



# The Crane

Volume 58 Number 3 January February 2017

## January and February Field Trips

**Saturday and Sunday, January 7-8, 8:00 a.m.**

**St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge:** Meet John Hintermister at the St. Marks visitor center on Saturday at 8 a.m. for a trip to one of Florida's premier winter birding spots. Expect a large number and wide variety of birds. Bring a lunch. 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 14, 6:00 a.m.**

**Circle B Bar Reserve:** Meet Bob Carroll in the Target parking lot to carpool down to Circle Bar B Ranch in Polk County. Located on the north shore of Lake Hancock, this birding hot spot supports a tremendous bird population including wading birds, waterfowl, raptors, warblers, sparrows, and others. The diverse habitat includes oak hammock, freshwater marsh, hardwood swamp, and lakeshore. Difficulty: 3.

**Saturday, January 21, 8:00 a.m.**

**Sweetwater Wetlands Park:** Join trip leader Debra Segal for a birding stroll around Gainesville's newest birding hotspot, a site that has already logged over 170 bird species! We'll search for ducks, American Bitterns, and other winter wetland birds. Directions: From the intersection of US-441 and Williston Rd., go east on Williston Rd. roughly  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile. The entrance will be on the right. Bring sunscreen and water. Entry fee \$5.00 per vehicle. Difficulty: 3.

**Saturday, January 28, 8:00 a.m.**

**La Chua Trail:** Meet trip leader Bob Carroll at the trail-

head of La Chua Trail on Camp Ranch Rd. La Chua is one of the area's best birding hotspots and it supports a tremendous bird population including wading birds, waterfowl, raptors, warblers, sparrows, and others. Entry fee \$4 per vehicle. Difficulty: 3.

**Saturday, February 4, 6:30 a.m.**

**Northeast Florida Coast:** Meet trip leader John Hintermister at the Tag Agency on NW 34th St. just south of US-441 to carpool to the east coast. We'll start at Fernandina Beach and work our way south. Possible Purple Sandpipers and scoters at Ft. Clinch State Park (entry fee \$6 per vehicle). Then to Amelia Island for Red-throated Loon, scoters, Horned Grebes, and gulls. We'll finish at another coastal site for shorebirds and other winter birds. Expect a full day of birding and some walking at various coastal sites. Bring a lunch and warm clothes. Difficulty: 3.

**Saturday, February 11, 12:30 p.m.**

**Daytona Beach Shores Gulls and Terns:** Join trip leader Dotty Robbins in the Target parking lot on Archer Rd. at 12:30 p.m. and then drive to Frank Rendon Park in Daytona Beach Shores. We'll meet Michael Brothers of the Marine Science Center at 3:30 to stroll the beach and enjoy the spectacle of the many thousands of gulls that amass there. Michael will share his gull expertise at our program on February 7th, and this will be an opportunity to practice those identification tips. Difficulty: 2.

*Field Trips continued on Page 12*

**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 \$20 annually. All checks for subscriptions or changes of address should be mailed to Karen Brown, Membership Chairman: see back page for address. Submissions to **The Crane** are welcomed.

**Deadline for  
Mar. Apr. Crane:  
Feb. 15<sup>th</sup>**



For birders, early winter is always ripe with anticipation. It's the time of year nearly anything can show up here, and this year plenty did! Stray western flycatchers made a particularly good showing. As early as October 20<sup>th</sup> a Vermilion Flycatcher turned up on U of F campus, noted by Travis Mitchell. Later,

on November 11<sup>th</sup>, Lloyd Davis found the first of what would be three Vermilions that came to occupy the open marsh at the end of the power line off Sparrow Alley. Rex Rowan spotted a Western Kingbird November 14<sup>th</sup> at the Hague Dairy; a second turned up along La Chua trail a week later, and Linda Holt picked out a gorgeous adult male Scissor-tailed Flycatcher December 2<sup>nd</sup> along Highway 41 north of Newberry. Our first Ash-throated Flycatcher was noted December 5<sup>th</sup> behind Hickory Ranch on the east side of the prairie basin. Three days later a second was discovered by Frank and Irina Goodwin along Cone's Dike. Frank and Irina also found our first-of- winter Fox Sparrow there the same day.

It was predicted that Red-breasted Nuthatches would venture farther south than usual this year, but they didn't appear in quite the numbers we had hoped for. Still, we had a few. Dick and Pat Bartlett spotted one at their feeders October 14<sup>th</sup>, and Anne Casella had one visit her yard November 10<sup>th</sup>. Glenn Israel topped both November 23<sup>rd</sup> by hosting in his yard a Red-breasted Nuthatch *and* a Western Tanager!

Jonathan Mays found a Dickcissel along the Rail Trail November 4<sup>th</sup> and Adam Zions picked out another along La Chua Trail December 10<sup>th</sup>. Jonathan Mays also broke our eighteen-month long Hairy Woodpecker drought when he spotted one at Longleaf Flatwoods November 14<sup>th</sup>. Our first Bronzed Cowbird showed up November 4<sup>th</sup> at the dairy where it was still present at the time of this writing. For the first time in memory we had no fall or winter reports of Yellow-headed Blackbird at the dairy, though one did appear briefly on UF campus November 5<sup>th</sup>, reported by Colleen Coudery.

The most dramatic show of the season was around the platform at the end of La Chua Trail. By late fall, water levels on the prairie basin had fallen almost perfectly to attract huge numbers of ducks, waders, shorebirds, and of course, birders. Ducks peaked at approximately two-thousand individuals, mostly Blue and Green-winged Teal, but also included higher than usual numbers of Northern Pintail, plus a smattering of Shovelers, Gadwalls, Wigeons, and Mallards. Shorebirds, too, hit peak density with up to a hundred Long-billed Dowitchers and even more numerous Wilson's Snipe, dozens of yellowlegs, plus token numbers of locally (continued on Page 13)

## 2016 Gainesville Christmas Bird Count Sets New Record—167 Species!

The long tradition of the Gainesville Christmas Bird Count began in 1957, was missed in 1958, and has been annual since 1959. If you add the three husband-and-wife Gainesville counts in 1924, 1927, and 1949, this year's CBC represents the 62nd Gainesville count.

The Gainesville CBC has become a showcase CBC with an established organizational infrastructure, a circle teeming with birds, and most importantly, a dedicated group of excellent birders who scour the prairies, lakes, creeks, thickets, and woods for every species. And this year the hard work really paid off! *We established a new all-time record with 167 species, recorded by 105 participants, comprising eleven teams, on Sunday, 18 December 2016!* Last year, the Gainesville CBC was the third-most diverse in Florida, and even though we do not have salt-water habitats, this count circle has become one of the top inland counts in the entire United States.

The most exciting birds seen this year were those that were new to the count. For the second year in a row, Newnan's Lake produced one of the highlight rarities. A Common Tern was first discovered by Matt O'Sullivan on December 11th. The bird obligingly remained at the lake for the "pelagic" team of Andy Kratter, Bob Wallace, and Danny Young to tally it, and for Bob and Danny to obtain documenting photographs. This is quite a rare wintering bird in Florida, especially so inland.

Also new for the count was a Clay-colored Sparrow seen by Debbie Segal, Celeste Shitama, Don Morrow, and Bob Knight. An extra bonus was that it perched onto a blackberry thicket only one foot from a Grasshopper Sparrow, and allowed the team long looks and photographs. Clay-colored Sparrow has been a regular fall migrant in

Alachua County, except for the past two years when they have been inexplicably absent. There are only a few previous wintering birds documented in the county.

Other remarkable sightings included two Royal Terns by Craig Bateman heading across the basin of Paynes Prairie (only third count occurrence) and first since 1986.; five Vaux's Swifts returning for the second year to the Dauer Hall chimneys at UF, by Tom Webber; a slew of noteworthy water birds noted by the team in the Paynes Prairie basin, including four Greater White-fronted Geese, two Western Sandpipers, a Stilt Sandpiper, a Dunlin, a Whooping Crane, and 38 Long-billed Dowitchers; a Least Flycatcher on Cones Dike by Adam Zions and Jonathon Mays; an *Empidonax* sp also seen on Cone's Dike by Craig Bateman; two Least Bitterns heard by Danny Rohan at Sweetwater Wetlands; an Ash-throated Flycatcher at Persimmon Point by Bubba Scales; a Summer Tanager near Haile Plantation by Glendy Robinson; three White-winged Doves and a Peregrine Falcon by Rex Rowan near Kanapaha Prairie; a Nashville Warbler at the home of Adam and Gina Kent; and a hummingbird bonanza in NW Gainesville, with three Ruby-throated Hummingbirds (Jacqui Sulek) and a species in the genus *Selasphorus* sp. (Samuel Ewing).

New high counts were noted for Black-bellied Whistling Duck (over 900 at Sweetwater Wetlands Park), Mottled Duck, Barred Owl, Sedge Wren, and Chipping Sparrow. We did remarkably well for the 151 "regularly" occurring species, missing only four species, none of which are annual on the count (Snow Goose, Horned Grebe, Redhead, and Yellow-breasted Chat).

Here's the complete list of birds tallied on the 62nd Gainesville Christmas Bird Count. (**Boldface** indicates a new species for the count or a historically high count for an individual species.) **Black-bellied Whistling-Duck 2510** (we are assessing double-counts), Greater White-fronted Goose 4, Gadwall 9, American Wigeon 3, (*Continued on Pg 13*)

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Drawing by  
Andre Frattino



### Youth Christmas Bird Count

Alachua Audubon will sponsor the famous Christmas Bird Count for young people on Saturday, January 21st. We will count birds in the morning and celebrate with a pizza lunch as we tally our results. Loaner binoculars will be available. Please register at [alachuayouth-birding@gmail.com](mailto:alachuayouth-birding@gmail.com) so you can be assigned to a team and for lunch reservations.

### Family Birding at Paynes Prairie

Join Alachua Audubon volunteers for family birding events on the first Saturday of each month, November through April. These field trips are sponsored by Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park. Call 352-466-4100 for more information and register at [www.prairiefriends.org](http://www.prairiefriends.org). Families and kids are encouraged to participate. Children must be accompanied by an adult.

### Audubon Youth Birding Wildly Popular

On Saturday, October 29th they just kept coming and coming to Sweetwater Wetlands Park. No, not birds, but middle school students. An enterprising teacher, Barbara Brock, created a “treasure hunt for birds” for science students at Oak View Middle School in Newberry. Students racked up points for birds and other wildlife they could find and identify. When their sheet was signed by a teacher or guide they earned extra points for their science grade.

A whopping 107 students and adults participated in this Alachua Audubon-sponsored youth birding event. That’s a crazy number for a bird walk, but with interested students and parents and seven adult guides, it all worked out very well indeed! Thanks to the Oak View teachers: Lisa Sauberan, Valissa Tombler, and Emma Caudill, and Alachua Audubon volunteers: Barbara Brock, Michael Brock, Debbie Spiceland, Sharon Kuchinski, Teresa Rodriguez, Emily Rodriguez, and Emily Schwartz.

By Emily Schwartz

Alachua Audubon sends a big shout-out to the AAS Education Committee and the many volunteers who worked together to deliver quality birding events to many youths around the county. AAS is committed to planting *the seed of conservation* in young minds so kids will learn to value wildlife, clean water, and natural areas.



*Photograph showing the steady stream of participants at the Alachua Audubon-sponsored youth birding event at Sweetwater Wetlands Park. Photo taken by Emily Schwartz.*

## Speakers Corner

**Tuesday, January 17th** at Tower Road Library (*not Milhopper Library*) Social at 6:30 pm, program at 7:00 pm. ***Treatment Wetlands Produce Cleaner Water, More Birds.*** By Bob Knight and Debbie Segal. Target one of Florida's many constructed treatment wetlands for bird watching or nature photography and you are likely to see many exciting birds. This is because some of the best birding hotspots in Florida are man-made treatment wetlands that were designed to strip nutrients and pollutants from storm water and municipal wastewater. The use of treatment wetlands is a proven technology that cost-effectively cleanses nutrient-laden water. And one of the many ancillary benefits of treatment wetlands is their high biological productivity that translates into more birds. Learn how these man-made features cleanse Florida's water bodies, attract birds, enhance environmental education, contribute to Florida's public use facilities, and generate ecotourism dollars.

**Tuesday, February 7th** at Milhopper Library. Social at 6:30 p.m., program at 7:00 p.m. **Gull and Jaeger Identification.** By Michael Brothers, Director of the Marine Science Center in Ponce Inlet (Volusia County) will present a visual program on those confusing gulls and how to tell them apart. Laughing gulls are the only gulls that breed in Florida but many others migrate here for the winter. Gull identification is a big challenge and our speaker will give us some help! *Note: There will be an Audubon field trip to Frank Rendon Park, Daytona Shores, the following Saturday (February 11) where as many as 30,000 gulls fly in each evening. Come and practice identifying gulls!*



## AAS Holiday Social

The 2016 Alachua Audubon Holiday Social was a roaring success, thanks to the UF student members of GREBE (Gators Ready for Exceptional Birding Experiences), a new club for which AAS Board member and UF ornithologist Katie Sieving serves as faculty advisor. As is our tradition, AAS members gathered to enjoy food, drink and fellowship and share their birding stories. In place of the silent auction of previous years, we sold AAS hats and members donated their gently-used birding and nature books that other members purchased at whatever price they felt was fair.

The highlight of the evening was the bird call and bird karaoke contest organized by members of GREBE. It was truly a hoot! With Katie Sieving serving as the Master of Ceremonies and revving up the crowd to participate, AAS and GREBE members showed off their skills in a variety of categories. In the bird call contest, the categories included Owls, Game Birds, Tall Birds, Small Birds, Water Birds, Mystery Birds and a Pish Off contest. For bird call karaoke, participants imitated two bird calls each from three continents. The finale was a group of members imitating the mating dance of the Magnificent Riflebird of Australia. If you were unable to attend, visit the Alachua County Birding group page on Facebook and check out the fun in the video posted by Bubba Scales.

By Anne Casella

*Photograph of Bob Simons participating in the bird calling contest as other participants watch. Photograph taken by Scott Flamand.*

# 4th ALACHUA AUDUBON

## BACK YARD BIRDING TOUR

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**Wild Birds Unlimited**, 4121 NW 16<sup>th</sup> Boulevard

## Ichetucknee, Santa Fe, O'Leno Christmas Bird Count

The Ichetucknee/Santa Fe/O'Leno Christmas Bird Count (CBC) held its eighth annual event on Tuesday, December 20<sup>th</sup>. The CBC covers many natural and state-managed properties including Ichetucknee Springs State Park, O'Leno State Park, the Ichetucknee River, 25 miles of the Santa Fe River, Fort White Wildlife and Environmental Area, along with private lands in residential, agricultural, and silvicultural use.

This year's 15-mile wide circle, centered near the town of Fort White, involved 32 participants traveling by car, foot, and canoe within five main teams. Many of the participants are members of the Four Rivers Audubon, Alachua Audubon, Florida Park Service, and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. The group was pleased to have seven new faces join the CBC this year.

Three of the five birding groups concentrated their efforts on state lands while the other two teams focused on other river sections, uplands, private lands, and neighborhoods. The day was overcast with a 30-minute drizzly rain around 2 p.m. The temperature was relatively cool, ranging between 48°F and 59°F. At the end of the day the five teams assembled for an enjoyable evening to get warm, summarize the data, swap stories, and eat pizza.

The CBC recorded 9,491 birds comprising 90 species. These observations included seven high count records, in addition to three new species. Record high counts were observed for Black Vulture (208), Eastern Bluebird (372), American Pipit (110), Red-winged Blackbird (505), Mourning Dove (243), Northern Harrier (2-tied), and Black-crowned Night Heron (1-tied). Bird species new to the Count Circle were Yellow Warbler (1), Snowy Egret (7), and Northern Waterthrush (1). Three species added during countweek include Sandhill Crane, Baltimore Oriole, and White-winged Dove. The CBC data are serving well to document the common and unique species of the area. There have been 58 species consistently seen all years of the count. The participants look forward to next year when they can spend another day in north-central Florida counting birds.

By Ginger Morgan

## Melrose Christmas Bird Count

On December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016, 44 participants from Santa Fe Audubon, Alachua and Duval Audubon, and others fanned out in boats, cars, and on foot to survey all the birds that could be seen and heard for the 26<sup>th</sup> annual Melrose Christmas Bird Count (CBC). This dedicated effort resulted in locating 106 species of birds. The Melrose CBC covers a 15-mile diameter circle centered at the intersection of SR 219 and SR 100, and encompasses parts of Clay, Putnam, Alachua, and Bradford Counties. 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 lakes and forests.

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. Laura Berkelman compiled the list of birds that were surveyed by eleven birding groups.

(Continued on Page 11)



Photograph of Lynne Peterson, Joy Segall, and Joyce King birding in the Santa Fe Swamp during the Melrose Christmas Bird Count. Photograph taken by Ida Little.

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### 2016 Lubee Bat Festival

On behalf of Alachua Audubon Society, I want to thank the volunteers who spent part of a chilly Saturday staffing the Alachua Audubon booth and promoting our organization, our events, and our mission at the 2016 Lubee Bat Festival.

We had a blast interacting with individuals and families whose interest in birds and birding ranged from beginner to expert. Our outreach was a huge success and I feel confident that our efforts will lead to many new faces at upcoming birding field trips and events.

Oh! And the bats were really cool too!

By Will Sexton

*Photograph right is of Alachua Audubon volunteers, Will Sexton, Charlene Leonard, and Ria Leonard pretending to be bats at the Lubee Bat Festival. Photograph taken by Will Sexton.*

### A New Alachua County Birding Record (continued from Page 11)

What was his most exciting experience?  
“Probably the most thrilling single point came on August 7th, when I found both Black Skimmer and American Golden-Plover within ten minutes of each other.”

Congratulations to Mike on the best Alachua County year list ever! I'd predict that it will never be beat, but Mike would probably just prove me a liar yet again.

By Rex Rowan

### Pints and Predators Live Birds of Prey Festival Saturday, Jan. 28th

Join Wild Birds Unlimited at First Magnitude Brewery Company on Saturday, January 28th from 1:00—5:00 pm for the second annual Pints and Predator Live Birds of Prey Festival. This year's event will feature the Avian Reconditioning Center and Florida Wildlife Care, Inc., two new wildlife rehabilitators; Sunrise Wildlife Rehabilitation, USDA Wildlife Services, and Lubee Bat Conservancy. See eagles, hawks, owls, falcons, vultures, flying squirrels, an opossum, and fruit bats.

Even though First Magnitude is a brewery, there will be plenty of activities for kids to do. You may bring your own food and drink, but we plan to have a food truck with high quality, hot meals, in addition to the excellent craft brews that are always on tap in First Magnitude's tasting room.



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## Lake City's Innovative Wetlands are Protecting Ichetucknee Springs

*(Reprinted from a Gainesville Sun op ed on 11/6/16).* Kudos to the City of Lake City, Columbia County, the Suwannee River Water Management District, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and other governmental entities for funding and constructing the Lake City treatment wetlands – officially named the Ichetucknee Springs Water Quality Improvement Project.

For about 30 years, Lake City Utilities disposed of the city's treated wastewater by spraying effluent through high-pressure spray nozzles onto planted pine trees. The trees and other vegetation absorbed some of the nutrient-enriched wastewater, but much of the water evaporated, and the remaining nitrogen percolated through the soil into the Floridan Aquifer. Lake City's wastewater sprayfield is located within the Ichetucknee Springs springshed, and consequently, has contributed a substantial amount of the nitrate nitrogen that continuously bubbles out at Ichetucknee Springs.

Lake City's newly constructed treatment wetlands, consisting of nine basins and stretching over 120 acres, is designed to remove about 85% of the total nitrogen from the City's wastewater effluent, thus reducing the amount of nitrogen reaching the springs. After initial treatment at the City's water reclamation facility, the nutrient-laden wastewater effluent slowly filters through wetland plants where millions of microscopic organisms – bacteria, fungi, and protozoans – biologically transform the polluting nitrate nitrogen to inert nitrogen gas, through a sustainable process called denitrification. The cleansed wetland effluent infiltrates into the ground, delivering cleaner water to the Floridan aquifer, and ultimately to Ichetucknee Springs.

Treatment wetlands are designed to provide a long water residence time, about two to four weeks at the Lake City wetlands, which not only results in low nutrient concentrations, but also facilitates removal of trace metals and organic compounds before those pollutants enter the aquifer. Since constructed treatment wetlands operate by solar energy that freely powers plant photosynthesis, they operate at a fraction of the cost of conven-

tional treatment facilities to further polish wastewater effluent.

Constructed treatment wetlands might also provide cost savings and greater environmental stewardship for other small communities that reside within the Florida's Springs Region, and whose partially-treated effluent percolates through the sandy soils and down to the Floridan Aquifer. Constructed treatment wetlands have wide-reaching benefits for our drinking water supply, our springs, our economy, and the entire public-at-large.

By Debbie Segal

*Learn more about treatment wetlands in the presentation on "Treatment Wetlands Produce Cleaner Water, More Birds" on January 17th. (See Page 5 for more information.*

*Note: The new Lake City treatment wetlands are not currently opened to the public.*

## Keeping Tabs on Alachua Audubon [AlachuaAudubon.org](http://AlachuaAudubon.org)

The Alachua Audubon Society maintains a rich website that features upcoming events such as birding field trips and speakers, a guide to Alachua County's best birding sites, birding reports that are written by Rex Rowan, eBird sitings in Alachua County, previous issues of The Crane newsletter, bird photography, and much more. For a good laugh, peruse the *Guide to the Birders of Alachua County* under the Local Birding & Natural History tab. Find the Checklist of the Amphibians and Reptiles of Alachua County and many other checklists (mammals, snakes, tadpoles and butterflies...) under the same tab by clicking on Local Natural History. Check out this great resource from Alachua Audubon and learn more about what it has to offer.

[www.AlachuaAudubon.org](http://www.AlachuaAudubon.org)

By Karen Brown

## A New Alachua County Birding Record

When I moved to Gainesville in 1988, I was intimidated by the local birding community. Barbara Muschlitz, whose standards were so high as to be slightly nerve-racking, wrote the “Birding” column in *The Crane*, and at the end of every year she would note which of the local birders had the highest “year lists” – the number of birds they had seen within the boundaries of Alachua County during the past year. The numbers struck me as absurdly high. What mortal could expect to see 180 birds in a single year? But Barbara and John Hintermister seemed to do it annually, and Barbara speculated about the possibility of seeing 200 species in a year. The thought was mind-boggling. Two hundred birds? In a single county? In one year?

But it happened. Beginning in the early 90s, birders started topping the 200 mark every year. Not by much, but they did it. Then came 2000, the year of the big drought, when Newnans Lake turned into an enormous mud flat and 30 species of shorebirds were recorded between January and September. Mike Manetz chased all of them, plus every other bird he could find, and at the end of the year he’d recorded an amazing 241 species! No one thought that record would ever be bested, but in 2012, another drought year, Mike not only beat his old record, he thrashed it, with a total of 255 species!

Needless to say, that seemed like a once-in-a-lifetime achievement that no one with a claim to sanity could even imagine beating. *But this year Mike has done it again.* As of December 23rd he’s seen **259** species of birds in the county!

He did this during a year when he spent a lot of time out of town on family business. He wasn’t here when Hurricane Matthew blew in the Black-capped Petrel, and he missed a hefty chunk of the fall migration. I asked how he managed to find so many birds this year, especially under those circumstance. He replied, “Besides the drought and the storm birds from Hermine, there were two other factors that helped. One was the decision to hit it hard the first few weeks of the year, focusing only on picking up the rare and very uncommon birds still lingering from December into January. The other is the number of great birders we have here, and their willingness to share their sightings.” *(Continued on Page 8)*

## Melrose Christmas Bird Count (Continued from Page 7)

Fewer individual birds were seen this year – 7,484 – than in 2015, at 9,265. Rusty Blackbird, a bird new to the count, was seen and photographed at a lake near Interlachen. New to the count also was Northern Pintail.

The Melrose CBC was begun in 1990 by Jan and Bill Bolte; this year marked 26 years of participation in the count.

Begun 117 years ago in New York City’s Central Park, Christmas Bird Counts provide important insight into the health of the environment. Since birds are the most visible of our wildlife and the easiest to survey, bird survey data provide an indication of the overall health of the less visible wildlife species. An abundant and diverse avian community can reflect healthy ecological habitats, while declining bird populations can signify disturbing trends in our land development patterns and their detrimental effects to natural areas. Changes in the range of some bird species have implications in assessing results of climate change. National Audubon has identified 314 species of birds in the U.S. that will be affected by climate change.

Results from the Melrose CBC combined with data from hundreds of other CBC surveys throughout the country allow ornithologists to assess bird trends on a national and international scale. If you’d like to see the complete list of birds seen, please request by email [sjoyceking@comcast.net](mailto:sjoyceking@comcast.net) or [lberkelman@windstream.net](mailto:lberkelman@windstream.net).

By Joyce King

## Around the County (Continued from Page 2)

uncommon to rare species like Dunlin, Black-bellied Plover, Stilt Sandpiper, and American Avocet. By early December large numbers of Sandhill Cranes began to arrive (eventually nearly three thousand of them) accompanied by a handful of Snow Geese and Greater White-fronted Geese. Standing on the platform at sunset, one could be held awestruck by the cacophonous scene of literally thousands of cranes, ibises and blackbirds silhouetted in fading orange light, making their way toward their night roosts amid clouds of undulating ducks and shorebirds spooked up by the occasional passing eagle or harrier.

The Vaux's Swifts returned to their chimney at Dauer Hall on UF campus. Since late November, Andy Kratter had been watching a small group of silent swifts making their dusk descent into the chimney, and finally on December 9<sup>th</sup> he heard them calling. (Visually, Vaux's and Chimney Swifts are practically indistinguishable, and while Chimney Swifts are not *known* to winter in North America, it is still prudent to identify Vaux's by their calls.) Like the Vaux's Swifts we hosted last year, these will likely be the only ones wintering in the southeastern U.S., so you can bet that dozens of birders from around the state and beyond will be making the pilgrimage to Dauer Hall to check them off their lists.

By the time this issue of the *Crane* reaches your mailbox or inbox the Christmas Count will be history, the last crazy-rare bird of the year will have been found, and it will be time to begin anew. Remember, our first returning migrant, Purple Martin, usually shows up at the end of January!

Thanks to those who shared their sightings through December 12, 2016



## Wednesday Bird Walks at the *Sweetwater Wetlands Park*

Alachua Audubon leads weekly bird walks at the Sweetwater Wetlands Park. The weekly walks are scheduled on Wednesday mornings at 8:30 am, from September through May. Admission is \$5 per car. An annual pass can be purchased for \$75 from the Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs administrative office, which is located on the third floor of the Thomas Center, Building B, 306 NE Sixth Ave. The office is open Monday-Thursday from 7 a.m.-6 p.m.

## Field Trips (Continued from Page 1)

**Saturday, February 18, 8:00 a.m.**

**Prairie Creek Lodge:** Meet Mike Manetz at Powers Park on Hawthorne Rd. to car pool to the 500-acre Prairie Creek Preserve. The Preserve encompasses a variety of uplands and lowlands, and we'll sample several of them on this trip. Wear rubber boots or old shoes you don't mind getting wet, as the trail can be soggy or even flooded. Difficulty: 2.

**Saturday, March 4, 8:00 a.m.**

**Morningside Nature Center (CLEP\*):** Meet Geoff Parks for a visit to one of Gainesville's premier nature parks featuring over six miles of trails through sandhills, flatwoods, cypress domes, and beautifully-restored native longleaf pines and wiregrass habitat. Morningside also features a working 19th-century farm, a bird blind, and a diverse array of wildlife that thrives in this unique environment. Difficulty: 2.

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

Photograph of Georgia Schemitz surveying for birds on the Santa Fe River during the Ichetucknee/Santa Fe/O'Leno Christmas Bird Count. Photograph taken by Jacqui Sulek.

## Gainesville Christmas Bird Count

(Continued from Page 3)

Mallard 32, **Mottled Duck 1196**, Blue-winged Teal 1040, Northern Shoveler 111, Northern Pintail 29, Green-winged Teal 1150, Ring-necked Duck 511, Lesser Scaup 3, Bufflehead 7, Common Goldeneye 1, Hooded Merganser 168, Ruddy Duck 15, Northern Bobwhite 3, Wild Turkey 61, Pied-billed Grebe 112, Rock Pigeon 53, Eurasian Collared Dove 17, Common Ground-Dove 8, Mourning Dove 634, White Winged Dove 3, Vaux's Swift 5, Whip-Poor-Will 4, Selasphorus sp. 1, Ruby-throated Hummingbird **3**, King Rail 12, Virginia Rail 2, Sora 52, Common Gallinule 352, American Coot 864, Limpkin 52, Sandhill Crane 7965, Whooping Crane 1, Killdeer 501, Stilt Sandpiper 2, Dunlin 1, Least Sandpiper 15, Long-billed Dowitcher 38, Wilson's Snipe 262, American Woodcock 7, Spotted Sandpiper 1, Greater Yellowlegs 68, Lesser Yellowlegs 18, Bonaparte's Gull 7, Laughing Gull 1, Ring-billed Gull 124, Herring Gull 1, **Royal Tern 2**, Forster's Tern 5, **Common Tern 1**, Common Loon 3, Wood Stork 86, Double-crested Cormorant 323, Anhinga 230, American White Pelican 82, Least Bittern 2, American Bittern 9, Great Blue Heron 178, Great Egret 150, **Snowy Egret 393**, Little Blue Heron 224, Tricolored Heron 41, Cattle Egret 149, Green Heron 7, Black-crowned Night-Heron 25, White Ibis 1394, Glossy Ibis 728, Black Vulture 311, Turkey Vulture 1316, Osprey 1, Bald Eagle Adult 43, Bald Eagle Immature 16, Bald Eagle Unknown 4, Northern Harrier 47, Sharp-shinned Hawk 7, Cooper's Hawk 17, Accipiter sp. 5, Red-shouldered Hawk 168, Red-tailed Hawk 37, Barn Owl 5, Eastern Screech-Owl 14, Great Horned Owl 40, **Barred Owl 65**, Belted Kingfisher 29, Red-headed Woodpecker 29, Red-bellied Woodpecker 316, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker 59, Downy Woodpecker 124, Northern Flicker 109, Pileated Woodpecker 138, American Kestrel 47, Merlin 2, Peregrine Falcon 2, Eastern Phoebe 462, Vermilion Flycatcher 2, Ash-throated Flycatcher 1, Least Flycatcher 1, Loggerhead Shrike 22, White-eyed Vireo 85, Blue-headed Vireo 60, Blue Jay 212, American Crow 630, Fish Crow 84, Crow sp. 64, Tree Swallow 9, Carolina Chickadee 267, Tufted Titmouse 363, Brown-headed Nuthatch 6, House Wren 243, **Sedge Wren 101**, Marsh Wren 21, Carolina Wren 409, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher 474, Golden-crowned Kinglet 7, Ruby-crowned Kinglet 615, Eastern Bluebird 318, Hermit Thrush 62, American Robin 4853, Gray Catbird 172, Brown Thrasher 18, Northern Mockingbird

127, European Starling 51, Cedar Waxwing 30, House Sparrow 22, American Pipit 79, House Finch 105, American Goldfinch 681, Ovenbird 11, Northern Waterthrush 2, Black-and-White Warbler 97, Orange-crowned Warbler 85, Nashville Warbler 1, Common Yellowthroat 167, American Redstart **3**, Northern Parula 6, Palm Warbler 754, Pine Warbler 119, Yellow-rumped Warbler 1195, Yellow-throated Warbler 41, Prairie Warbler 4, Wilson's Warbler 2, Eastern Towhee 117, Field Sparrow 3, **Chipping Sparrow 994**, **Clay-colored Sparrow 1**, Vesper Sparrow 46, Savannah Sparrow 190, Grasshopper Sparrow 3, Henslow's Sparrow 2, Fox Sparrow 4, Song Sparrow 23, Lincoln's Sparrow 3, Swamp Sparrow 302, White-throated Sparrow 5, White-crowned Sparrow 4, Northern Cardinal 754, Summer Tanager 1, Painted Bunting 1, Red-winged Blackbird 9501, Eastern Meadowlark 271, Rusty Blackbird 1, Common Grackle 867, Boat-tailed Grackle 4234, Brown-headed Cowbird 780, Baltimore Oriole 46.

By Andy Kratter

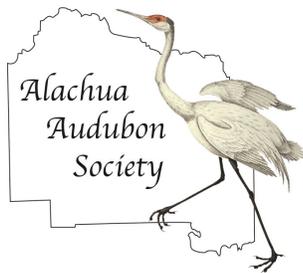


Above photograph taken by Danny Rohan of large congregation of Black-bellied Whistling Ducks roosting at Sweetwater Wetlands Park. Bottom photograph taken by Bob Knight of the first Clay-colored Sparrow documented on the Gainesville Christmas Bird Count.



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

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*The Crane*  
Jan.—Feb. 2017

**Lake Apopka Wildlife and Birdapalooza Birding Festival**, January 20-22, 2017. Full-day and half-day field trips will be led by well-known local birding guides, including Greg Miller of *The Big Year*. For more information and to register, see <http://orangeaudubonfl.org/birdapalooza>.

## Join Audubon!

Join the Audubon Society on 3 levels  
(National, Florida, and Alachua) for \$35

- or -

Join the Alachua Audubon chapter for only \$10

Send completed application and check to:  
**Karen Brown, 3242 NW 12th Terrace,  
Gainesville, Florida 32609**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_  
State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_ (Required for Newsletter)

### Chapter E-18

Please indicate level of membership:

Introductory \$20.00     Basic \$35.00

Make check payable to **National Audubon**

-or-

Alachua Audubon Chapter only - \$10.00

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Check if this is a renewal

Membership Form Also Available at: [AlachuaAudubon.org](http://AlachuaAudubon.org)

Questions? Contact Karen at 352-213-4257 or  
[AlachuaAudubonMembership@gmail.com](mailto:AlachuaAudubonMembership@gmail.com)