

# The Crane

Volume 60 Number 1 July – August 2018

## The June Challenge Edition of The Crane Newsletter

### Results of the 2018 June Challenge

This was the 15th annual June Challenge, during which birders venture out into the broiling tropical heat and humidity and – if they survive! – try to find more bird species in Alachua County during the thirty days of June than anyone else. It’s partly a contest, partly a way to keep our birding skills exercised during the heat of summer, and partly a way to find out what birds are spending June in our area.

The 30 people who participated in this year’s Challenge found a cumulative total of 123 species. Of these, only about 103 were birds that normally occur here during summer and are more or less easily found. The rest could be divided into four categories. There were wintering birds which, for one reason or another, remained in the area into June: Blue-winged Teal, American Coot, Ring-billed Gull, Belted Kingfisher, and Tree Swallow. There were a few belated spring migrants, two Spotted Sandpipers and a Bobolink, none of them seen after June 2nd. There was one early fall migrant, a Louisiana Waterthrush, already southbound on June 30th. There were rare breeders like Short-tailed Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Burrowing Owl, Hairy Woodpecker, Gray Catbird, American Robin and, for the first time this year, Snail Kite. And there were birds that fit into none of the above categories, which might best be characterized as “occasional visitors”: Canada Goose, Brown Pelican, Least Tern, and Whooping Crane. Barn Owl and Yellow-breasted Chat were big misses this year, probably because of the flooding on Paynes Prairie.

Of those 123 species, Chris Cattau saw 112, a higher individual total than anyone else. As the first-place winner, Chris got a Wild Birds Unlimited gift certificate and the dubious privilege of keeping the trophy at his house for the coming year. The trophy is large – some might say ostentatious – with Winged Victory holding aloft a golden disk on which is displayed a Sandhill Crane rampant, the symbol of the Alachua Audubon Society, and it will be engraved with Chris’s name and winning total. Howard Adams took second place with 109 species, which would have been enough to win the Challenge during five of the past fifteen years. Danny Shehee, who tied for first place in 2014, came in third with 107.

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*Chris Cattau takes home the trophy!  
Photo by Glenn Price.*

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President .....Debbie Segal 352-514-0596  
Vice President .....Scott Flamand 352-665-7020  
Secretary.....Felicia Lee 714-791-8855  
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Editor/Ads .....Karen Brown 352-213-4257  
Website .....Trina Anderson 352-363-6810  
Crane Circulation.....Erika and Bob Simons  
AAS Website .....[www.AlachuaAudubon.org](http://www.AlachuaAudubon.org)

*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.*

Submissions to *The Crane* are welcomed. Deadline for the September–October issue: Aug. 15<sup>th</sup>

Content of *The Crane* is the sole responsibility of the editor and fulfills the stated objectives and goals of the Alachua Audubon Society. Annual subscription to *The Crane* is included in National Audubon and/or Alachua Audubon membership. Please see the back page for complete information.

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

The number and variety of migratory birds we see here in spring is partly determined by the weather. When cold fronts pass through during April and early May the odds are better that birds will drop in for a few days to fatten up before resuming their journeys. Most of the migrant warblers that pass through the center of the state are coming from their wintering grounds in northern South America and the Caribbean and make up a fairly predictable basket of species: Prairie, Blackpoll, Cape May, Black-throated Blue Warblers, and American Redstarts comprise the bulk; however, if we get strong westerly winds accompanying a cold front, birds that typically migrate across the open gulf hoping to make landfall in the panhandle can get pushed into the peninsula. That was the case this year, as we had, in addition to the usual suspects, a colorful smattering of warblers that are fairly rare here in spring.



*Gray Catbird. Photo by Danny Shehee.*

Among them were a Cerulean Warbler which was recorded singing by Frank Goodwin, and a Blackburnian reported by Janet Russo; there are very few records of either species here in spring. We also had at least two each of Magnolia and Tennessee Warblers, a Black-throated Green Warbler, and as many as six Yellow Warblers. For perspective, in my previous twenty-eight years of birding here I had only seen one Yellow Warbler in spring. This year I saw three.

The most spectacular migratory hot-spot this spring was a single tree just west of the entrance building in Kanapaha Botanical Gardens. Last April an Alachua Audubon field trip discovered that the gaudy flowers of a large Silky Oak tree (*Grevillia robusta*) were attracting the attention of several nectaring Cape May and Blackpoll Warblers. With that in mind, birders revisited this spring and were thrilled to find the tree literally crammed with birds...so many at times it was difficult to count them! One day there were over thirty Cape May Warblers, as many as five each of Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Scarlet Tanager, and Orchard Oriole, plus numerous Catbirds and a smattering of other

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## New and Continuing Audubon Initiatives for 2018/2019

The Alachua Audubon Society is embarking on a number of new and exciting initiatives for the 2018-2019 birding season. AAS board members Katie Sieving and Jonathan Varol are developing a **bird banding station** that will educate and train students and other participants on the scientific methods of capturing, banding, and long-term avian monitoring. The Alachua Conservation Trust will partner on this new banding project by offering areas at their Prairie Creek property for the monitoring stations.

Alachua Audubon hopes to partner with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the Avian Research and Conservation Institute to implement a **banding and monitoring program** of Black-bellied Whistling Ducks at select locations in Alachua County. This species has increased considerably, however, little is known about their daily feeding and roosting patterns or their nesting locations.

AAS board member Felicia Lee will be coordinating an evening of **Birding Storytelling**. This event is tentatively planned for mid-November at the Cypress and Grove Brewing Company with master facilitator, Taylor Williams. Watch for more details in the September/October Crane Newsletter.

New AAS board member Christina Opett will be starting a monthly **Zen Birding Program** at Possum Creek Park that will consist of yoga, meditation, and birding. Birding by ear will be emphasized during this new and unique birding program. A monthly schedule will be determined once final approval is received from the City of Gainesville.

Alachua Audubon has just developed a **College Volunteer Internship Program** and a **College and High School Scholarship Program**. We hope to expose more young adults to the exciting field of birding, conservation, and environmental education through these internship and scholarship programs. A call for volunteer internship applications is now on the AAS website; the deadline to apply is August 15th.

The **City of High Springs** has just received funding to design and construct a treatment wetland that, like Sweetwater Wetlands Park, will remove additional nitrogen from the city's wastewater. Once the wastewater is treated in the wetland, it will infiltrate through the soil and recharge the Floridan Aquifer with cleaner water. Alachua Audubon has met with the City and offered to fund part of the public use facilities in an effort to allow the new wetland to be open for public use.

The Alachua Audubon Society has been selected by **Subaru of Gainesville** as the upcoming local charity during the Share-the-Love program. From mid-November through early January, Subaru will donate \$250 for every car sold. Alachua Audubon is slated to receive a large donation in 2019 from this Subaru program which we will invest locally for environmental education, environmental advocacy, and wildlife conservation.

As with previous years, Alachua Audubon will be leading many **birding field trips** through the weekend programs, **Wednesday Walks at Sweetwater Wetlands** (8:30 am September - May), **Sunday Birds and Brews** (1st Sunday afternoon of each month), **Family Birding at La Chua Trail** (first Saturday of each month, October through May); Bob Carroll's **Third Thursday birding trips**, and now the new monthly **Zen Birding at Possum Creek Park** (dates to be announced). In addition, Charlene Leonard and Cindy Boyd will continue to lead the popular **Santa Fe College Community Education Birding Class** during the fall and spring semesters. The fall class will run from September 8th through October 6th. Registration begins August 8th on the Santa Fe College Community Education website.

We hope you will join us on one or more of these offerings by AAS, an all volunteer organization. You don't need to be a member to participate but your membership enables us to offer more to the community and makes us stronger in our efforts to promote conservation initiatives in Alachua County. If you are not a member, please consider joining us.

By Debbie Segal

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## Sandhill Cranes Problematic to IFAS Plant Research Plots

Several months ago, Alachua Audubon learned that the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) Plant Science Research and Education Unit in Citra was authorized by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to kill up to 20 Sandhill Cranes annually to prevent damage to their research plots. The permit was intended to target the migratory Greater subspecies that can be hunted in certain states during designated periods, and not the Florida subspecies, which is a Florida State-designated Threatened species and is being considered for Federal listing due to a considerable population decline from habitat loss. Suitable crane nesting habitat is within close proximity of the IFAS Citra Unit, with Hawthorn Prairie forming its eastern border and Orange Lake just a short flight to the north.

The two subspecies of Sandhill Cranes that occur in Florida – the migratory Greater subspecies that winters here by the thousands, and the non-migratory Florida subspecies – are nearly identical in appearance and require close inspection by a trained scientist to differentiate between the two subspecies. Because most of the Greater subspecies depart Florida during mid-February before the spring crop seeds are sown, the culprit cranes that have disturbed the research plots are likely the more vulnerable Florida State-designated Threatened subspecies.

Alachua Audubon contacted the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FFWCC)



*Sandhill Cranes. Photo by Danny Shehee.*

and learned that they were unaware that USFWS had issued a depredation permit to IFAS even though state regulations require a permit from the FFWCC to lethally take a Sandhill Crane. Once the FFWCC became aware of this issue, they immediately began meeting with the IFAS staff and advising them on alternative, non-lethal, deterrent techniques.

Alachua Audubon also notified Charles Lee, Audubon Florida's Director of Advocacy, and requested his assistance with this avian conservation issue. With Charles' involvement, the issue of shooting cranes was brought to the attention of Dr. Jack Payne, UF/IFAS Vice President of Natural Resources.

Thanks to the involvement of the FFWCC and Audubon Florida, IFAS has committed to implementing alternative, non-lethal methods to deter Sandhill Cranes from their research plots during the critical period when plant trials are in progress. More humane techniques that could be used include employing a dog handler to use a trained dog to chase cranes from the field, installing streamers or coyote decoys in the crop field, sounding off propane canons, detonating pyrotechnics, and spraying the crops with a garlic-based spray. Additionally, small research plots can be covered with netting during the experimental trials.

Alachua Audubon is pleased with the cooperation of all stakeholders and the positive outcome of this situation.

By Debbie Segal

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## Snail Kites Nest on Paynes Prairie!

On February 19th a young female Snail Kite was discovered at Sweetwater Wetlands Park by Caroline Poli, Isabel Gottlieb, and Rob Vessels. The bird was peculiarly loyal to one little spot just a few yards off the trail, and she remained there for several weeks, all alone, as dozens of birders and photographers filed past.

This was news in itself. There had been only a handful of Snail Kite sightings in Alachua County over the years, and none of the birds involved had persisted like this one. An immature Snail Kite seen at Alachua Sink by Fritz Davis, Ike Fromberg, and the Community Education birding class on February 3, 1996 was a one-day wonder. Another immature bird found at the La Chua Trail on June 8, 2006 was present for only a few days before disappearing. An adult male that Lloyd Davis found at Sweetwater on March 20, 2016 stayed until the 23rd, when Rob Norton photographed it carrying a stick. We wondered if it could be nesting, but it was never seen again. Two months later, on May 28th, Dalcio Dacol found a female at Sweetwater but, like the male, it disappeared after four days. And that was it – Snail Kites were documented in Alachua County four times between 1996 and 2016, and the duration of their visits had ranged from one to four days. So the simple fact that this young female bird had lingered for several weeks was already pretty remarkable on its own. But more exciting developments were on the way!

On March 11th park ranger Danny Rohan photographed an adult male kite keeping company with the female, but the male was gone the next day. He did return a few times over the next three weeks, but always vanished for days after each visit, while the female stayed right where she was.

On April 7th there were three kites – an adult male seen from the La Chua Trail boardwalk by Keith Pochy and two females photographed by Glenn Israel at Sweetwater – and on the following day, Peter Polshek counted four at La Chua – two males and two females. Peter noted that one of the males was “carrying strands of vegetation.”

There was a lot of speculation from this point on. How many kites were there? Was the young female from Sweetwater one of the four seen at La Chua? On May 26th Felicia Lee positively



*Adult Snail Kite. Photo by Alexis Cardas.*

confirmed at least five – two different males plus three females seen at the same time – and her count was seconded on each of the next two days. Some of the kites were seen carrying sticks, but that evidently hadn't meant anything in March 2016; maybe it didn't mean anything this time either. Still, at least four birds had been present from early April through late May, there was a lot of kite-food around in the form of exotic Island Apple Snails – could they, after all, be nesting?

On June 1st an airboat was launched from Sweetwater Wetlands Park to try to answer that question. It carried Paynes Prairie park biologist Keith Morin, UF Wildlife Research Coordinator Brian Jeffery and UF graduate student Alexis Cardas. After nosing around the willow swamp at the southwest corner of the park, they followed the old Sweetwater Canal out onto the Prairie. Three days later Morin announced the results of their search: at an undisclosed location they'd found a nest containing three Snail Kites approximately three weeks old. They also saw, not five adult Snail Kites, but eight!

*(Continued on page 15)*

## A History of Birding in Alachua County

Pioneer: Frank Chapman

If we leave out incidental observations by botanist William Bartram, who visited the area in 1774, the history of bird study in Alachua County goes back a little over a century to November 22, 1886, when **Frank M. Chapman** (1864-1945) arrived in Gainesville.

He had lately resigned his post at the American Exchange National Bank of New York to come south for relief from respiratory problems – Gainesville had a reputation as a health resort – and to begin “the business for which I came here,” his ornithological studies.

At the time, Paynes Prairie was at the bottom of Alachua Lake, and remained so until 1891. Chapman described the lake as “about nine miles long and averaging two or more in width. A large portion of its surface is covered with a dense growth of yellow pond lilies, locally known as ‘bonnets,’ affording a home to innumerable Coots and Ducks. At its eastern end is an immense savanna bisected by an inflowing creek, and dotted with clumps of cypresses and numberless small pools. A few years ago Herons were abundant and bred here; today it is comparatively deserted, the result of merciless persecution by plume hunters.”

Chapman explored several spots in the area, including Bivens Arm, Sugarfoot Prairie (north of Lake Kanapaha), and Newnans Lake, but spent most of his time at Alachua Lake. His first description of it is memorable: “There was a splashing and calling, a squeaking and squawking such as I had never heard in my life before, odd noises of all sorts and descriptions all unknown to me. The place seemed to be alive with birds, ducks were constantly flying from place to place, coots and herons were apparently common. On the shore near me birds were just as abundant; a pair of Pileated Woodpeckers with flaming crests were pounding away in a tree above my head

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## SPEAKER’S CORNER

Programs are held at the Millhopper Library, 3145 NW 43rd Street, Gainesville.

**Birds and Mammals of North India**, Wednesday, September 5th. Socializing at 6:30 PM; Program at 7 PM.

Scott Flamand, retired science teacher from Buchholz High School and former president, current vice president of Alachua Audubon Society will describe his recent trip with a nature guide through northern India. Scott was very excited to be able to take this trip and this will be an outstanding presentation about what he saw and learned in northern India.



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## Monthly Birds and Brews

The AAS Birds and Brews event continues to be a popular event for both new and experienced birders. Meet the first Sunday of the month at **First Magnitude Brewery**, 1220 SE Veitch Street. Arrive early as parking can be scarce. There will be an Alachua Audubon table set up and loaner binoculars will be available. On **August 5th** and **September 2nd** we will meet up at **6:45** for a **7:00 PM departure** to Depot Park. It is a lovely time of day for a leisurely stroll to look for birds around the ponds. Then we’ll return to First Magnitude for an optional cold brew and good conversation. All birding skill levels welcome.

**Next event: Sunday, August 5th at 6:45 pm**



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## American Kestrel Nest Box Update

First I got an e-mail from Rex Rowan. The kestrel box that Debbie Segal and I had put up a few years ago at the Santa Fe River Preserve was hanging loose from the pole. Then he sent another e-mail – the box was gone! Rex and I went out with a new box to re-install, but when we got there, the old box was hiding in the weeds at the base of the pole, undamaged, so we decided to put it back up, using bigger nails and re-furnished with new bedding material. We left the rather large jumping spider that had been living in the box alone to continue living 16 feet above the ground in its spacious abode. The photos show Rex doing the actual work, supervised by the spider, while I mess around taking photos.

Alachua Audubon has been putting up and monitoring nest boxes for decades. Initially it was bluebird boxes. Alice Tyler, Cathy Reno, Susan Sommerville, Mary Landsman, and others did most of the bluebird box work, taking care of dozens of boxes in various places around the county (Dudley Farm, Hague Dairy, Morningside Nature Center, etc.). In 1992 John Smallwood got a grant from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) Non-Game Wildlife Program to construct, install, and monitor 388 kestrel boxes on power poles beside highways, mostly in Marion and Levy Counties. Truby Lee and I helped John put up the first dozen boxes in Suwannee County. This effort was very successful. Kestrel populations increased as did their use of the boxes. For instance, 5 of the boxes in Suwannee County were used by kestrels the first year, 7 the next year, and then on the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth years, all twelve boxes were used by kestrels.

The success of the kestrel box experiment stimulated Alachua Audubon to start its own nest box program. In 2006, at the urging and with the help of Bruce Christensen, we cooperated with Skip Ingle's Boy Scout Troop 841 to construct 100 kestrel boxes and 200 bluebird boxes. Over the next decade we installed about 130 kestrel boxes and over 200 bluebird boxes in Alachua County and other North Florida counties. Since then I have continued to construct and install a few nest boxes each year.



*Rex Rowan re-installs a fallen Kestrel nest box. Photo by Bob Simons.*

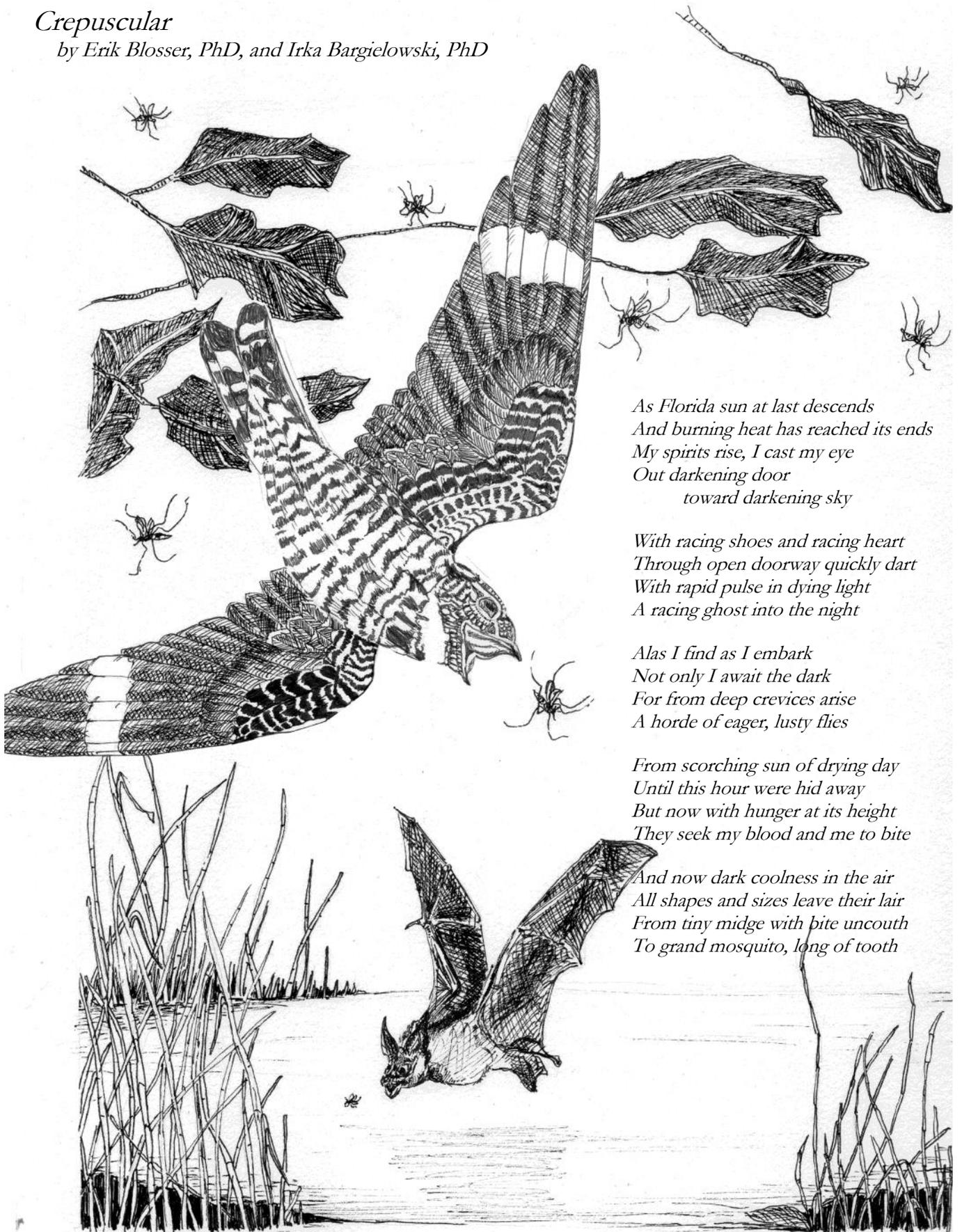


Kestrels and bluebirds clearly benefit by having additional nesting cavities provided for them. There are not nearly enough natural cavities to maintain their populations. However it is not always easy to find appropriate places for the boxes. Kestrels and bluebirds both feed mostly on insects they find in open grassland such as pastures and native upland pine savannahs maintained by frequent prescribed burning. They both need a lot of open space and a lot of insects such as grasshoppers. Other species that use kestrel boxes include screech owls, great crested flycatchers, and flying squirrels. Bluebird boxes are used by Carolina chickadees and tufted titmice. In order for this to work well, the nest boxes need monitoring and maintenance. Although we have done some of this work in the past, this is mostly done by FWC employees in Alachua, Marion, and Levy Counties and by Richard Melvin in counties northwest of Alachua County.

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# *Crepuscular*

by Erik Blosser, PhD, and Irka Bargielowski, PhD



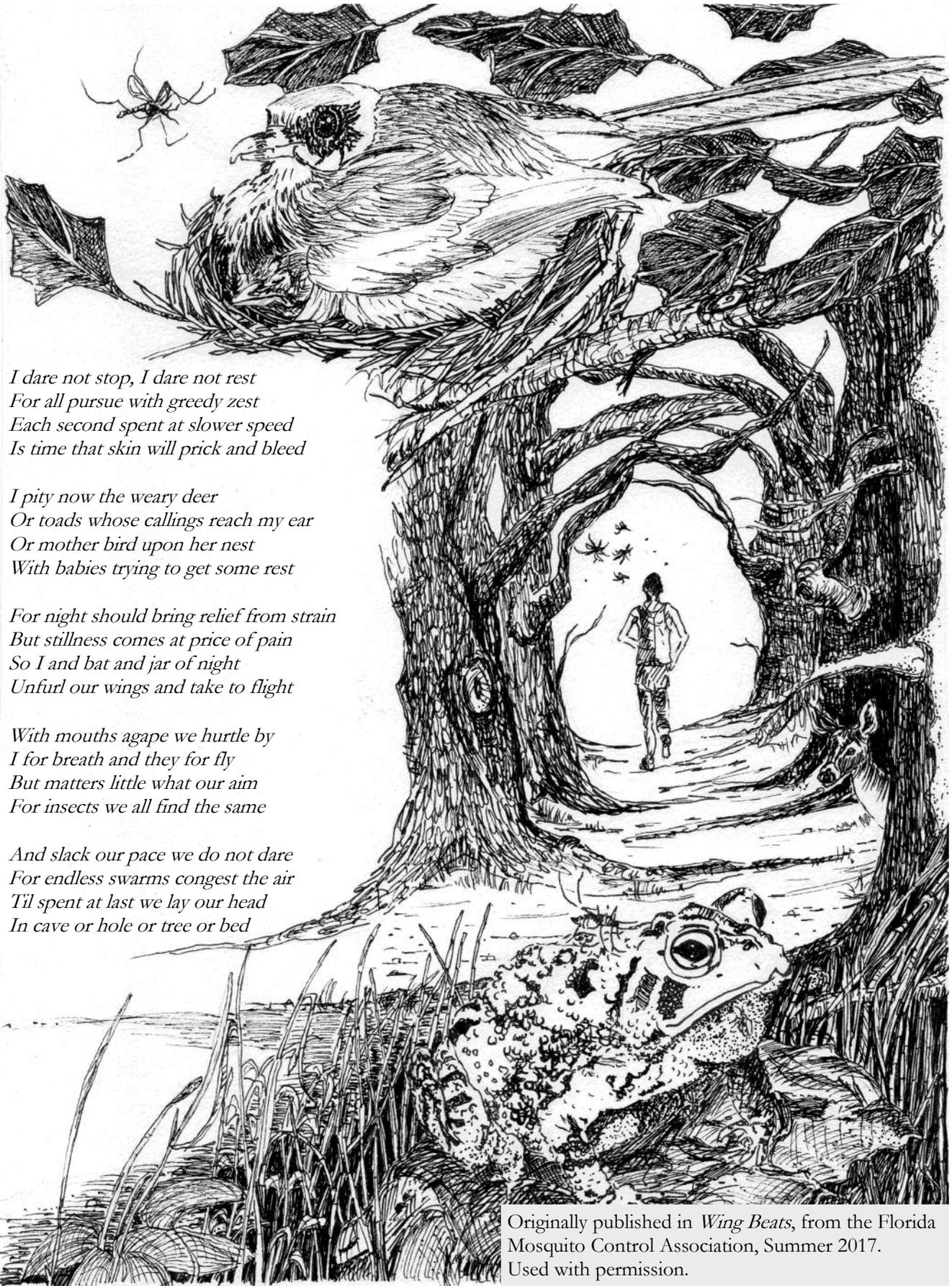
*As Florida sun at last descends  
And burning heat has reached its ends  
My spirits rise, I cast my eye  
Out darkening door  
toward darkening sky*

*With racing shoes and racing heart  
Through open doorway quickly dart  
With rapid pulse in dying light  
A racing ghost into the night*

*Alas I find as I embark  
Not only I await the dark  
For from deep crevices arise  
A horde of eager, lusty flies*

*From scorching sun of drying day  
Until this hour were hid away  
But now with hunger at its height  
They seek my blood and me to bite*

*And now dark coolness in the air  
All shapes and sizes leave their lair  
From tiny midge with bite uncouth  
To grand mosquito, long of tooth*



*I dare not stop, I dare not rest  
For all pursue with greedy zest  
Each second spent at slower speed  
Is time that skin will prick and bleed*

*I pity now the weary deer  
Or toads whose callings reach my ear  
Or mother bird upon her nest  
With babies trying to get some rest*

*For night should bring relief from strain  
But stillness comes at price of pain  
So I and bat and jar of night  
Unfurl our wings and take to flight*

*With mouths agape we hurtle by  
I for breath and they for fly  
But matters little what our aim  
For insects we all find the same*

*And slack our pace we do not dare  
For endless swarms congest the air  
Til spent at last we lay our head  
In cave or hole or tree or bed*

Originally published in *Wing Beats*, from the Florida Mosquito Control Association, Summer 2017. Used with permission.

## Results of the 2018 June Challenge

Continued from Page 1

Both Howard and Danny were also awarded WBU gift certificates, as were the two winners in the under-16 age category, Nora Parks-Church and Owen Parks-Church. Congratulations to all!

Here's the complete list of June Challenge participants and their totals: Chris Cattau (112); Howard Adams (109); Danny Shehee (107); Bob Carroll (106); Brad Hall (106); Rex Rowan



*Black-bellied Whistling-Duck. Photo by Lloyd Davis*

(103); Barbara Shea (103); Cindy Boyd (101); Anne Casella (99); Debbie Segal (99); Deena Mickelson (98); Erin Kalinowski (96); Bob Knight (93); Becky Enneis (92); Jennifer Don-sky (91); John Martin (91); Pratibha Singh (91); Bob Simons (90); Tina Green-berg (87); Jerry Pruitt (85); Karen Brown (84); Linda Holt (82); Nora Parks-



*Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Photo by Bob Simons.*



*Hooded Warbler. Photo by Jerry Pruitt.*

Church (76); Tom Wronski (76); Austin Gregg (73); Geoff Parks (73); Owen Parks-Church (69); Emily Schwartz (67); Colleen Cowdery (39); Debbie Spiceland (37).

For the complete list of birds seen during June, in current (i.e., confusing) American Ornithological Society order, please visit the AAS website.



*King Rail. Photo by Colleen Cowdery.*



*Tricolored Herons (juveniles). Photo by Danny Shehee.*

Editor's note: Thanks to the many photographers from the June Challenge for sharing their excellent photos.

## A Flightless Bird

The Guam Rail, endemic to the U. S. territory of Guam, is a species of flightless bird. The bird disappeared in Guam in the early 1970s and was extirpated from the entire island by the late 1980s. They were preyed upon by brown tree snakes which were probably introduced to the island accidentally by cargo ships. Fortunately, some birds were saved and since then have been bred in captive breeding programs on Guam and in several mainland zoos. After 20 years of extinction in the wild, 16 were released onto Cocos Island, Guam, after the island was freed of predators.



*Guam Rail. Photo by Emily Schwartz.*

The Santa Fe Teaching Zoo is proud to be raising a Guam Rail that was rejected by its parents after the egg rolled away into a water bowl. It was incubated and raised by humans. This bird will become an “ambassador” animal to teach children about animal extinction and captive breeding programs.

After volunteering at the Audubon table at the Santa Fe Zoo “Party for the Planet” on Earth Day weekend, Debbie Spiceland was the lucky winner of a raffle to have a private experience with this bird. Debbie and Emily Schwartz met Jade Salamone, Conservation Education Specialist, on April 26th and were allowed to sit in the aviary with this bird and observe it closely while it ate worms. Since it is used to humans, the bird happily jumped into our laps to look for more food. It was a thrilling experience!

by Emily Schwartz

Note: The [Santa Fe Zoo](#) is one of only two teaching zoos in the nation!



*Danny Shehee captured this beautiful photo of a stunning Red-headed Woodpecker.*

### Bird Walk at the Zoo

During Santa Fe Zoo's "Party for the Planet" event on Earth Day weekend, Alachua Audubon promised a guided bird walk to visitors on the following weekend at the Zoo. On April 29th, Brittany Kryder and Emily Schwartz met three families who came to take a walk and look for birds both inside and outside the Santa Fe Teaching Zoo. Jade Salamone, Conservation Education Specialist, and Kali Wolf, Zoo Graduate, guided the group and were able to give very detailed information about the zoo's exotic birds. It was fun to use the Audubon binoculars to see all the details of the birds' feathers. One special bird of interest was the Red-billed Hornbill from Africa. Children were amazed to hear that during nesting the male walls up the female with mud, feces, twigs, etc., leaving only a tiny hole to allow his bill to enter. He returns to feed his mate through this hole while she is safely locked away from the world, sitting on the eggs and later feeding the chicks.

by Emily Schwartz

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Be sure to visit Alachua Audubon Society's Facebook page for regular updates on local birds, including the Federally Endangered Snail Kite that is now nesting at Sweetwater Wetlands Park.




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## Around the County

(Continued from Page 2)

warblers. Arguably, the most sought-out tree in the entire state for attracting spring migrants is the famed Mulberry Tree at Fort Desoto; but if migrants keep returning annually to this Silky Oak in the numbers we saw this year, we may have a new state contender – and we won't have to drive through St. Pete traffic to see it!

Several notable sightings occurred at Sweetwater Wetlands Park within a few days of each other. On April 28<sup>th</sup> Scott Fisher photographed a light-morph Short-tailed Hawk. The next day Danny Rohan reported a Least Tern, and Daniel Horton photographed a very late Clay-colored Sparrow. The following day a Ruff made a brief appearance and was also photographed. The evening of May 5<sup>th</sup> a group of birders at Adam Kent's house were startled by a fly-over flock of eighteen Brown Pelicans headed east toward Newnans Lake. Canada Geese continued to be seen in the area. Emily Schwartz spotted four April 20<sup>th</sup> flying over Sugarfoot Prairie, and Barbara Woodmansee reported two May 13<sup>th</sup> at Kanapaha Prairie. That makes an unprecedented five reports of that species in the first half of the year, so we may have a small feral population establishing itself somewhere in the southern half of the county.

Recall that in our previous issue of *The Crane* we speculated on the possibility of Snail Kites nesting on Payne's Prairie basin. On June 1<sup>st</sup> a team of biologists from the UF Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit along with park Biologist Keith Morin launched an airboat and surveyed 2500 acres of flooded basin searching for kite nests...and they found one! It contained three chicks, which they promptly weighed, measured, and banded. As far as it is possible to know, this was the first record of Snail Kites successfully nesting in Alachua County. They also reported seeing an astounding total of eight Snail Kites on the prairie, all un-banded. A banded adult male was photographed recently at Sweetwater Wetlands, so at least nine birds have been visiting us this year!



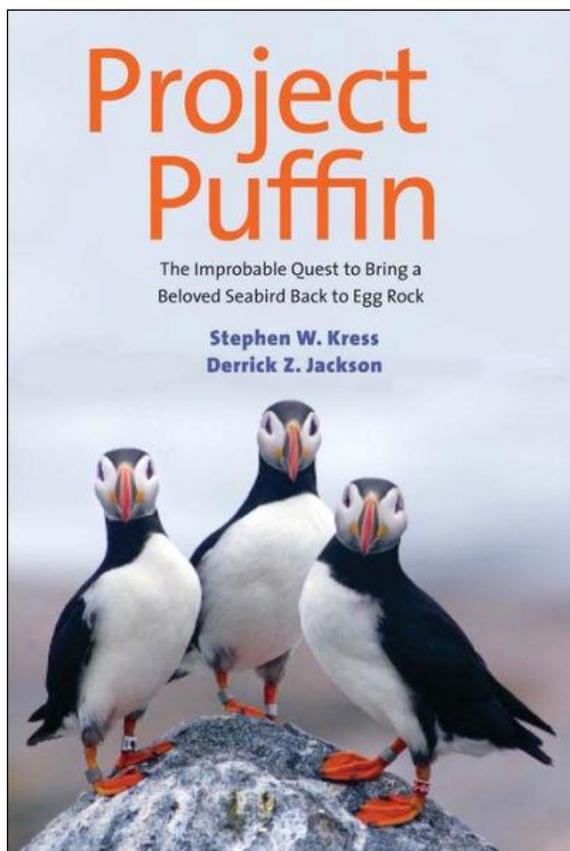
*Snail Kite chick. Photo by Keith Morin.*

The June Challenge was in full swing at the time of this writing. Goodies the first half of June included Common Loon, Brown Pelican, Blue-winged Teal, Least Tern, Spotted Sandpiper, Belted Kingfisher, and Ring-billed Gull. Please look for a compilation of winners and results elsewhere in *The Crane*.

Thanks to those who shared their sightings through June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

By Mike Manetz





## Summer Reading

I received *Project Puffin—The Improbable Quest to Bring a Beloved Seabird Back to Egg Rock* as a gift from friends who had recently visited Maine and, on my advice, had gone in search of Puffins. I had just read an article about them in *Audubon* magazine. They found the Project Puffin Visitor Center in Rockland, Maine, and took a tour to see the Puffin colony at Eastern Egg Rock in Muscongus Bay. Their tour guide turned out to be none other than Stephen Kress, the author of this most enjoyable and informative book and the director of Project Puffin which he started in 1973. This book is the story of his youthful development as an ornithologist and his perseverance in reintroducing puffins to Egg Island. Dr. Kress is Executive Director of the Seabird Restoration Program and Vice president for Bird Conservation of the National Audubon Society. He is also Manager of National Audubon's Maine Coastal Island Sanctuaries, was an Ornithology Instructor at the Audubon Camp on Hog Island in Maine and is currently its Director.

By Karen Brown

## A History of Birding in Alachua County

(Continued from page 11)

with them were hundreds of Flickers and one Red-bellied Woodpecker. Doves whistled through the woods at my approach, Bluejays screamed, Mockers chirped and hundreds of birds flew from tree to tree. Truly I was in an ornithologist's paradise."

Not all of Alachua County struck him quite that way. A journey of several days west of Gainesville elicited the following words: "the country is dreary and desolate beyond description, an unending forest of pines with nothing to disturb the monotony of the scene."

When he went back to New York in late May 1887, Chapman had recorded 149 species of birds in Alachua County and secured 581 specimens. He went on to become one of the most respected naturalists of his time – Curator of Ornithology at the American Museum of Natural History, pioneer in Neotropical ornithology, author of what was for many years a standard reference, *Handbook of Birds of Eastern North America*, and founder of both the Christmas Bird Count and *Bird-Lore* magazine, which later became *Audubon*. But one of the first published works of this distinguished career was an 11-page paper in the *Auk* of July 1888 entitled, "A list of birds observed at Gainesville, Florida."



Frank Chapman at 21.

Excerpted from Rex Rowan's *A History of Birding in Alachua County*. To read the full account, visit the AAS website at [alachuaaudubon.org/local-birding-info/history/](http://alachuaaudubon.org/local-birding-info/history/)

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## Snail Kites Nest on Paynes Prairie!

(Continued from Page 6)

All were unbanded, and since a banded male had been photographed by Lynn Komorny on May 28th, there were at least nine Snail Kites on the Prairie. The news was held back for three weeks as the Florida Department of Environmental Protection was “concerned about the nest location being discovered and disturbed by overzealous fans of the birds.”

This may be the first known nesting of Snail Kites in Alachua County, but it could be the second. A set of three eggs in Pittsburgh’s Carnegie Museum of Natural History was reportedly collected by H.H. Simpson in Micanopy on December 4, 1919. However that’s an awfully late date for Snail Kites to be nesting in North Florida, and Simpson also claimed to have found an American Bittern nest in Micanopy – not impossible, but unlikely. Sad to say, a lot of these old egg collectors were not entirely trustworthy. So I think that the best we can do with this old record is to reserve judgement, permanently. At the very least, the nest discovered on June 1st is the first in 99 years!

By Rex Rowan

Note: As of June 30th, the AAS Facebook post of this news had received more than 60,000 views and had been shared more than 250 times, off the charts compared to any previous AAS Fb post.

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*Snail Kite chicks. Photo by Keith Morin.*

## American Kestrel Nest Box Update

(Continued from page 7)

This is still working well for bluebirds, but kestrels are declining range-wide at a fairly rapid pace (about 3% decline per year) in spite of nest box programs. Several reasons for the decline are given: habitat loss, fire ant predation on nestlings, competition by other cavity nesters such as starlings and flying squirrels, widespread pesticide use that is reducing the populations of insects and lizards and perhaps directly harming the kestrels, and possibly the West Nile Virus.

Even so, the nest boxes are still helping and still producing baby kestrels and bluebirds in some places, such as the public lands around Watermelon Pond and the private lands near Evinston.

By Bob Simons

Note: If you would like to be involved in the nest box building, installing or monitoring program, please contact Eric Amundson (artmouth@live.com) who, along with Alan Shapiro and Michael Brock, will be taking over this project after many years of faithful service from Bob Simons who claims he's too old to be climbing tall ladders anymore.



*Three-day-old Kestrel nestlings. Photo from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Flickr album.*

Alachua Audubon Society  
P. O. Box 140464  
Gainesville, Florida 32614-0464  
[AlachuaAudubon.org](http://AlachuaAudubon.org)

*The Crane*  
July–August 2018

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Please send any questions to [AlachuaAudubonMembership@gmail.com](mailto:AlachuaAudubonMembership@gmail.com)