwise, we'll hope to see Florida Scrub-Jay, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Bachman's Sparrow, and Swallow-tailed Kite. Difficulty: 1 or 2

Saturday, April 7, 7:30 a.m.- Prairie Creek Lodge – CLEP*; Meet trip leader Ivor Kincaide at Powers Park. Ivor is the land manager for the Alachua Conservation Trust. We'll walk the trails through upland oak woods, swampy edges, and the borders of Prairie Creek, looking for such neotropical migrants as Prothonotary Warbler, Northern Parula, Yellow-throated Warbler, and Blue Grosbeak. Difficulty: 2

Saturday, April 14, 8:00 a.m.- San Felasco Hammock (north entrance); Meet trip leader Mike Meisenburg at Progress Park (north) entrance near Alachua (\$4.00 per vehicle parking fee). Alachua Audubon spearheaded the effort to buy San Felasco Hammock in 1974 and we're especially interested in showing everyone what a beautiful place it is. We'll follow a trail along Lee Pond and Cellon Creek, looking for woodland-nesting species and spring migrants. Difficulty: 3

Saturday, April 21, 8:00 a.m.-Ft. DeSoto County Park; Meet trip leader John Hintermister at the Ft. DeSoto visitor center in St. Petersburg. This is one of Florida's top migrant traps, and if the migrants cooperate (always a gamble) you can see 20 species of warblers not to mention tanagers, grosbeaks, buntings, thrushes, and cuckoos. Even if migrants don't show, there are plenty of shorebirds, and such coastal specialties as Reddish Egret and Magnificent Frigatebird. \$5/car Difficulty: 1

Sunday, April 22, 8:00 a.m.-San Felasco Hammock (south entrance); Meet trip leader Steve Hofstetter 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. Difficulty: 2

Saturday, April 28, 8:00 a.m.-La Chua Trail; Meet trip leader Caleb Gordon at the La Chua trailhead (\$2.00 per person admission). Paynes Prairie will be alive with wildflowers and birds at the end of April. Summer residents like Purple Gallinule, Least Bittern, Indigo Bunting, Orchard Oriole, and Yellow-billed Cuckoo will be the main attractions, and if the water levels are right we might find Black-necked Stilts and migrant shorebirds. Bring water and sunscreen. Difficulty: 3

Sunday, April 29, 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: 1

**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.*

Visit Alachua Audubon Society on Facebook for postings on field trips, special events, and other items of interest!

Annual Pot Luck Dinner and Election of Officers and Board of Directors

Please join us on Wednesday, April 18. at 6:30 pm for our annual pot luck dinner party and election of officers and board of directors. Our dinner party 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 Williston Road. (Look for our new Audubon signs!) Bring some food to share for the pot luck, a drink of choice, and enjoy visiting with our Alachua Audubon Board Members. This will be a fun gathering and provide time to share our more recent spring migration bird observations!

The Alachua Audubon Society is a volunteer-based organization. We have four officers and fifteen members on the Board of Directors who serve a three year term. The officers of Alachua Audubon are:

President- Helen Warren

Vice President- Scott Flamand

Secretary- Anne Casella

Treasurer- Dotty Robbins

The Board Members consist of Ron Robinson, Caleb Gordon, Rex Rowan, Debra Segal, Kathy Haines, Ivor Kincaid, Geoff Parks, Bob Simons, Joni Ellis, Mike Manetz, Emily Schwartz, Leslie Straub, John Hintermister, and Martha King. Our new board member is Lynn Rollins. We welcome Lynn most heartily.

Please join Alachua Audubon for this annual pot luck dinner party!

Receive The Crane Electronically

By receiving The Crane electronically you can view it in color and you can more easily share it with other birding enthusiasts. You will receive only one email per newsletter and the email will contain a link to the Alachua Audubon Website. To start receiving The Crane electronically, simply send an email to AAS-thecrane@att.net Please include your complete name and address.

Speakers Corner, Family Birding, and Events

Mark your calendar now for these upcoming exciting events!

Sunday, March 4, 9:00 a.m. *Family Birding*

Audubon members will host children accompanied by their parent or grandparent for a fun morning of identifying birds. Meet at the parking lot west of the bat house at Lake Alice. If you would like to borrow binoculars for your child or grandchild please Emily at 372-0754.

March 21, Millhopper Library. Meet and Greet 6:30, Program 7:00 Caleb Gordon will speak on Wildlife and Wind Energy. What is the impact of wind towers on wildlife? Listen to the latest research on this topic.

March 24 & 25 Kanapaha Botanical Gardens Spring Garden Festival—*Come by our Alachua Audubon Booth and say hello!*

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Prairie Creek Conservation Cemetery

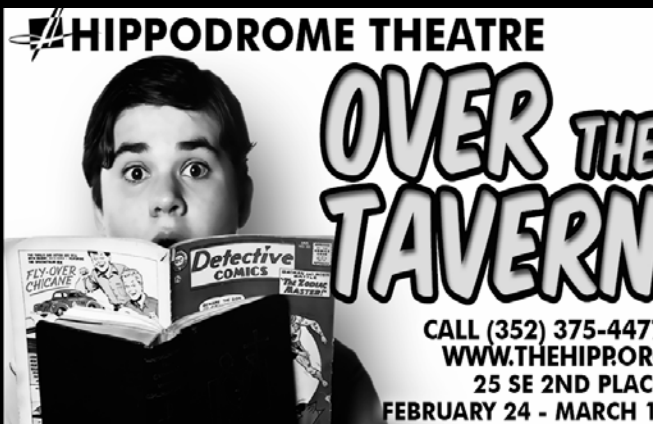
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Burrowing Owl

Very odd,
this little cloud

in trousers
in the sandy

fortress
favored by

prairie dog
and gopher

tortoise.
On the mound

at the mouth-hole,
he scouts around

with sybilline
yellow eyes

and then, owl-
wise, decides

to clean house.
He dives down

and soon
great clouds

of smudge come
flying out,

his home now
clean as a bone.

A diurnal owl,
he's upside-down

and inside-out,
at ease

not in trees,
but underground,

where his mate
broods

on her eight
fragile moons

in an immaculate
burrow whose

contours are lined
with cow manure.

By Sidney Wade;
MFA@FLA Creative
Writing Program in the
English Department at
UF and Alachua Audu-
bon Member. Re-
cently published in
The New Yorker.



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Kid's Christmas Bird Count

The 4th annual Kid's Christmas Bird Count was held on January 21, 2012. Twenty-nine kids and 16 adults divided into 4 teams and, accompanied by experienced birders from the Alachua Audubon Society, spent the morning searching for birds in a variety of locations and habitats around Gainesville. Teams covered such diverse areas as Lake Wauburg, Paynes Prairie, Lake Alice, La Chua Trail, Newnan's Lake, and various city ponds. At noon, the teams converged on the Mill Pond Clubhouse to tally up their findings, and for a well-deserved lunch of pizza, fruit, and juice.

Every winter, Audubon chapters throughout North America conduct organized bird counts. Alachua Audubon's Christmas count is one of the highlights of the year for many birders. Unfortunately, children and their families are often not included in this rigorous event. To address this situation, the Alachua Audubon Kid's Christmas Bird Count was initiated in 2008 as a scaled-down half-day version of the regular Christmas Count. The Kid's CBC has grown each year, from 8 kids in 2008 to 29 young people this year.

In spite of the dry conditions, the 2012 edition of Alachua Audubon's Kid's Count totaled 3,085 individual birds divided among 73 species. But more importantly, 29 young people and their family members had a lot of fun and got to spend a beautiful morning in the outdoors looking for birds and enjoying nature.

Ted Goodman & Steven Goodman (13 years old)

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Backyard Birding Tour

The Alachua Audubon sincerely thanks all of the many volunteers who devoted their time and effort to make the Backyard Birding Tour a success.. Almost \$900 was collected to help fund the many different conservation events that Alachua Audubon sponsors. Ron Robinson conducted the lion's share of planning, organizing, coordinating, and scheduling to make this event such a success. Helen Warren and Debbie Segal devoted many hours of their time assisting Ron. The Backyard Birding Tour could not have happened without the generosity of our six yard hosts who so graciously shared their yards—Allan and Ellen Shapiro, Linda Goshorn, Ginny and Eric Rose, Larry Teague, Scott Flamond, and Terry Harpold. Many people responded to our request to volunteer at the various yards. We are grateful to those volunteers—Lee Bloomcamp, Anne Casella, Lloyd and Marie Davis, Chip Deutsch, Kathy Fanning, Barbara Fennely, Caleb Gordon, Kathy Haines, John Hintermister, Karen Hilliard, Jean Kaufman, Mary Landsman, Paul Lyrene, Mike Manetz, Linda McMahon, Neil and Joan MacLeod, Irma McLaughlin, Rex, Rowan, Barbara Shea, Celeste Shitamo, and Wendy Wilbur..

Prairie Creek Conservation Cemetery

Prairie Creek Conservation Cemetery is a natural burial ground where people can have a natural burial while also contributing to land conservation and restoration. The cemetery's first burial was Dr. Kathy Cantwell, a local physician and environmentalist who sought an environmentally sound burial. Natural (or "green") burial is a safe and legal burial practice that uses biodegradable containers, avoids embalming fluids and vaults, and harnesses burial fees to pay for land acquisition, protection, restoration, and management. The cemetery becomes a beautiful place to visit and a sacred legacy for future generations. PCCC is located on 75 acres in eastern Alachua County, adjacent to ACT's Prairie Creek Preserve and Payne's Prairie State Preserve. It is a joint operation of the non-profit organizations Alachua Conservation Trust Inc. and Conservation Burial Inc. For more information or to schedule a cemetery tour, please contact Freddie Johnson at 352-317-7307 or www.conservationburialinc.org.

Announcing the Upcoming FL Wildlife Corridor Expedition—1000 Miles in 100 Days

Follow the journey of the FL Wildlife Corridor Expedition as events are scheduled during the next three months. This project is a collaborative effort to connect remaining natural lands, waters, and working farms and ranches from the Everglades to Georgia. Protection of these areas will contribute to the restoration of habitat and migration corridors essential for the survival of Florida's diverse wildlife. By protecting these areas for wildlife we will also be protecting areas crucial to healthy water systems that supply our urban areas. Other benefits from a healthy wildlife corridor include increased recreational opportunities and support for sustainable food production by working ranches and farms within the corridor. To find out about events along this corridor as the expedition travels 1000 Miles in 100 Days, go to [FloridaWildlife Corridor.org](http://FloridaWildlifeCorridor.org)

Several somewhat local events are scheduled as the expedition travels through central and north central Florida. They are:

April 1: Conservation Trust for Florida event at Juniper Springs featuring regional wildlife corridor projects

April 4: Office of Greenways and Trails and Florida Trail Association event on the Cross Florida Greenway and Florida National Scenic Trail

April 16-20: Pinhook Swamp event to honor Larry Harris

Other potential events include stops at Etoniah Creek State Forest and Camp Blanding.

More details coming soon at [.FloridaWildlife Corridor.org](http://FloridaWildlifeCorridor.org)

25 Years of Bird Watching Classes—A Long Time Favorite

I just celebrated 25 years of coordinating and teaching the bird watching class in conjunction with Santa Fe College. It all began for me in 1985 shortly after moving to Gainesville. My brother-in-law, Ron Robinson, suggested that I attend an Audubon field trip to San Felasco State Park, which was being led by Bob Simons. I recall that it was not a particularly “birdy” day in the San Felasco woods but I remember noticing how beautiful the woods were. Bob was able to share all kinds of wonderful facts about trees, plants, and wildlife. The feeling of being out there on a Saturday morning when most other people were still asleep was breathe-taking. I wanted to learn more. Soon I was signed up for a bird watching class through Santa Fe Community Education. After taking the class three times, my instructor, John Dickenson, suggested I serve on the Audubon Board. Then before I knew it I was in charge of the Santa Fe bird watching classes!

It was evident right from the start that Gainesville has an abundance of excellent birders and it was my plan to share these brilliant people with my students. I have maintained this tradition of scheduling an expert birder for each class. This allows the students to see this hobby from many different viewpoints. Some of our most outstanding birders today first attended this class during their infant bird watching days. For some students this interest in bird watching has been an enjoyable pastime while for others it has become serious business. At any rate many students repeat the class two or three times so they can expand their birding knowledge while enjoying the lovely natural areas around Alachua County. This has been very gratifying to me to welcome these returning students.

Some of my favorite memories of this class go back to when my helpers acted like bird dogs trying to flush out a bird from the swampy marsh. The students would get such a kick out of someone brave enough to walk in two to three feet of water just so the students could get

a quick look at a bird. One particular memory turns out to be a recurring event. One time, when we were at Payne’s Prairie, we spotted this streaky dark bird clinging to the reeds. Everyone grabbed their birding guides and no answer could be found as to what this bird could be. After a long pause we finally discovered that it was a female Red-winged Blackbird. It turns out there are very few birders who can honestly admit that they haven’t been stumped by this bird at least once.

As coordinator for this birding class it has been a sheer joy to share the excitement of birding with such appreciative folks for 25 years. I recently served as a volunteer for Alachua Audubon’s Backyard Birding Tour, and during the tour I had the pleasure of meeting many former students who have not only continued to foster the hobby of bird watching, but have also recruited friends to take the bird watching class. It gave me goose bumps. If you have never taken this class I hope you will join us and share in the excitement of bird watching.

Kathy Haines, Class Coordinator

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. The next class starts April 21st. 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 21st. Limit 12 students so register early as this class fills quickly. Hope to see you in class.

Kathy Haines, Class Coordinator

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For more information and full itinerary:
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We need your yard!

We are looking for at least 36 suburban yards in Alachua County (specifically in or near the city of Gainesville) to use in a University of Florida research study. The “**Plant for Wildlife**” study will evaluate the ability of three types of Florida urban/suburban landscapes, such as native plants, Florida-Friendly Landscaping™, and conventional yards, to support native wildlife, including important pollinators essential to Florida’s ecology and economy. Surveys will record the presence/absence of a broad spectrum of species, including butterflies, insect pollinators, birds, and landscape plants. Interactions between wildlife and plants will also be recorded. The 3-year comparative study will start in spring 2012.

Our visits would involve regular visits to your yard (front and back) and will occur when organisms are typically most active, between 9 am and 4 pm. If you would like to help we will send you more information about the study in the next few months along with a questionnaire about your yard and maintenance practices.

If you have questions or are interested in participating, please send your name and home address to Dr. Jaret Daniels (jdaniels@flmnh.ufl.edu).

Your participation is greatly appreciated!

Thank you,

Jaret C. Daniels, Ph.D.

Assistant Director of Exhibits and Public Programs

Assistant Curator of Lepidoptera

Assistant Professor of Entomology

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Outdoor Cats Kill Native Wildlife

Cat overpopulation is a human-caused tragedy that affects the health and well-being of our native wildlife population. Outdoor cats, even when well fed; kill hundreds of millions of wild birds and other animals each year in the U.S. Birds that nest or feed on the ground are especially vulnerable. The domestic cat is an effective predator that when left outside, will prey on native wildlife who are ill equipped to defend themselves. For the cats, it means one easy meal after another. For native wildlife, it is a death sentence. According to the American Bird Conservancy, there are about 95 million outdoor cats in the U.S. and these outdoor cats are responsible for killing at least 532 million birds each year, possibly significantly more. The Alachua Audubon Society encourages all cat owners to keep their cats indoors. This is especially important as nesting and breeding season approaches. Young birds, rabbits, squirrels, and other wildlife are defenseless against these domesticated predators.

Alachua Audubon Society
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