



The Crane

Volume 53 Number 6 July-Aug. 2012

June Challenge adds Kids' Competition

If birding is the sport of kings, now it's also the sport of princes and princesses in Alachua County, thanks to the new competition for birders 15 years old and younger inside of the June Challenge. Since 2004, Alachua County birders have turned the proverbial "get hot and see nothing" phenomenon of summer-time birding in our region into one of the most colorful, festive, and yes, competitive events in the birding calendar through the June Challenge. This year, a brainstorming session between Alachua Audubon Society and founding members of the June Challenge resulted in some new wrinkles to the event, including the kids' competition. The intent is to get more kids involved in birding. The hope is that the nature of the June challenge, with its structure, well-defined spatio-temporal boundaries, and scavenger-hunt-like rules and telos, will appeal to the younger set. And don't forget the prizes! Yes, there will be prizes for the first time this year, and not just for the kids.

The June Kids' Challenge was officially launched on June 2, with an action-packed 2 hours of birding at a couple of the birding hot spots along Newnan's Lake that have turned up such great birds in recent months. This event was masterminded, coordinated, publicized, and shepherded by Alachua Audubon Society Board member and education committee member, Emily Schwartz, who knows all the secrets for making kids' events successful. Over 20 kids attended the event, many of them seventh graders from Stephen Doherty's Howard Bishop Middle School science class, along with a constellation of parents and younger brothers. I was along to explain the rules of the June challenge, hand out the purple checklists, show people some birds, and encourage new birders to take their first steps down the birding road within the



Young June challengers Lily Gordon (left) and Phoebe Gordon enjoy the climbing structure at Palm Point Park during the June Challenge (photo by Caleb Gordon).

context of the June Challenge.

Our group did not see anything that would make mention on one of Rex Rowan's email posts for Alachua County avifaunistic rarity, but one of the great things about birding with new birders is that you see familiar birds with new eyes. It is an occasion to remember that Red-winged Blackbirds (*continued Pg 3*)

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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
Sept-Oct Crane:
Aug. 15th**



Most years spring bird watching in our area is pretty predictable, but a couple of unusual weather events combined with a severe ongoing drought set the stage for some of the most memorable birding experiences in over a decade.

A cold front April 21-22 was accompanied by exceptionally strong winds from the west and pushed huge waves of trans-gulf migrants to Florida's west coast. Cedar Key, for instance, had one of the biggest fallouts in memory including 18 species of warblers plus boatloads of thrushes, grosbeaks, and orioles. Alachua County, being so far inland, only received a faint echo of this fallout but accepted it gratefully. Four species of thrushes were reported at San Felasco Hammock. There were several sightings of Scarlet Tanagers and a Western Tanager was seen by many at Palm Point. Cape May and Blackpoll Warblers began to show up, and there were so many Rose-breasted Grosbeak reports they were hard to keep up with.

In the wake of the front, migrant shorebirds and a few normally coastal species began to build up around the muddy receding shoreline of Newnans Lake. Mixed flocks of peeps began to appear with numbers eventually swelling into the thousands. These were mostly Semipalmated and Least Sandpipers, but often included small numbers of Semipalmated Plovers. A dizzying array of unexpected birds began to appear...Whimbrels, Wilson's Phalarope, Willet, Black-bellied Plover, Western Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitchers, dozens of Black-necked Stilts, a small flock of Roseate Spoonbills, a couple of American Avocets, and briefly, singles of Brown Pelican, Common Tern, Franklin's Gull, and Black Skimmer. This was turning into a birding opportunity of epic proportions, and birders took full advantage with countless expeditions beating down well-worn tracks north from Palm Point and across the north end of the lake through Gum Root Swamp.

Tropical Storm Beryl kept the party going through Memorial Day weekend, blowing in hundreds more peeps (now mostly White-rumped Sandpipers), a couple of Ruddy Turnstones, Royal and Caspian Terns, plus several Black, Forster's and Least Terns, more than a dozen Laughing Gulls, as many as 15 Brown Pelicans, and another pair of Black Skimmers. By the end of May at least 19 species of shorebirds and seven species of terns had been recorded at Newnans.

Several wintering species lingered to take advantage of the concentrating food sources at Newnans. Present into June was a flock of 150-plus White Pelicans and small numbers of ducks that normally vacate our area by March. These included Mallards, Northern Shovelers, Ring-necked, and Ruddy Ducks, (*continued Pg. 3*)

Around The County (Cont.)

along with numerous attendant American Coots. Surprisingly the two American Avocets remained at least into early June despite sporting gorgeous breeding plumage, and the cormorants were so impressed by the bounty of fish that a few stayed to nest at Palm Point, as did several pairs of Black-necked Stilt. Rex Rowan added another great bird to this amazing story. While at the north end of the lake one evening with a couple of photographers he spotted a dark morph Short-tailed Hawk. Eventually as many as two others were seen, suggesting the possibility of nesting in the woods north of the lake.

All this added up to a phenomenal bonanza for June Challengers, who will no doubt break all previous records; and if water levels at Newnan's Lake remain low into August you had better fasten your binocular straps...we could be in for another wild birding ride!

Thanks to those who shared their sightings through June 3, 2012



Photo of Charlotte Loomis holding a rescued and rehabilitated Barn Owl chick. Photograph taken by Leslie Straub. (See article on next page.)

June Challenge adds Kids' Competition (cont)

are pretty awesome-looking birds. We got off to a reasonable start at Powers Park, but great looks at large, stationary waterbirds were not as abundant as I had hoped, so we decided to face the challenge of caravanning up the east shore of the lake to the Windsor Boat ramp. It was there, where the water's edge hid below the lush green lawn of water plants, that the new Kids' June Challenge got legs. Black-necked Stilts were the first birds to produce a line at the telescope, and then one of the dads in the group spotted something about 50 yards out: Black-bellied Whistling Ducks, with their clown-orange beaks, sticking their heads up out of the emergent water plants. An Osprey flew right over us carrying a huge fish. A pair of Wood Storks flew over us, followed by a succession of other large waterbirds.

Even more exciting, a small handful of the middle schoolers who were experiencing birding for the first time really started to get into it. They started scanning the horizon and the skies and spotting some great stuff, a drake Wood Duck swimming amidst the water lotuses, Little Blue and Tricolored Herons along the lake margin, Bald Eagles flying out over the lake. Species were getting ticked on checklists. The occurrence of new species was met with glee. The occurrence of additional individuals of already-observed species was met with a groan and a heightened craving for avi-faunistic novelty. Checklists and bird books were perused with budding curiosity, and the question was asked "Could we see that one?"

How stiff will the 15-and-under competition be in the inaugural year of the Kids' June Challenge? For now, the answer to this question is as unknowable as the identity of the next rarity that will show up in Newnan's Lake this June. These, and other local ornithological mysteries will be resolved on July 1st at the June Challenge closing celebration (see Alachua County Audubon website for more details). However, one thing is clear. When it comes to birds seen in Alachua County during the month of June, or kids experiencing the fun of birding, they all count!

By Caleb Gordon

.Meter Reader Saves Protected Birds

(Reprinted with Permission by Marcia Gaysue;
Electric Co-op Today Staff Writer)

Thanks to the smart thinking and big heart of a Florida electric cooperative meter reader, several baby owls are lucky to be alive. Several weeks ago Bill Sauls of Keystone Heights, Fla.-based Clay Electric Cooperative was driving along his route when he heard a loud crash. Sauls discovered that a large pine tree had fallen. As he approached the tree, he noticed four baby barn owls had plummeted from their nest. Sauls' instincts took over as he intervened. "I couldn't leave them there," he said. "They would've been killed for sure."

After investigating the area, Sauls found some neighbors nearby. He told them about the incident and they called Florida Wildlife Care, Inc., a nonprofit organization dedicated to the care and conservation of native wildlife and habitats in Florida.

"Barn Owls are cavity nesting birds whose young fare best with the security and protection of an enclosed nest," said Charlotte Loomis, a local owl conservation advocate. "They are extremely vulnerable to predators if they end up on the ground."

On April 26, a representative from the non-



Billy Sauls



profit group traveled nearly an hour from its Gainesville, Fla. facility to pick up the owlets from the co-op for tests. Barn Owls are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Once examinations were completed, three of the birds were determined to be injury-free and could be returned home the next day, said Leslie Straub, director of FWC. Straub then called Loomis to take the birds back home, and within 24 hours the owlets were placed in a large wooden nest box, which was attached to a tree near the original nest. A fourth bird was injured and needed to stay at the wildlife facility longer than expected. Once the bird was able to stand on its own, Loomis returned it to join its thriving siblings on Mother's Day.

I have been involved in barn owl conservation and advocacy for the last few years and believe that Leslie Straub and Billy Sauls' timely actions saved the lives of all four owlets," Loomis said.

According to Loomis, upon returning to the site and installing an owl house for the birds, she noticed that the birds' parents were "looking for their babies and were ready for their return." (Continued on Pg. 5)

Meter Reader Saves Protected Birds (cont. from Pg. 4)

That four owlets were saved in this way provides a wildlife rescue story with the happiest and most heartwarming of endings.” Loomis said. “Billy’s part in the outcome of this story is deeply appreciated. His actions provide a perfect model for all of us, should we come across this kind of natural accident in the wild”.

Charlotte Loomis wishes to acknowledge the huge role that Leslie Straub and Florida Wildlife Care, Inc. played in orchestrating both the original rescue and return of these wild owlets back to their parents. Wildlife centers across the country are slammed at this time of year rescuing babies of all kinds. Sometimes the young are lucky enough to be returned to their wild parents and it often takes a team to pull that off successfully. Another unsung hero in the barn owl rescue mission was Lars Andersen, “Adventure Outpost” owner, Florida historian/author and arborist extraordinaire. Lars worked for hours into the dark of night by flashlight, and by the sweat of hard physical labor to secure the nest box in a tree directly next to the original nest (tree) which lay in massive pieces on the ground.

Photograph of Leslie Straub with rescued and rehabilitated Barn Owl chick. Photograph taken by Charlotte Loomis.



Neighborhood Nestwatch

Neighborhood Nestwatch is a citizen science program founded 12 years ago by the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. This year the program has expanded to include two additional regional centers on the East Coast; one in Amherst, MA and the other right here in Gainesville, FL through collaboration with the University of Florida.

The two main goals of the program are to determine how backyard bird populations are coping with urbanization and to educate the public about wildlife and the scientific process. We are seeking citizen participants in the Gainesville area or close to the city limits who are interested in learning first-hand about the common birds found in their backyard. On an annual basis, scientists will conduct a backyard bird-banding visit with the help of participants. Participants then report on their observations of color-banded birds captured and released in their yard as well as nests found and monitored.

The general protocol consists of scheduling an appointment any day of the week in which the participant will be available for 3-4 hours beginning at 7am. In this first year in Gainesville, the project began in June and will last until the end of July. A team of two researchers from the University of Florida will arrive at the property, conduct a bird census, and, with the help of the participant, set up nets, catch birds, record data about them, and color-band them. The participant will be given a copy of the species of birds banded in their yard along with the color band combinations. Also included in the visit are nest searching and vegetation sampling.

If you or someone you know is interested in being a part of this fun, hands-on project feel free to contact us at any time to find out more information.

Jennifer Grindle
386-506-9010

[gainesvillenestwatch at gmail.com](mailto:gainesvillenestwatch@gmail.com)

Birds Bringing Smiles at Haven Hospice

(By Koertni Blacketter; Reprinted by Permission from *Home Magazine*)

Jean Kaufman remembers the way her mother's face would light up as the birds came. She noticed that, even through a plate of glass, watching the fleeting birds and hearing the echoes of their melodious chirping radiated a joy throughout her entire room at Haven Hospice.

"We put a bird feeder and bird bath outside of her window, and she was just overjoyed with seeing the birds each day" Kaufman recalled.

This sweet memory is what inspired her to become one of the many volunteers at Haven Hospice who help carry on its mission throughout the 18 counties it serves.

Kaufman has made it her personal mission to bring the same joy her mother found to all of Haven's patients. She has placed bird feeders and bird baths at each of the four care centers and keeps them stocked with birdseed at all times. "I'm in awe of her dedication," said Courtney Quirie, director of volunteer services at Haven. "She's made this commitment to helping Haven maintain something that may seem so simple, but people don't realize it's the little things like this that bring such delight and joy to patients and their families. It really is commendable."

As the poultry chairperson for the local 4-H Club, Kaufman has become a local expert on birds. She also wrote a book, which can be found in the library at the E.T. York Haven Hospice Care Center in Gainesville, about the various native bird species that Haven's patients might see outside of their windows.

"Even outside of the bird feeders, Jean is just a good, amazing person," Quirie said. "She is an example of the volunteer who everyone wants—every organization wishes someone like that will walk through their door."

It is her immeasurable passion for birds and volunteering that awarded Kaufman the title of Haven Hospice Volunteer of the Year 2011. But, it's the patients themselves who motivate

Kaufman to continue her donations.

"I know a woman who didn't want to enter hospice care because she didn't want to leave her birds at home," Kaufman said. "But then when they reassured her that there would be birds at Haven, she willingly came to where she needed to be. Things like that keep me going".

But keeping up with all of the feeders quickly grew to be an expensive task for Kaufman. After reaching out to the Alachua Audubon Society, the organization not only gave her advice on what type of seed to buy and where to place the feeders, but it also raised \$850 to help pay for the seed.

Because \$30 in birdseed only lasts two weeks, help from the AAS has been a blessing, Kaufman said. It also donated two pairs of binoculars to Haven, so the patients can get a closer look at the birds outside of their windows.

"Patients will come to the front desk at the care centers and say 'My bird feeder is empty, I need it filled,'" Kaufman said. "It really brings them joy, and I enjoy seeing their happiness."

Kaufman has put in bird feeders, bird baths, hummingbird feeders and even two Blue Jay houses. From cardinals to chickadees, a colorful assortment of singing friends can be found outside the windows of Haven Hospice.

Anyone interested in donating to the birdseed fund can contact Helen Warren, president of the Alachua Audubon Society at (352) 214-7755 or helenkwarren@cox.net

To learn more about Haven Hospice and to find out about volunteering, visit www.havenhospice.org.



Florida Breeding Bird Atlas II

The Second Florida Breeding Bird Atlas (BBA) has started! The Florida BBA II kicked off its first year with the Florida Ornithological Society (FOS) Spring Meeting at Camp Weed near Live Oak on May 18-20, the same location that saw the kick-off of BBA I.

Audubon of Florida and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the primary forces in the BBA 25 years ago, have joined FOS as collaborators in this second project. With the experience of the many atlases run in the past 25 years, BBA II will yield much more useful results – not only detailed current distribution maps for each bird species breeding in Florida, but also a change map comparing our results with those from 25 years ago, and a relative abundance map showing where each species is most common. The BBA II survey will cover the southeast block in every Quadrangle in Florida, where possible, and will allow comparisons to be made among all quads throughout Florida and among other states.

The BBA survey is challenging, exciting, and will provide important information on breeding bird activity in Florida. Methods for the BBA survey include noting all bird species found in the southeast (10 square mile) block of an assigned quad. Any breeding-related activity is recorded and includes singing on territory, nest building, feeding young, presence of young, or other related breeding activities. The remaining quad is then explored for additional breeding species that were not found in the southeast block. The bird list is accumulated over a 5-year period and occurs during the breeding season of approximately April through August.

As a volunteer, you can perform the bird survey anytime during those months over the 5-year period, survey as often as you prefer, at your own pace, and on the days that you choose. The purpose of the BBA is to record actual or potential breeding bird species in the designated block and supplement that list with other species found in the quad—not perform a detailed tally of individual birds. More information and tools

are provided on the FOS web site <http://www.fosbirds.org/bba2news> including a link to a USGS site with maps and lists of birds seen in each block during BBA I 25 years ago.

BBA Coordinators are looking for more volunteers to assist with BBA II. If you are interested in participating in this important birding endeavor, please contact Adam Kent (kestrelkent@yahoo.com) or Rick West (RickLWest@aol.com) for more information.

By Rick West

The following people signed up for the BBA II survey and have been assigned quads in Alachua County:

Quad	Atlaser
Alachua	Debra Segal
Archer	Michael Meisenberg
Arredondo	Rob Bowden
Gainesville East	Karl Miller
Gainesville West	Adam Zions
Hawthorne	Ivor Kincaid
High Springs	Mike Manetz
Melrose	Andy Kratter
Micanopy	Craig Parenteau
Monteocha	Caleb Gordon
Newberry	John Martin
Orange Heights	Rob Norton
Rochelle	Chris Burney
Waldo	Rex Rowan

Gina and Adam Kent will be surveying parts of Levy County and other north Florida quads, while Dotty Robbins is surveying all quads in Gilchrist County.

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AAS Sends Youth Birder to Hog Island Audubon Camp in Maine

We are delighted to send Steven Goodman to Audubon's Hog Island Bird Camp this summer in coastal Maine. Alachua Audubon continues to foster a growing interest in bird watching among youth birders. And as our chapter expands with youth birding programs we looked to do something new and big....really big.

The Alachua Audubon Board of Directors decided to sponsor a young birder to attend Audubon's Hog Island birding camp this summer and provide that person with an experience that they would remember for a lifetime. Steven Goodman was the selected youth birder.

Steven has participated in the Gainesville Christmas Bird Counts with his father Ted Goodman for seven years (and Steven is only 13 years old). In addition, Steven has participated every year in our Christmas Bird Count for Kids. When Alachua Audubon started hosting field trips for young birders, Steven participated and soon became the leader who the other young birders could look up to. Steven will attend the 6-day

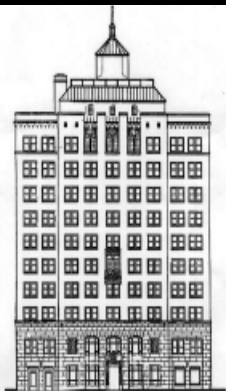
camp program at Audubon's seabird conservation field research station and also participate in the Project Puffin program during puffin breeding season.

Alachua Audubon hopes to connect with other youth birders during the next year and consider ways to continue to provide a scholarship to the Hog Island Audubon Camp in Maine. If you are a student with an interest in birds, conservation, and ornithology, or a teacher or parent with an interest in getting young people interested in birding, please contact Emily Schwartz at 352-372-0754 or Emilysgfl@gmail.com and ask to be included on our email contact list for young birders programs and field trips.

By Helen Warren



Youth birders at Hog Island Summer Camp



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