



The Crane

Volume 52 Number 6 May-June 2012

May Field Trips and Program

These are the last four Audubon-sponsored field-trips of the season.

Sunday, May 5, 8:00 a.m. Palm Point

Meet trip leader Rex Rowan at Powers Park on Hawthorne Road. The swampy margins of Newnan's Lake from Powers Park to Palm Point can be some of the best places in the area to find spring migrants. Scope the lake for aquatic species and, if conditions merit, search for shorebirds along the receding lake edge. Difficulty: 1

Saturday, May 12, 9:00 – 11:00 a.m. Woodpecker Walk for Youth. Young people must be accompanied by an adult. Meet at Northeast Park, 400 NE 16th Ave. You do not need to register that you are coming but it is appreciated if possible. Email emilysgfl@gmail.com. More information is provided on page 5.

Saturday, May 12, 10:00 a.m. Butterflies with Jaret Daniels

Field Guide for this Alachua Audubon special event will be Jaret Daniels, Assistant Director of Research at the McGuire Center for Lepidoptera and Biodiversity and author of Adventure Publication's Butterflies of Florida. Destination depends upon current conditions. Call Wild Birds Unlimited [352-381-1997] to reserve a spot or for more details.

Saturday, May 19, Backwaters of Cedar Key with Capt. Doug Maple

Join this veteran backwater guide on a canopied pon-

toon 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 or for more details.

Speakers Corner

Wednesday, May 16th 6:30 Meet and Greet; 7:00 Program; Birds of New Caledonia

Lloyd Davis will share images of his trip to the South Pacific—New Caledonia, Island of Efate, Espiritu Santo, and Isle of Pines. Come listen to this interesting presentation by Lloyd on the fascinating birds and other wildlife he observed while recently visiting James A. Michener's South Pacific.



Photograph of a recent Alachua Audubon fieldtrip at O'leno State Park. Photograph taken by Sandi Saurers.

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.

**Deadline for
July-Aug Crane:
June 15th**

**Around
The County...
By Mike Manetz**

By the time this issue of the Crane reaches your mailbox or inbox, spring migration will be in full throttle. If the weeks prior are any indication, it should be a good one. To begin with, we had a number of very early and interesting passerine sightings. A stunning Nashville Warbler was seen and photo-

graphed March 29 by Ron Robinson at a bird bath in his yard. Ron also noted our first American Redstart on April 5. Another very unusual warbler report was that of two gorgeous Blue-winged Warblers seen April 4 by Ignacio Rodriguez at Morningside Nature Center. Blue-wings are regular here in fall, but are seldom seen in spring. Andy Kratter had the rare treat of hearing a Wood Thrush singing near his house April 4, and on April 9 Caleb Gordon reported hearing a very early Yellow Warbler singing at Palm Point. Caleb also noted an early Broad-winged Hawk calling and soaring over his neighborhood the second of April. The Ewing family discovered and photographed a locally-rare Lark Sparrow April 11 in their yard near Newberry. The Ewing's also had a fairly late Louisiana Waterthrush visiting their property for several days in early April.

Our big lakes remained generally low and provided some spectacular birding. At Newnans Lake as many as two thousand Coots, nearly a thousand White Pelicans, and hundreds of cormorants, ducks, and shorebirds concentrated to feed in the shallows. Notable were over a hundred Long-billed Dowitchers, a record eighty-six Stilt Sandpipers, a small flock of normally coastal Dunlins, and a couple of very early Semi-palmated Sandpipers. Best of all were two Red-necked Phalaropes reported March 28 by Judy Bryan.

There were some other late-lingering winter birds of note. Lloyd Davis found an Ash-throated Flycatcher March 14 in vegetation surrounding the dry lake bed at Orange Lake. It's possible this was the same one heard in that vicinity by Bubba Scales in December. Adam Kent and Chris Burney found another, the county's latest ever, along La Chua trail on the 17th. Later the same day, Adam and Chris also found the county's first returning Great-crested Flycatcher, likely making them the first birders ever to see two species of *myiarchus* flycatchers in the county in a single day! Adam and Gina Kent stretched another late record by finding a couple of Winter Wrens April 3 at Orange Lake. Also at Orange Lake, Adam Zions found our first Roseate Spoonbill of the year on March 24, and on the 30th, Rex Rowan and Tim Spahr extended the late record for Le Conte's Sparrow, finding four of them still lingering.

The flight of migrating loons was fairly strong this year. The peak day seems to have been March 30, (continued on page 3)

The June Challenge

The Ninth Annual June Challenge will run from June 1st to June 30th. The June Challenge is a friendly competition originated by Alachua Audubon's Becky Enneis in 2004 in order to get us outside where we belong. The point is to see as many species of birds in Alachua County as you can see during the month of June. It's a competition because the desire to win will motivate you to go birding – and you're happy when you're birding, right? – but we don't take that aspect too seriously.

June is a month that most birders spend indoors, and consequently it's largely terra incognita as far as bird movements are concerned. In 2004, the first year we did it, we were amazed to find several locally-rare tern species on Newnans Lake, and in 2006 we found a Snail Kite on Paynes Prairie; obviously we wouldn't have known about any of those birds if we'd stayed indoors. Who knows what might be out there this year, especially with all those mud flats on the local lakes? If you're interested in joining us, here are the rules:

1. Only birds seen in Alachua County during the month of June may be counted. (Those of you living in other counties are encouraged to do June Challenges there, too, and to report the results to me at the email address below when it's over. You folks in Gilchrist, Marion, and Columbia may find yourselves discovering new birding spots.)

2. Heard birds do not count; you've got to see those Chuck-will's-widows and Eastern Screech-Owls.

3. You are free to put Muscovy Ducks and Whooping Cranes on your list. Almost any wild bird can go on your list. But not – Bob Simons, I'm looking at you – not chickens.

That's simple, isn't it? Now here are a few tips:

Do as much birding as possible during the first half of the month. You're more likely to see lingering migrants that way. There are June records for Common Loon, Ring-billed Gull,

Forster's Tern, Cedar Waxwing, American Redstart, Blackpoll Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, Swainson's Warbler, and Black-throated Blue Warbler, as well as several shorebirds. Likewise the last few days of the month have produced early fall-migrant Louisiana Waterthrush and Lesser Yellowlegs.

Make several visits to Newnans Lake and other large bodies of water to scan for gulls, terns, and pelicans, which may come and go on a daily basis. Go to Longleaf Flatwoods Reserve for Bachman's Sparrows and San Felasco Hammock for Hooded Warblers. There are over 100 species possible here in June. The first and last few hours of daylight are best. Birds tend to sing early in the morning.

Good luck to all of you who decide to join us! In the spirit of good sportsmanship, let me know (rexrowan@gmail.com) when you see an unexpected bird so I can pass the word. Don't keep it a secret – as I say, it's a *friendly* competition, based on our shared enthusiasm for birding rather than a desire to come in first.

Rex Rowan

Around the County (continued from page 2)

when Bob Carroll noted an amazing 64 Common Loons from the Hwy. 441 platform. Andy Kratter spotted a rare Red-throated Loon while doing his loon-watch April 10.

Newnans Lake will probably remain the place to check as shorebird migration peaks in late April, and Palm Point will be as good a place as any for spring warbler migration. In late April and early May look for Bobolinks at La Chua trail or Lake Alice. La Chua should be good for a number of breeding birds such as Orchard Oriole, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Blue Grosbeak. The second and third weeks of May are your best bet for White-rumped Sandpiper anywhere shorebirds are still being seen, and for Connecticut Warbler at... well, you tell me. I still have never seen one in the county!

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

Kestrel Nest Box Program Update

The Southeastern American Kestrel used to be a common bird in Alachua County, even nesting within the City of Gainesville. It has declined drastically over the past half century due to loss of habitat and lack of suitable nesting cavities.



Over the past five years Alachua Audubon has installed about 20 kestrel nest boxes per year in and near Alachua County. A Boy Scout troop made 100 boxes and I have constructed a few more. We currently have about 115 boxes that have been occupied—about half of which are used by kestrels in any given year. The other half are used by a variety of species including Eastern Screech Owls, Great Crested Flycatchers, Yellow-shafted Flickers, and flying squirrels.

Kestrel nest boxes have been installed on both public and private land. This year we installed boxes on protected natural habitat as follows: two on Kanapaha Prairie with the help of Lauren Day, Ron Robinson, and Rex Rowan; four at San Felasco Hammock Preserve State Park with the help of Randy Brown and four



Santa Fe College students (Clair Verdier, Peyton Melton, Charlotte Felner, and Javier Flores); and five at Watermelon Pond with the help of Anna Fasoli, Norberto Fernandez, and Ron Robinson. We are planning to install more kestrel nest boxes this spring at Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park.

During previous years we have installed kestrel nest boxes on other protected areas including four on the Indian Lake State Forest in Marion County, two on the Hague Dairy property, four on Freddie Wood's property (protected by a conservation easement) near Evinston, six at Ichetucknee Springs State Park, and about 16 at Watermelon Pond. Charlie Pederson helped put up boxes on the two State Forests, Valerie Thomas and Ginger Morgan helped at Ichetucknee, and Tom Staley helped at Freddy Wood's property.

By Bob Simons

Left photograph of Anna Fasoli on the ground and Ron Robinson on the ladder. Photograph taken by Alex Lamoreaux. Above photograph of Randy Brown, Clair Verdier, Peyton Melton, Charlotte Felner, and Bob Simons. Photograph taken by Javier Flores.

Chimney Swifts are Back!

The arrival of spring is marked with the return of many summer avian residents. Chimney Swifts are just one of those species that spends the summer half of their year here in Florida. Chimney Swifts arrived in my neighborhood during the last week of March and announced their arrival with their characteristic call. Each year a colony of Chimney Swifts returns to my neighbor's chimney, which they use for their summer roost site. While this colony is lucky to have this roost site to return to each year, many colonies are losing structures as homeowners close access to their chimneys.

Alachua Audubon is exploring options to build a Chimney Swift roosting structure. This type of structure will contribute to the conservation of these day time insect eaters while also providing a wonderful learning experience for school groups. With bats feeding on insects at night and Chimney Swifts feeding on insects during the day, we are provided 24 hours of pest control.

If you have a colony of Chimney Swifts in your home or neighborhood take a moment to notice the number of swifts overhead. See if the size of the colony grows as summer progresses. Can you locate the roost? Although Chimney Swifts are challenging to census, the best way to count them is when they enter the roost just after sunset.

Many communities have a 'Swift Night Out' in late August or mid September and survey the number of Chimney Swifts in local roosts. If you have a roost to report, send an email to helenkwarren@cox.net with "chimney swifts" noted in the subject line. If you would like to meet at one of the local large roosts or would like more information on Chimney Swifts, send a note in your email with your request. This type of gathering can be fun for the whole family!

By Helen Warren

WOODPECKER WALK FOR KIDS

Saturday, May 12, 2012, from 9:00-11:00 a.m. At the Northeast Park (400 NE 16th Avenue)

This fieldtrip is geared for kids of all ages. Northeast Park is a small, urban park in the heart of Gainesville and is home to a variety of songbirds, including at least 4 species of woodpeckers. The park provides the perfect setting to get acquainted with these colorful, animated birds.

Ted Goodman, Steven Goodman, and Adam Kent will be your birding guides. Meet at the parking lot at 9:00 a.m. for an introduction, followed by birding in the park. Binoculars will be available, and drinks and snacks will be provided. For insurance reasons, all children must be accompanied by an adult.

It is not necessary to preregister but it helps us plan for snacks. If you can preregister please email emilysgfl@gmail.com that you are coming and let us know if you would like to borrow binoculars.

Bird Behavior Walk for Kids

Alachua Audubon sponsored a bird walk for kids and their families at Lake Alice on March 4th. During the walk participants split into two groups and each group looked for birds doing interesting behaviors. After about an hour, the two groups reconvened and described what types of bird behaviors they had observed. Some of the most interesting behaviors were of feeding birds—an Osprey catching a fish, a Red-shouldered Hawk catching a bat, and an American Coot turning over water lettuce and looking for food in the plant's roots. We are hoping to make these themed family bird walks a regular Alachua Audubon event so please keep checking The Crane Newsletter and our Facebook page for more information. Hope to see you on our next walk!

By Adam Kent

Rally for Restoration of the Ocklawaha River

Alachua Audubon supported the recent 'Rally for the River' in February along the banks of the Ocklawaha River. This rally was well attended by both long-time supporters of the Ocklawaha River restoration, as well as those who have more recently joined the restoration crusade.

Opposition to the Cross Florida Barge Canal—one of the most notorious U.S. boondoggles—started about 50 years ago. Early rallying efforts to stop construction of the Cross Florida Barge Canal were successful thanks to those founding members of the Florida Defenders of the Environment (FDE) - with Marjorie Harris Carr and David Anthony noted as significant leaders in the protest. Many of those early environmental crusaders started their conservation involvement with Alachua Audubon. The concerted efforts of concerned citizens were successful in stopping construction of the Cross Florida Barge Canal, but not until after Rodman Dam was constructed in 1968.

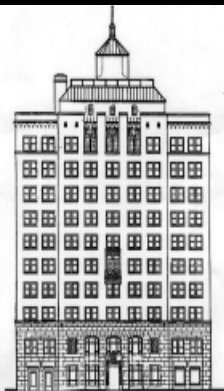
Both fiscal and physical benefits can be

realized when the impounded river is allowed to once again be free flowing. The annual cost to operate the dam and lock is roughly \$300,000 to \$500,000—quite an economic burden for a boondoggle project. Removal of the Rodman Dam can lead to enhanced river sports like kayaking, canoeing, and fishing. Many migrating fish—shortnosed sturgeon, channel catfish, and mullet—will benefit when the Rodman Dam impoundment is severed. For a good read on the benefits of a free flowing river, pick up *Ditch of Dreams* by Steve Noll and David Tegeder.

We applaud Earth Justice for filing a Notice of Intent to sue the U.S. Forest Service on behalf of FDE and the Florida Wildlife Federation (FWF) to sever the Rodman Dam and restore habitat for the endangered West Indian Manatee and Shortnose Sturgeon.

So, the big question is "What will it take to bring down the dam?" As my father used to say, "If not now, when? And if not you, who?" The rally bell is ringing. Now is the time to join forces for restoration of the Ocklawaha River.

By Helen Warren



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The Refineries of Life

According to WildBirds.com, Purple Martins are one of the most appealing wild birds in the United States. Each year, over a million North Americans erect martin houses in the hopes of drawing the beautiful chortlers into their backyards. However, often those very same freshly minted martin houses situated in pristine suburban locations are received with disdain by a persnickety house hunting martin. Instead, as many Gainesville residents know, some local martins eschew the quiet of the country for the lively corner at 6th Street and University Avenue or perhaps the parking lot of the old George's Hardware store. And even more bewildering is the report in Nature Society News presented by Jamie Hill in 1986 which detailed a popular year round martin roost in an oil refinery in Manaus, Brazil.

Birder Jamie Hill traveled to Manaus, Brazil as a guest of then-graduate student Tania Sanalotti to check out the martin roosts at a local oil refinery located at the headwaters of the Amazon River. Manaus, Brazil, with 1.7 million inhabitants, is located where muddy waters from the Rio Negro meet up with the Rio Solimoes. At this junction, the Amazon is 1,000 miles upstream from its mouth, yet is approximately two miles wide and totally navigable by ocean going ships, making it a suitable location for a petrochemical refinery.

When Jamie Hill arrived at the refinery at 9 pm in the evening, he found 25,000 martins crammed into the steaming belching network of steel. The conditions were nearly intolerable for a human, and would seem even more so for the constitution of a delicate bird. The miles of tangled pipes of the refinery rose like a huge Erector set high off the ground producing head pounding noise and intense heat, making some pipes far too hot to touch. The fetid smells of escaping gas and animal by products, combined with a pulsating vibration from the steaming pipes which caused roosting birds to rock back and forth proved no deterrent. The martins merely swayed with the rhythm and slept peace-

fully with their heads tucked comfortably under their wings, in what might amount to a human nightmare.

Other species of martins also roosted in the refinery grounds. Purple Martins seemed to prefer the upper lofts, and below them perched the Brown-chested Martins and Gray-breasted Martins, which comprised 40% and 5% of the total bird population, respectively. Tania Sanalotti reported that martins of all species reside in the refinery throughout the entire year, and some of those appear to be Purple Martins. However, since Purple Martins are not believed to breed in South America, it was surmised that those year rounders may actually be birds older than breeding age which choose to remain in Brazil rather than making the arduous return migration back north in the spring.

Another question which arose was whether this swarm of 25,000 birds represented winter long residents or merely migratory birds pausing to rest for the night on their journey back home. Enthusiasts theorize that birds may choose to roost in the Manaus oil refinery because of the safety from predation, which suggests that a little more asphalt, less tree cover, and possibly a plethora of insects may be the secret to attracting martins. Bucolic appeal, which may charm humans, could actually prove to be deadly to Purple Martins. As inhospitable as it appeared from a human perspective, the Manaus oil refinery has been an active martin roost since 1973 and according to a recent post on a forum hosted by The Purple Martin Organization, the Manaus refinery is still an active martin roost to this day.

Elaine Robinson

Check out the new Purple Martin nest boxes that Alachua Audubon installed—two boxes next to Hogtown Creek at the SW corner of Univ. Ave. and 34th St., one box behind the Thaler and Townsend Dentist Office just a few hundred yards west and also next to Hogtown Creek, and a box at Chapman's Pond. Word is, Purple Martins have already started occupying several of these new nest boxes!

Barn Owls in Alachua County

Barn owls are the most widely distributed species of owl in the world, occurring on every continent except Antarctica. However, Barn Owls are widely declining due to habitat loss as grasslands and farmlands are reduced by suburbanization. Barn Owls need open areas with extensive marsh or grassland for foraging, and use tree hollows or cavities created from other birds for nesting. Like many other cavity nesters, Barn Owls readily move into nest boxes. Barn Owls appear to be rare and localized in Alachua county, in spite of the extensive suitable habitat—namely Paynes Prairie, Tusawilla Prairie, Kanapaha Prairie, Barr Hammock, and a number of privately owned farmlands.

Charlotte Loomis is monitoring several pairs of Barn Owls around Paynes Prairie and Tusawilla Prairie and has documented breeding success of some of these pairs. Since Barn Owls will readily occupy a nest box, Charlotte is leading the effort to construct and install Barn Owl nest boxes in Alachua County. Charlotte researched box design for nearly two years before starting with conservation efforts in this area. Alachua Conservation Trust (ACT) recently assisted by installing two nest boxes on public property—one in the shade near Prairie Creek



Photograph above of two Barn Owls taken by John Moran. The male is on the left and the female is on the right. Left photograph of an exterior Barn Owl nest box taken by Charlotte Loomis.

Lodge and one at Tusawilla Prairie where a pair of Barn Owls had already been observed roosting.

Charlotte's efforts have been a solo, "one box at a time" effort until now. To date she has coordinated the building of over 15 boxes, most of which have already been erected in optimal public or private lands. At this point Charlotte would welcome assistance from anyone interested in donating time, money, or carpentry skills to future barn owl advocacy efforts.

The nest boxes needed for Barn Owls are large and costly. Nest boxes that are installed in a barn (and are not water proof) cost \$90 for material and labor. External (and water proof) nest boxes cost \$230 for material and labor. These prices do not include installation costs.

Please contact Charlotte Loomis if you wish to become involved in Barn Owl conservation or if you would like to learn more about this captivating species of owl. Charlotte can be reached at cbloomis@aol.com

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The Crane
May-June 2012

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