



The Crane

Volume 54 Number 3 January February 2013

January and February Field Trips

Saturday, January 5, 8:00

Alligator Lake

Meet Jerry Krummrich at Alligator Lake Park parking lot in Lake City (enter from SE Country Club Rd.) for a site that has often provided new and unique birds. Difficulty 3.

Saturday and Sunday, January 12 & 13, 8 am

St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge

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

Saturday, January 26, 8:00 am

La Chua Trail

Our newest fieldtrip leaders, Neil and Joan McLeod, will lead a field trip out La Chua Trail to the observation platform that overlooks Alachua Lake. If water conditions remain, expect to see waterfowl, wading birds, raptors, and perhaps even some of the rarities that have recently been reported.

Sunday, January 27, 8:00 am

Gainesville Ponds

Meet Ron Robinson at the Home Depot parking lot on Tower Road to search for waterfowl and other birds at various ponds around Gainesville, including Chapman's Pond. Difficulty 1

Saturday, February 2, 8 am; Persimmon Point

Call Wild Birds Unlimited [352-381-1997] to make a reservation. Limit 15 people. Join local sparrow guru Adam Kent and park ranger Howard Adams for a special trip to one of the county's best kept birding secrets. Access to Persimmon Point is strictly managed to protect the resource for ongoing restoration and wildlife. Difficulty 3

Saturday, February 9, 6:30 am

NE Florida Coast

Meet trip leader John Hintermister at the Tag Agency and carpool to the east coast. We will start at Fernandina Beach and work our way south. Possible Purple Sandpiper and scoters at Ft. Clinch State Park. Then to Amelia Island for Red-throated Loon, scoters, grebes, and gulls. And finish at Huguenot Park for shorebirds and other winter birds. Expect a full day of birding and some walking at various coastal and intercoastal sites. Bring a lunch and warm clothes. Diff. 3

Saturday, February 23, 8 am

San Felasco Milhopper Park Meet Geoff Parks at San Felasco Park parking lot (just off NW 43rd St.) for a tour of this under-explored county park. San Felasco is the county's most reliable spot each winter for Golden-crowned Kinglets. Difficulty 1

Saturday and Sunday, March 9 and 10

Canoe Trip Save the date! Details to be announced in the next Crane Newsletter. Preregistration will be required as space will be limited.

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

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The Alachua Audubon Society's mission is to foster appreciation and knowledge of birds and other native wildlife, to protect and restore wildlife populations and their habitats, and to promote sustainable use of natural resources.

Content of **The Crane** is the sole responsibility of AAS and fulfills stated objectives and goals of AAS. Annual subscription to **The Crane** is included in AAS dues. Non-Audubon members may subscribe to **The Crane** for \$8 annually. All checks for subscriptions or changes of address should be mailed to Paul Moler, Membership Chairman: see back page for address. Submissions to **The Crane** are welcomed. **The Crane** is printed on recycled paper.

**Deadline for
Mar. Apr. Crane:
Feb. 15th**



Late fall and early winter always bring birding surprises, but this year's crop of accidental, stray, and unusual birds was exceptional. Starting in mid-October we had so many reports of Clay-colored Sparrows and Painted Buntings it was hard to keep track of them all. Geoff Parks had a Nashville Warbler in his

yard; a Least Flycatcher showed up along Cone's Dike; but the star of the show by late October was the little Red-breasted Nuthatch. A southward winter irruption of this species was widely predicted, but we usually take such prognostications with a grain of salt. We became believers when the first of several was discovered October 16th by Jonathan Mays in Prairie Creek Preserve. The following day, five were reported at Cedar Key, and they were sighted from many Gainesville area residences, plus San Felasco Hammock, Kanapaha Prairie, and Watermelon Pond. This was the first irruption of this species since 1980-81, and for nearly everyone who saw one it was a county life-bird.

The Hague Dairy is usually interesting in early winter, but this year it exceeded expectations. By early November, two Yellow-headed Blackbirds, at least two Bronzed Cowbirds, plus Clay-colored, Grasshopper, and Henslow's Sparrows had been reported, and John Martin video recorded an amazing but brief appearance of a trio of American Avocets.

In early November at La Chua trail John Hintermister found our first Vermilion Flycatcher in several years, plus a Lincoln's Sparrow. La Chua was excellent for other sparrows as well, and it was not uncommon for birders to report up to nine species in a single morning. Nashville Warbler, Painted Bunting, and a rare sighting of Purple Finch added to the mix. By late November a Whooping Crane and a blue-morph Snow Goose were visible from the La Chua platform, but neither seemed to stay very long. We also had a pretty serious outbreak of Ash-throated Flycatchers on Paynes Prairie basin. A group of birders scouting for the Christmas Count found four of them in a single day, one at Persimmon Point and three together along Cone's Dike. Others were seen at Bolen Bluff and La Chua trail. Most years we are happy to get just one of these western strays; to have six or more is unprecedented. All of these great birds raised expectations for an exceptional Christmas Count, the results of which are provided in this newsletter. Other good sightings elsewhere in the county during the period included a pair of White-fronted Geese seen by the Ewing family near Watermelon Pond, a Henslow's Sparrow reported at Gum Root Park by Frank Goodwin, and two Western Kingbirds— one at Palm Point, the other on (Continued on Page 11)

**Kids' Christmas Bird Count
Sponsored by
The Alachua Audubon Society**

Join us for an exciting morning of bird surveys followed by a tally session & pizza.

Who: Kids under 17, accompanied by an adult*

When: Saturday, January 19, 2013: 9:00 A.M.-2:00 p.m.

Where: Teams meet at assigned locations; locations provided when you register

Questions and to register: Contact Emily Schwartz at: emilysgfl@gmail.com or 352-372-0754

This event will take place unless there is heavy rain. If you need binoculars, please let us know when you register. Following the bird count, teams will meet from 12:30-2:00 p.m. at Mill Pond Condominiums Clubhouse (240 NW 48th Blvd.) to tally the number of birds seen.

Pizza & drinks will be provided by AAS.

*Parents are asked to attend and help with transportation, but please leave the bird watching to the kids!

Kids Bird Camp at Tusawilla Prairie

Alachua Audubon sponsored a day-long birding camp on October 28th at the beautiful Alachua Conservation Trust site at Tusawilla Prairie on the south side of Micanopy. How exciting that this year there was water in the lake and plentiful birds for the children to view. Twenty-five children and their parents attended the bird camp, with many kids in the early elementary age range. And yes, kindergartners can bird!

The Bird Detective power point presentation, created by Adam Kent, was first shown to the kids so they could learn key points for identifying birds and some common bird names. They then practiced using binoculars, learned how to listen by ear for bird calls, and how to use the birding field guides. Then i was off to Tusawilla Prairie natural areas to locate, observe, and identify the numerous birds!

Our thanks go out to the following AAS members who helped with this event: Helen Warren, Caleb Gordon, Adam Kent, Sharon Kuchinski, Ted and Steve Goodman, and Neil and Joan MacLeod.

By Emily Schwartz

**Upcoming Youth Activities:
Surveys for Brown-headed Nuthatches
and Woodpeckers**

A Brown-headed Nuthatch survey at Morningside Nature Center and a Woodpecker identification workshop at Northeast Park will be planned for the upcoming spring.

Alachua Audubon volunteers will teach basic birding skills, bird identification, and use of binoculars and field guides during these designated youth birding days. If you would like to be added to our email notification list for these upcoming youth birding activities, please contact Emily Schwartz at emilysgfl@gmail.com. You will then be notified as soon as these events are scheduled. These events are open to youths of any skill level.



Photograph taken by Chris Burney at last year's Kids Bird Camp.

Gainesville Christmas Bird Count

The Gainesville Christmas Bird Count (CBC) exceeded 160 species for the first time in our 55-year history, tallying 161 (or 162, if you count the freshly-dead Redhead, a hunting casualty recovered by the Newnans Lake boat team). Can we match that total in the future? We have counted 140+ species during most years from 1997 to 2003, and 150+ species from 2004 to 2011. Is bird variety actually increasing? Or are we just getting better at finding rarities?

There were plenty of birds that would have been major finds on previous counts—for instance, Canvasback, LeConte's Sparrow, and Winter Wren—but they were thrown into the shade by major finds like the flock of six Black Scoters that the Paynes Prairie South team found on Lake Wauberg, not just a first for the Gainesville CBC, but a first for Alachua County. Other notable sightings included two Sprague's Pipits on the Kanapaha Prairie, found in precisely the same spot where they were discovered on the 2011 count, a Groove-billed Ani near the beginning of the La Chua Trail, an astounding total of 10 Ash-throated Flycatchers in various spots around Paynes Prairie (the highest previous count was three in 2007), four Least Flycatchers on the Cones Dike Trail, and four Red-breasted Nuthatches.

The Count supper was held at LifeSouth on Newberry Road this year, since LifeSouth on 13th Street was undergoing renovation. We had a spacious room for our supper and John Martin's tally (which shows this year's results graphed in comparison with all previous results), which was perfect holiday entertainment for this crowd. Thanks to Griselda Forbes for arranging the feast (including some really good beer!), something she's been doing for decades now. Last but not least, congratulations to compilers Howard Adams and John Hintermister, and to Gainesville's outstanding corps of birders for our best Christmas Bird Count ever.

By Rex Rowan



Top photo of Black Scoters on Lake Wauberg, taken by Greg McDermott during the Gainesville CBC. Middle photo of Groove-billed Ani and bottom photo of LeConte's Sparrow. Both photos taken by Jonathon Mays on Paynes Prairie during the Gainesville CBC.

Happy New Year and Thanks to All!

Our Christmas tree sale was a success, and again AAS sold many trees and wreaths. Thanks to Anne Casella and Helen Warren for organizing the sale, Ivor Kincaid and Adam Kent for traveling to Virginia and North Carolina to pick up the trees and wreaths, and to those who unloaded and distributed the trees and wreaths—Helen Warren, Scott Flamand, Mike Manetz, Craig Parenteau, Bob and Erika Simons, Mike Pellett, Carmen Harris, and Adam and Gina Kent. We appreciate the use of space at The Gardener's Edge provided by Dorn's Liquors and Wine Warehouse for our distribution activity.

The Holiday Social at Lynn Rollin's house was joyful and well attended and continues to provide a warm gathering of friends. Thanks to Barb Kerkhoff for her festive and peaceful harp music. Thanks to Helen Warren, Emily Schwartz, Scott Flamand, Anne Casella, and Debbie Segal for collecting donations for the silent auction and food and spirits for the holiday social. Thank you to all who graciously donated items. And a special thanks to Lynn Rollins for her generosity, hospitality, and for opening her house for this festive event!



Photograph of Ida Little, Joyce King, Helen Warren, and Laura Berkelman during the Melrose CBC. Photo taken by Jim Swarr.

Speakers Corner

Hummers and Other Birds of Ecuador

Tuesday, February 12th at 7:00 p.m. at the Millhopper Branch Library, 3145 NW 43rd Street. Share a recent trip with Alachua County Audubon members Brenda Springfield and John Sivinski to Ecuador, where they photographed startlingly beautiful hummingbirds, tanagers, barbets, potoo, cock of the rock, and many other birds in the cloud forest of the Andean foothills.

Birds of Africa—Wednesday, March 20 at 7:00 p.m. at Millhopper Branch Library, 3145 NW 43rd Street. This program, presented by Bob Wallace, will be a discussion of birding in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and Rwanda in which he saw 840 species of birds (1/12 of the world's species) in 32 days with renowned bird guide Brian Finch. Photographs of birds, discussion of birding regions and endemic rarities, plus travel tips for those dreaming of going to Africa on a bird safari will be the topic.



Photograph of Joyce King and Laura Berkelman looking for birds during the Melrose CBC on Little Lake Santa Fe. Photograph taken by Ida Little.

Ichetucknee, Santa Fe, O'Leno Christmas Bird Count

The Ichetucknee/Santa Fe/O'Leno Christmas Bird Count (CBC), the newest CBC in north-central Florida, held its fourth annual bird count on December 18th. Sunny, mild, and sometimes windy weather created superbly comfortable birding conditions for the 29 participants. This CBC covers many natural and state-owned properties, including Ichetucknee Springs State Park, O'Leno State Park, the Ichetucknee River, the Santa Fe River (approximately 25 miles from River Rise down to the confluence with the Ichetucknee River), and numerous springs and sinks that comprise the landscape. The 15-mile wide count circle also incorporates private, residential and agricultural areas.

Three birding groups conducted their observations by paddling down the Santa Fe and Ichetucknee Rivers, while other groups fanned out through the uplands and adjacent public lands. The agricultural and sparse residential areas were also covered, although not with the equivalent man (or woman) power that the more natural areas received.

By the end of the day, 92 bird species were recorded, including several locally rare species. Red-breasted Nuthatches were observed within both state parks, with three of the six seen in a single tree at Ichetucknee Springs State Park. Also recorded at Ichetucknee Springs State Park were a Prairie Warbler, three Soras, and three Virginia Rails. Other locally uncommon birds were a Louisiana Waterthrush foraging along the shore of the Santa Fe River near River Rise, a Winter Wren at O'Leno State Park, and a Fox Sparrow at both O'Leno and Ichetucknee Springs State Park.

The number of individual birds was lower this year as compared to the previous three years – possibly a result of fewer participants, which led to less coverage in the agricultural and weedy field habitats, a windy afternoon which was especially challenging while birding from a canoe or kayak, and the unseasonably warm weather which excluded the large flocks of Robins and Cedar Wax-

wings that are typically seen. Nevertheless, who can complain after spending a beautiful day paddling down the magnificent Ichetucknee or Santa Fe River, or after exploring the stunning O'Leno or Ichetucknee Springs State Park!

By Debra Segal



Photograph above of Jacqui Sulek and below of Jacqui and Betsy Martin birding by kayak on the Santa Fe River during the 2012 Ichetucknee/Santa Fe/O'Leno CBC. Photographs taken by Georgia Schemitz.





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Have you signed the Florida Water and Land Legacy Campaign petition yet? If not, please contact www.floridawaterlandlegacy.org to see how you can play a small but important role in protecting our critical water and land areas.

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Photography Contest

The 2012 winners of Swarovski's international Digiscoper of the Year Contest were just announced, and Tara Tanaka of Tallahassee was awarded 1st Place for the second year in a row. 2011 was the first year that anyone from the US had won, and this is the first time that the same person has won twice. The winning photograph was a portrait of a Cattle Egret in breeding plumage (left

photo).

Digiscoping employs the use of either a Digital Single-Lens Reflex (DSLR) camera, or more commonly a point & shoot camera, mounted on a spotting scope. Equivalent focal lengths of 1000 mm and greater are achieved using this method. Tara's prize package included one of Swarovski's just released ATX/STX spotting scopes, their new digiscoping-specific lens, and a tripod. All of the winning photos can be viewed at <http://www.digiscoperoftheyear.com/>.

Tara also generously donated several of her digiscope photographs to the Alachua Audubon Silent Auction last year. Congratulations Tara!

Monitoring Breeding Birds on Cell Towers—Volunteers Needed

Audubon volunteers led by Barb Walker from Clearwater Audubon have embarked on an ambitious bird monitoring program. In partnership with American Tower Corporation, one of the largest cell phone tower companies in the nation, volunteers in Florida are monitoring specific cell phone towers prior to tower maintenance. Predominately Ospreys, but also Bald Eagles, Red-tailed Hawks, Great Horned Owls, and even Crested Caracaras will nest on a cell phone tower. Audubon volunteers throughout Florida are being sought to help with monitoring. The monitoring results will help to avoid disturbing birds when they are nesting on cell phone towers.

If you are interested in monitoring a cell phone tower in your area on an as-needed basis, please contact Barb Walker at barbibird@tampabay.rr.com or at 727-798-2385 and tell Barb which geographical region you can assist with. To ensure that pertinent and consistent data are collected during the surveys, Barb will provide some training information through phone conversations, email, and Webinar. You will then become Audubon-trained for nest monitoring. To cover gasoline and miscel-

laneous expenses, you will be reimbursed \$25 - \$35 for each completed survey. Please consider lending your birding skills to this bird conservation project – certainly a great example of how Audubon volunteers can work cooperatively with industry for the shared goal of bird conservation.

By Debra Segal

Melrose Christmas Bird Count

On December 14th, 24 participants from Santa Fe Audubon, Alachua Audubon, and others fanned out in boats, cars, and on foot to survey all the birds that could be seen and heard. (*Photographs shown on page 5*). This dedicated effort resulted in locating 98 species of birds. Started 25 years ago by Jan and Bill Bolte, the Melrose Christmas Bird Count (CBC) covers a 15-mile radius circle that encompasses parts of four counties – Clay, Putnam, Alachua, and Bradford. Many bird-rich natural areas occur in this circle and include Lake Santa Fe, Santa Fe Swamp, Gold Head Branch State Park, the Ordway Preserve, and numerous sandhill lakes.

At the end of the day-long survey, participants congregated at Betty's Pizza in Melrose to tally the results, to share stories of the day's birding highlights, and of course to feast on the local cuisine. Jim Swarr, the CBC organizer, compiled the list of birds that were surveyed by the six birding groups. Some of the birding highlights included a rare Greater White-fronted Goose flying with three Sandhill Cranes, a rare Red-breasted Nuthatch at Santa Fe Swamp, clear views of a pair of Bald Eagles on a nest at Gold Head Branch State Park, and an abundance of typically coastal species – Bufflehead, Common Loons, Horned Grebes, and Bonaparte's Gulls - at Lake Santa Fe. Not only was this survey challenging and entertaining for the participants, it added to the important long-term bird conservation database.

Wildlife surveys like the Melrose CBC provide important insight into the health of the environment. Since birds are the most visible of our wildlife and the easiest to survey and census, bird survey data provide an indication of the overall health of the less visible wildlife species. In many cases, an abundant and diverse avian community reflects healthy ecological habitats, while declining bird populations can signify disturbing trends in our land development patterns and their detrimental effects on our lakes, floodplains, rivers, forests, and other natural areas. Results from the Melrose CBC combined with bird data from hundreds of other CBC surveys throughout the country will allow ornithologists to assess bird trends on a national and international scale.

By Debra Segal

Killdeer Bathing

Distinctive
black collar

invisible,
he wriggles,

frisky,
in the drink.

He prinks
and sprinkles

dizzy
droplets

everywhere
in the morning

air. Restored,
he resumes

his chores—
the brisk

and worried
survey

of the shore,
the skitter,

feint,
and twist

of the natural
catastrophist.

By Sidney Wade; MFA@FLA Creative Writing Program in the English Department at UF and AAS member. First published in "*Onearth*", a publication of the Natural Resources Defense Council.

The birding field trips listed below are sponsored by Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park. Families with children are encouraged to attend.

Family Birding at Paynes Prairie

Come join us for birding fun the 1st Saturday of every month December through April. Children must be accompanied by an adult.

- ☆ Saturday, December 1st, 2012: 9 to 11am Lake Trail, meet at Lake Wauberg Parking Lot. Bird Habitat: Where and when to see birds.
- ☆ Saturday, January 5th, 2013: 9 to 11am Meet at La Chua Trailhead. Cranes and winter birds on the prairie.
- ☆ Saturday, February 2nd, 2013: 9 to 11am How to identify birds and their songs. Meet at visitor center.
- ☆ Saturday, March 2, 2013: 9 to 11am Attracting birds to your backyards. Meet at visitor center.
- ☆ Saturday, April 6th, 2013: 9 to 11am Migration and keeping a birding checklist. Meet at La Chua Trailhead.

Pre-registration
is required as
space is limited.

Call (352) 466-4100
daily 9am to 4pm to
register.

Program is free,
but regular park
admission fees
apply.



Restoring Paynes Prairie

Construction on the Paynes Prairie Sheetflow Restoration Project began last month. Gainesville Regional Utilities (GRU), in partnership with many other agencies such as the City of Gainesville's Public Works Department and Alachua County's Environmental Protection Department, will construct a 225-acre enhancement wetland and restore 1,300 acres of prairie wetlands located southeast of the intersection of South Main Street and Wiliston Road. The project is scheduled for completion in August 2014.

The Sheetflow Restoration Project is a GRU reclaimed water initiative that will revitalize wetlands and wildlife habitat, purify water, remove trash, provide public education and recreational opportunities, and fulfill GRU's regulatory requirements cost-effectively. The reclaimed water comes from GRU's Main Street Water Reclamation Facility after being treated to meet safe irrigation standards.

The project will restore the natural flow of water onto the prairie, which was interrupted by a man-made canal built for cattle ranching in the 1930s. Public amenities will include trails, a boardwalk, educational signposts and observation structures. Future plans include a visitors' center and two viewing towers.

"This is a beneficial way to use reclaimed water because it will help protect our water resources and also restore wetland habitat on Paynes Prairie," said Alice Rankeillor, water and wastewater engineer. "It is a win-win situation for everyone."

GRU received a \$200,000 grant from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection as well as a \$500,000 award from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission for the Paynes Prairie Sheetflow Restoration Project. The awards recognize the environmental restoration and public recreation benefits of the sheetflow project. The award funds will supplement the cost of removing the man-made canal through the prairie, and the

grant funds will be applied toward installing a 3.5-mile walking path around the wetlands.

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An additional note: The Alachua Audubon Society has been consulted by GRU on bird habitat improvement features and educational signage. AAS looks forward to this public use nature facility, one that is sure to be a premier birding hotspot in Alachua County!

(Around the County; continued from page 2)
Bob Wallace's property near Alachua.

I am putting out feelers to see how much interest there is in another birding trip to Costa Rica in early June. The emphasis will be on birds, but the itinerary mixes in some conservation and biodiversity experiences. To see an example of the full itinerary, check the website birdsandconservation.weebly.com, and please let me know if you might like to join us.

Birding Class Offered

Santa Fe College's Community Education Program, in collaboration with the Alachua Audubon Society, is offering a 4 week course in Field Bird Identification. The next class begins Jan. 26th and concludes Feb. 23rd. Classes are on Saturday mornings and last 2 hours. The final class will be a longer trip to Cedar Key. Each class is led by a local birding expert. This class will benefit both beginning birders and more advanced birders. We will visit local natural areas to identify birds in their natural habitat.

Cost is \$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 January 5th and you must be at least 18 years old to register. This class receives great reviews and many students have returned for additional instruction. Limit 12 students, so register early, as this class fills quickly. Hope to see you in class.

Kathy Haines, Class Coordinator

Audubon Assembly 2012 Conserve Water to Sustain Life

Audubon Florida recently held the annual Audubon Assembly on October 26-27 in Sarasota. The theme of the assembly was *Conserve Water to Sustain Life*, and presentations, workshops, and awards all centered on conservation of water. Speakers at the Assembly were top caliber and their messages powerful and motivating. U.S. Representative Kathy Castor – representing Florida's 11th Congressional District in Tampa and St. Petersburg – opened the Audubon Assembly. Representative Castor is Florida's most prominent coastal advocate, and she discussed the recently passed RESTORE Act, which directs funds from the BP oil spill penalties to fund coastal state restoration projects.

Cynthia Barnett, local Gainesville resident and author of two books - *Blue Revolution* and *Mirage* - provided the keynote dinner presentation. Ms. Barnett spoke of how communities need to develop a water ethic so clean and abundant water will be available for future generations. She encouraged us to elect candidates who will implement sustainable water laws and policies, and to engage more people in water issues by spreading the water ethic. She noted how Florida has fallen behind Georgia in water conservation since Georgia passed one of the most progressive water conservation laws in the southeast. While Florida has also passed excellent land and water laws, they have not been effectively implemented or enforced by our environmental and political administrators. If you haven't read either of Cynthia's books, I highly encourage you to do so. The St. Petersburg Times named *Mirage* as one of the top 10 books that every Floridian should read.

A surprise evening guest speaker was Ken Salazar, Secretary of the Interior. Having flown in from Washington, Mr. Salazar spoke of the ongoing restoration activities in the Everglades and formation of the new ***Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area***. This new refuge is located just north of Lake Okeechobee and is strategic for protecting

Important Bird Areas within the Atlantic Flyway. The 150,000 acre refuge will be comprised of ranchland that supports Florida Grasshopper Sparrows, Florida Scrub Jays, Southern Bald Eagles, Audubon's Crested Caracaras, Florida Sandhill Cranes, and other migratory and resident species. This new National Wildlife Refuge is one of Audubon's top priorities for Everglades restoration.

Patrick Lehman, Executive Director of the Peace River Water Authority (PRWA), described how the water authority manages surface water flows in the Peace River for municipal water supply. Whereas most Floridians receive their drinking water from the Floridian Aquifer, residents in south-central Florida tap into the Peace River for their water supply. Patrick Lehman discussed PRWA's water management strategies of storing surface water from the Peace River in a constructed reservoir during high flow events so water can be supplied to residents during drought conditions when river flows are low. Otherwise, large scale river withdrawals during drought conditions could adversely affect fish, wildlife, and other ecological functions in the Peace River.

Jon Thaxton, outgoing Sarasota County Commissioner, spoke on how Sarasota County chose to increase water rates for large water users in the county while maintaining low rates for those residents and businesses that use less water. The changed rate structure has resulted in Sarasota's transitioning from one of the highest water use counties to one of the lowest water use counties. Being the progressive county that it is, Sarasota County has also implemented a Green Champions program to educate its employees and residents of the importance of conservation and sustainability.

Three water-focused Learning Sessions were presented to describe and discuss specific water issues in Florida. Springs scientist, Dr. Bob Knight, discussed how reduced aquifer levels have affected water flow in Florida's springs. Spring flow in some springs has declined by 20 percent, a level that has caused significant harm in our spring-fed rivers. Ironically, many of these rivers are classified as Outstanding Florida Waters – a designation designed to protect against significant harm.

Dr. Paul Gray, Audubon's Science Coordinator for the Everglades, discussed water management challenges in the Everglades. He noted how the Everglades now support only about 5 percent of the originally estimated one million wading birds, even though about 50 percent of the wetlands still remain. The challenge is that the remaining wetlands do not produce the same amount of food – aquatic insects, small fish, etc. – that were produced before water in the Everglades was so highly manipulated. For example, Dr. Gray noted that Wood Storks require an estimated 440 pounds of live food during the nesting season, which equates to about 70,000 small fish. However, due to high water use, water manipulations, and competing water needs between agriculture and ecosystems, the Everglades no longer produces a large enough food base to support such a large wading bird population.

Barbara Powell, Water Resource Manager for Broward County, described the county's goal to achieve a 10 percent decline in water use by developing a regional conservation ethic. Broward County has already reduced water consumption from an average of 150 to 130 gallons of water per person per day and is striving to reach lower rates. Broward County has partnered with the public schools to educate and promote a water conservation ethic to over 60,000 students. Broward County provides irrigation evaluations for large water users, provides rebates and water saving devices for high efficiency toilets, and organizes the annual *Water Matters* festival, which draws over 3,200 attendees.

Jason Lauristen, Audubon Florida's new director of the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, described how Corkscrew Swamp once supported the largest and most significant Wood Stork nesting colony in the nation. However, a significant decline in the Wood Stork population has been noted. Jason described how wet prairies – an important Wood Stork foraging habitat – have been impacted for development and that the associated wetland mitigation has not replaced the foraging wet prairie habitat functions that are needed by Wood Storks. Corkscrew's mission has been to protect Wood Stork core foraging areas in and sur-

rounding the 18,000 acre Corkscrew Sanctuary. One mechanism for protection is to monitor wetland permits that are being issued by the regulatory agencies to ensure that habitat for Wood Storks and other wetland-dependent birds are not adversely impacted.

Sarasota, Venice Area, and Manatee County Audubon Chapters guided three field-trips to local birding hotspots – Myakka River State Park, the Celery Fields, and South Lido Beach. Interestingly, the Celery Fields represents a 300+ acre constructed stormwater treatment wetland that provides water quality enhancement, wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities for residents of and visitors to Sarasota County. Sarasota Audubon leads frequent bird watching field trips at the Celery Fields and is now running an ambitious capital campaign to raise enough money to build a nature and educational center at the site.

The Audubon Assembly concluded with a presentation of the 2013 Conservation Action Agenda. This included a set of conservation-related goals that Audubon Florida and the six state regional areas plan to implement in 2013. A copy of the 2013 Conservation Action Agenda can be obtained at Audubon_conservationactionagenda_2013 or contacting Audubon Florida at www.audubonofflorida.org.

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