



# The Crane

Volume 60 Number 6 July – August 2019

## The June Challenge Edition of The Crane Newsletter

### Results of the June Challenge, 2019 Edition

Thirty-two birders entered the 16th running of the June Challenge, Alachua Audubon’s annual summertime contest. The Challenge is an individual competition among birders – who can see more birds in Alachua County than anyone else – but it’s also a means of tracking the fluctuating populations of our breeding birds, finding out what’s increasing, what’s declining, and where less common birds are still holding out.

This year we recorded 121 species, 104 to 107 of which were local nesters. The rest can be roughly divided into three categories. There were late spring migrants: Semipalmated Sandpiper, Spotted Sandpiper, and Bank Swallow. There were regular winter visitors that lingered here for one reason or another: Blue-winged Teal, American Coot, American White Pelican, and Tree Swallow. And there were strays from the coast: Laughing Gull, Royal Tern, Brown Pelican, and Roseate Spoonbill. Most of our rarities were found by Challengers, but not all: American Goldfinches remained at two feeders well into June, the county’s only Yellow-crowned Night-Heron was seen at O’Leno by a park visitor, and a Fulvous Whistling-Duck was sighted on the Kanapaha Prairie by a non-participating local birder. (We also saw three species that rarely nest here and probably aren’t doing so this year: Wood Stork, Double-crested Cormorant, and Glossy Ibis.)

For the fifth year in a row, a Gray Catbird (possibly a pair) was present at Tumblin’ Creek Park, and for the sixth year in a row, at least one American Robin spent the month singing in a northeast Gainesville neighborhood. Neither seems to have founded an expanding local population, however, though an immature robin was photographed in 2014.

There were a few “big misses” this year. No one found a Hairy Woodpecker, a Broad-winged Hawk, a Wood Thrush, or – the biggest surprise – a Yellow-breasted Chat. And there were no late-spring or early-fall migrant warblers, which is unusual for the Challenge.

Our winner’s circle was heavy on Ewing brothers. Sam Ewing won with 115 species, and his brother Ben came in third with 112. Sandwiched in between was last year’s winner, Chris Cattau, with



Winner Sam Ewing will keep the Winged Victory trophy until next year’s June Challenge. Photo by Danny Shehee.

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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: August 15<sup>th</sup>

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U ntil about a year ago  
Canada Geese were  
considered rare winter migrants  
in the county, this despite the  
existence of several non-  
migratory colonies established  
elsewhere in Florida. Last year  
there was a sudden spike in the  
number of sightings, mostly at  
the southern end of the county,

which suggested that a small flock (or gaggle, if you prefer) may have taken up residence. Eventually Barbara Woodmansee discovered a location where they seemed to be congregating: a farm pond southwest of Gainesville along CR 346A. As many as nine adult geese were regularly seen frequenting the pond, and on April 25<sup>th</sup> Barbara made the happy announcement that she had spotted nine goslings! This was the first breeding record of Canada Geese in the county, so congratulations to the parents, and a thank you to Barbara for initially finding and then monitoring these birds.

Spring migration was fairly typical but, as always, included a few interesting wrinkles. We had good numbers of our usual spring warblers: Blackpolls, Cape Mays, Black-throated Blues, and Redstarts. Bolen Bluff seemed to be particularly good for those species. A few Yellow Warblers were reported, including two by Caroline Poli, first on April 21<sup>st</sup> at her residence and another the following day at Sweetwater Wetlands Park (SWP), and one seen May 3<sup>rd</sup> by Eli Martin at the USGS ponds. Karl Miller reported a Magnolia Warbler April 15<sup>th</sup> at Kanapaha Botanical Gardens, and Jen Donsky had another April 29<sup>th</sup> at Newnans Lake State Forest. There were two Kentucky Warblers, one found on April 17<sup>th</sup> by Harrison Jones at Split Rock Park and the other April 22<sup>nd</sup> by Becky Ennis in her Alachua yard. Remarkably, we had four Blue-winged Warbler sightings. The first was by Tim Hardin at Depot Park April 20<sup>th</sup>; the following day Deb Segal and Caroline Poli had one each at Seven Springs Farm and Newnans Lake State Forest, respectively, and a fourth was found April 23<sup>rd</sup> at Chapmans Pond by Trina Anderson. The only Black-throated Green Warbler reported this spring was by Andy Kratter April 16<sup>th</sup> at Pine Grove Cemetery. There was something of an explosion of Rose-breasted Grosbeaks the last week of April when numerous backyard feeding stations reported multiple birds, with a high of eight individuals at Ron Robinson's feeders on the 25<sup>th</sup>. Just a few days later, Mary Ellen Flowers and Tedd Greenwald found as many as thirty Blue Grosbeaks feeding on a newly-seeded shoulder of a dirt road bordering the Santa Fe Conservation Area in Alachua.

We had more reports of Veerys than usual this spring, including a high count of four at Bolen Bluff, plus individuals reported by Deb Segal from River Rise, Sam Ewing at Hogtown Creek Greenway, and

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## New and Continuing Audubon Initiatives for 2019/2020

The Alachua Audubon Society is embarking on several new and exciting initiatives for the 2019-2020 birding season.

AAS board members Jonathan Varol and Dr. Katie Sieving are developing a **bird banding lab** that will educate and train students and other participants on the scientific methods of capturing, banding, and tracking birds. The **Alachua Conservation Trust** is partnering with AAS on this new endeavor by offering a wooded area and the barn facility at their Prairie Creek Lodge property. A field trip and ribbon-cutting event will be scheduled in early 2020 at our new Prairie Creek Bird Banding Lab.

The **City of High Springs** has just completed the design of a treatment wetland facility that, like Sweetwater Wetlands Park, will remove additional nitrogen from the city's wastewater. But unlike Sweetwater's flow-through wetland, the cleansed water from the High Springs wetland will infiltrate into the ground and recharge the Floridan Aquifer and help restore nearby springs. High Springs had not originally planned to open the wetland facility to the public, but AAS met with city officials and offered to fund the public use facilities if the city would allow public visitation. The City enthusiastically agreed. AAS received funds from Subaru of Gainesville as a 2018/2019 recipient of their Share-the-Love Program and is using those funds for the public use facilities at the High Springs Treatment Wetlands. Look for this new wetland facility to open in early 2020.

Are you one of the many birders who has searched for wintering sparrows at the **Newnans Lake Forest West Tract**? The current "old field" habitat has been attractive to sparrows and other grassland species such as Northern Bobwhite and Southeastern American Kestrel during its current early successional stage, but if the site is allowed to mature into a shrubby and then forested community, the attraction to grassland species will be lost. Consequently, AAS is working with the Florida Division of Forestry to develop and implement a Sparrow Restoration project that will maintain a portion of this site as "old field" habitat. AAS will be funding a large portion of the sparrow restoration activities.

Dr. Mark Hofstetler gave a presentation to AAS board members on the **Acopian Window Treatments** which are vertical parachute cords that are installed on windows at a specified width to significantly reduce the number of bird window strikes. AAS board member Eric Amundson has constructed and installed his adapted version of the Acopian Window Treatments at his house, and has noticed a reduction in bird strikes. AAS is looking for 1-2 buildings that have a high incidence of bird strikes so we can purchase and install Acopian Window Treatments.

AAS is partnering with **Kanapaha Botanical Gardens** to create a bird checklist brochure for visitors to the gardens. We will also provide brochures on "Plants for Birds" and "An Invitation to a Healthy Yard" as a way of encouraging more bird-friendly yards.

Alachua Audubon Society's new **High School Scholarship program**, **College Internship program**, and **College Scholarship program** were all unveiled in 2018/2019. These programs were a huge success and will continue to be funded in 2019/2020 and subsequent years. The board of the AAS voted to name the high school scholarship program the **John Hintermister Memorial High School Scholarship program** in memory of John Hintermister, who was a charter member and long-time volunteer of AAS and a huge supporter of high school programs.

AAS will lead **over 100 birding field trips** during the 2019/2020 season. These field trips include the strategically scheduled weekend field trips (with some new sites planned), **Wednesday Walks at Sweetwater** (8:30 am September – May), **Sunday Birds and Brew** (1st Sunday afternoon of each month), **Family Birding at La Chua Trail** (9:00 am, first Saturday of each month, October – May), **Bob Carroll's Third Thursday** birding trips, and **Zen Birding** at Possum Creek Park (4th Sunday of each month, Sept. – Apr. at 9:00 am). 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 Alachua Audubon Society is an all-volunteer organization. You do not need to be a member to participate in any of our activities, 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 the Alachua Audubon Society.

Debbie Segal

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## Ocala's Treatment Wetland to Open this Fall

Known officially as the Ocala Wetland Groundwater Recharge Park, or Recharge Park for short, Ocala's constructed treatment wetland is set to open its gates this fall. Like Sweetwater Wetlands Park in Gainesville, Ocala's Recharge Park will remove nitrogen and other pollutants from the City of Ocala's treated wastewater by flowing the water through three constructed wetland cells that will be vegetated with native emergent wetland plants. But unlike Sweetwater, which is a flow-through wetland, the Ocala Recharge Park will infiltrate the polished water into the ground, where the cleansed water will percolate through the soil and recharge the Floridan Aquifer.

Various public use facilities, such as two miles of trails, a boardwalk over the wetland ponds, educational signs, and benches are being constructed at the new wetlands. The City hopes to build an educational center at



the site next year. The Marion County Audubon Society is donating Purple Martin and Eastern Bluebird nest boxes and will lead regular bird walks at the site. The Alachua Audubon Society is also planning a field trip to the Ocala Recharge Wetlands during the 2019/2020 field trip season. The date will be announced when AAS's official field trip schedule is released in early September.

By Debbie Segal

*Aerial view of Ocala's Recharge Wetlands cells that are under construction (Don Engle/Ocala StarBanner Staff Photographer).*



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## Studying the Endangered Snail Kite at the New Northern Limit of its Range

The federally endangered Snail Kite (*Rostrhamus sociabilis plumbeus*), a raptor with a highly restricted diet, has a small United States range that, until recently, has been strictly confined to unforested freshwater wetlands in the southern two-thirds of peninsular Florida. These conditions, combined with this population's small size, increasing impacts on its essential habitats and Apple Snail prey, and the limited resources available for conservation and management, pose a very high risk of extinction for the Snail Kite. Despite the resources invested in research in the last 35+ years, we have failed to design and apply sufficiently effective management action to stabilize Florida's Snail Kites at a sustainable level. It is imperative that we identify the most important management-focused research questions, answer them in the most cost-effective and expeditious manner, and apply the results in ways that will ensure the Snail Kite's persistence in the face of increasingly conflicting human demands for water.

The nomadic Snail Kite, with its dependence on Apple Snails that, in turn, vary in availability with water conditions, presents special tracking challenges because its movements are less predictable than are those of species for which long movements are entrained with seasonal changes. In addition to maintaining adequate contact with study birds, wherever they go, finely-scaled GPS telemetry produces an abundance of highly accurate locations at a low cost per bird relative to other tracking methods. These large datasets offer excellent opportunities for addressing important ecological questions for imperiled birds.

The Avian Research and Conservation Institute (ARCI), a non-profit based in Gainesville, will soon begin deploying satellite/GPS devices on adult Snail Kites and sampling Apple Snail density and abundance on Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park. This site represents a newly extended northern limit of the kite's range. Information from this tracking and Apple Snail study will build on ARCI's existing movement and habitat research, while discovering what is needed for these birds at the edge of their breeding range, including whether or not they can remain in this area throughout the year. This effort is possible due to very generous donations from the Alachua Audubon Society and the St. Petersburg Audubon Society.

With over 30 years of experience studying the conservation biology of at-risk species of 21 bird species (over 900 individuals tracked) in the United States, the Caribbean, and Latin America, the staff of ARCI has developed effective research techniques for challenging species while acquiring expert knowledge of the intricacies and demands of working in complex ecosystems. Ken Meyer, co-founder of ARCI in 1997, and Gina Kent, employed by ARCI since 2000, have 60 years of combined experience conducting and teaching telemetry-related operations, analyses, and interpretations for such research.

Over the last 12 years, ARCI's consecutive studies of Snail Kite conservation biology have produced a total of 86 bird-years of tracking data (mean duration: 3.9 years/bird) and over 120,000 individual tracking locations. To do so, they developed a safe, effective method for capturing Snail Kites, and have established long-term telemetry-based studies that inform and support management action and conservation planning for this imperiled raptor.

Key findings include the discovery that individual Snail Kites frequently move long distances, often spanning more than half of their Florida range in as little as a day. In doing so, they spend at least half their time (70-80% for some individuals) outside of the large, publicly owned wetland systems (e.g., Everglades National Park and the adjacent Water Conservation Areas), with their greatest excursions occurring during the breeding season. In 2007 and 2008, during the most severe drought in decades, all 10 adult kites being tracked by satellite at the time survived both years. ARCI and U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists also demonstrated that copper, of great concern as a toxin because it was historically applied in large amounts to fight fungus in citrus groves, was not being ingested by Snail Kites in a dangerous form, as had been feared. With mercury, however, ARCI's range-wide sampling revealed sufficiently high levels in the southern portion of the Snail Kite's range (interior Everglades), thus raising concerns about sub-lethal (i.e., relatively undetectable) effects on behavior and reproduction.

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## How Can You Identify a Southeastern American Kestrel?

People often ask me, “How do I tell a Southeastern American Kestrel from a migrant American Kestrel visiting from the north?” There are some obvious answers that are nearly foolproof, and then there are more subtle answers that can be useful in some situations.

First, our resident subspecies, *Falco sparverius paulus*, is non-migratory and tends to occur in well-drained open habitats such as sandhills, scrub, pastures, fields, and suburban upland areas. Once well distributed across seven states in the Southeast, it is now mostly extirpated from its former haunts except for peninsular Florida. If you see a kestrel in appropriate habitat during May, June, or July then you can be sure it is a Southeastern American Kestrel. Of course, if you see a kestrel entering or exiting a nest cavity or a nest box earlier in the spring, then you can be certain that is also a local kestrel because migrants do not breed here. However, simply observing a perched kestrel during April in Florida doesn't rule out the possibility that you are seeing a migrant. The last migrant individuals exit our state during the last few days of April and the first few days of May.



Second, the males tend to have plumage differences that usually, but not always, are indicative of subspecies. Typically, our resident male Southeastern American Kestrel has fewer dark streaks on its breast and flanks than a migrant kestrel. It is common to see a resident male kestrel that is completely unmarked below, with nothing but immaculate white feathers. The Southeastern American Kestrel also has few, or sometimes no, dark bars on its shoulders and back. Research by John Smallwood, myself and colleagues during the 1990s found that this trait is latitudinal which means that male kestrels are the most heavily barred at high latitudes, are moderately barred at mid-latitudes, and are nearly unbarred at southern latitudes.

The Southeastern American Kestrel has some less obvious characteristics, such as its smaller size, that are more difficult to view in the field, or that are less consistent from bird to bird. The above tips (season/habitat and male plumage) are the two most useful things that I can offer folks in Alachua County for identification of Southeastern American Kestrels.

By Karl E. Miller

*Typical Southeastern American Kestrel males showing mostly unmarked breast, belly, and back.  
Photos by Alex Lamoreaux.*



## Kestrel Nest Box Program Results for 2018-2019

After meeting at my house about a dozen times in the fall of 2018 to build new kestrel and bluebird nest boxes, our sterling crew of student interns and Alachua Audubon member volunteers began in December to go on field trips to check on old boxes, put up new boxes, put new nesting material in kestrel boxes, get GPS coordinates for all the kestrel boxes, put Amdro fire ant bait around fire ant nests near the location of the boxes and around the poles and trees supporting the boxes. Beginning in March, we returned to monitor what



*Adrian Dougherty installing a new kestrel box on the Shay property that was immediately investigated by a female kestrel (see inset). Photo by Bob Simons.*



was happening in the boxes and put out more Amdro. (We needed to use the fire ant bait because, without it, many of the baby birds would be killed by the ants. Fire ants kill more baby birds in nest boxes than all other forms of predation combined.) We made good use of a pole camera paid for by a grant from Florida Power and Light, a large extension ladder of mine, and the



*Joelle Carbonell-Bierbaum installing a nest box, 2/21/2019. Photo by Bob Simons.*

climbing ability of our student volunteers. We made 29 field trips averaging about four hours each to check on 70 kestrel boxes (an average of three visits to each box and perhaps 8 boxes checked each trip). (There are another 60 or so boxes that are either checked by other people or are not monitored.) Audubon members involved include myself, Eric Amundson, Karen Brown, Debra Segal, and Alan Shapiro. Student volunteers include Amanda Corrick, Adrian Dougherty, Joelle Carbonell-Bierbaum, Cayley Buckner, and Trokon Johnson, with Adrian and Joelle doing the lion's share of the work.



*Richard Melvin banding a young kestrel on 5/18/2019. Photo by Valerie Thomas.*

The results of the monitoring effort: 25 of the monitored kestrel boxes were used by kestrels this year, 9 were used by screech owls, 4 were used by bluebirds, and one was used by starlings. One box near Ron Robinson's house was used first by bluebirds, and then, after the bluebirds were done, it was used by kestrels.



*Adult screech owl at a nest box containing two baby screech owls on a longleaf pine on the Metzger Tract at Watermelon Pond. Photo by Cayley Buckner, 5/19/2019.*

Eighteen of the boxes used by kestrel pairs were in Alachua County, 2 were just outside the boundaries of the county, and 5 were near and northwest of Ichetucknee Springs State Park. A new box put up on the north side of US 27 just east of the Ichetucknee Springs State Park south entrance had 5 healthy young kestrels banded by Richard Melvin on 5/18/19. Three of the boxes used by screech owls and 3 boxes used by kestrels were about 6 miles NW of Ichetucknee Springs in southern Suwannee County.

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**Theme:** Water and Land for Florida's Future: Science Based Strategies for Clean Water and Healthy Watersheds

**Keynote Speaker:** State of Florida Chief Science Officer Dr. Tom Frazer

Registration will open in late July/early August. Visit the website for updates:

[fl.audubon.org/about-us/audubon-assembly](http://fl.audubon.org/about-us/audubon-assembly)



*Common Gallinule feeding a newly hatched chick. Note the spurs on the chick's wings that help it climb into the nest or grab onto vegetation. Read more at The Cornell Lab of Ornithology All About Birds website at [AllAboutBirds.org](http://AllAboutBirds.org). Photo by Erika Simons.*

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## Around the County

(Continued from page 2)

Eli Martin from San Felasco Hammock. Wood Thrushes were fairly numerous too, with as many as six at Bolen Bluff and several others at scattered locations. The big disappointment this spring was the shorebird migration. Water levels began to recede in April, but not fast enough to attract shorebirds in any number, and by mid-May when some serious mudflats began to emerge migration was all but over. Even usually-numerous and widespread Least Sandpipers and Yellowlegs could be hard to find. We had only three White-rumped Sandpipers, first discovered by Chris Burney April 23<sup>rd</sup> at SWP, and a paltry total of three Pectoral Sandpipers: Adam Zions found one at Home Depot pond April 15<sup>th</sup> and another April 21<sup>st</sup> at Split Rock Park. Chris Burney accounted for a third at Hague Dairy April 28<sup>th</sup>. We had only two Stilt Sandpipers, seen April 17<sup>th</sup> by Jonathan Mays at SWP and, as far as I know, there were no migrant Long-billed Dowitchers reported at all.

Oddly, Brown Pelican sightings continued through the spring and early summer. Participants on the April 5<sup>th</sup> Alachua Audubon field trip to Newnans Lake were treated to one, Jason and Kelly O'Conner spotted three flying over Newberry May 5<sup>th</sup>, and Ben and Sam Ewing saw a trio of them at Newnans Lake June 11<sup>th</sup>. That made at least eight reports in the last year. In most years one or two are as good as it gets, and in some years we miss them altogether.

The June Challenge uncovered some interesting and unusual birds but I'll not steal any thunder from the full article which you'll find located elsewhere in this issue of *The Crane*. Be sure to "scope" it out! Thanks to those who shared their sightings through April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

By Mike Manetz



Red-headed Woodpecker. Photo by Becky Enneis.

### 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 **July 7<sup>th</sup>** we will meet up at **6:45** for a **7:00 pm departure** to Depot Park. On **August 4<sup>th</sup>** we will meet at **6:45** for a **7:00 pm departure**. It's a lovely time of day for a leisurely stroll around the ponds to look for birds. Then we'll return to First Magnitude for an optional cold brew and good conversation. *All birding skill levels welcome.*

Next event: Sunday, July 7<sup>th</sup> at 6:15 pm.



## Results of the June Challenge, 2019 Edition

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113 species. In the under-16 competition, first and second place were taken by another pair of siblings, Nora and Owen Parks-Church, with 79 and 76 species respectively, while third place went to Liam Watson with 70. All winners received gift certificates from Wild Birds Unlimited.

Here's the complete list of June Challenge participants and their totals: Sam Ewing 115, Chris Cattau 113, Ben Ewing 112, Tina Greenberg 110, Rex Rowan 110, Deena Mickelson 109, Howard Adams 108, Pratibha Singh 108, Anne Casella 104, Tim Hardin 103, Bob Carroll 102, Brad Hall 102, Jerry Pruitt 101, Barbara Shea 101, Bob Simons 93, Becky Enneis 91, Debbie Segal 91, Erika Simons 88, Dean Ewing 84, Phil Laipis 80, Geoff Parks 79, Nora Parks-Church 79, Barbara Woodmansee 79, Tom Wronski 77, Owen Parks-Church 76, Linda Holt 73, Josh Watson 73, John Martin 71, Rob Norton 71, Liam Watson 70, Danny Rohan 51, Bob Knight 48, Cayley Buckner 39. Congratulations to our winners, and to all who participated! For the complete list of birds seen

during June, please visit the AAS website.



*Rex Rowan (pointing) led no fewer than 6 field trips for the benefit of the June Challengers. Photo by Pratibha Singh.*

By Rex Rowan



*Great Blue Heron with field rat above. Photo by Tom Wronski. Black-crowned Night-Heron and Tricolored Heron below. Photo by Erika Simons.*

*Eastern Towhee (right) by Pratibha Singh. Wood Ducks by Jerry Pruitt (bottom right).*



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## Studying the Endangered Snail Kite at the New Northern Limit of its Range

(Continued from page 5)

Much of ARCI's work is being done in exciting collaborations, including calibration of Everglades hydrologic models with USGS scientists, and applying a sophisticated forensic spatial model to identify Snail Kite nest locations from tracking data (with USGS and Queen Mary University of London). In 2016, they trained Dr. Alex Jahn of the Smithsonian Institution in capture and tagging methods for his recent movement study of Snail Kites in South America. ARCI also has been joined by University of West Florida biologists on a 5-year federally funded study of Apple Snail responses to Everglades restoration, including measuring densities within observed kite foraging areas; and has been collaborating with University of Florida wildlife ecologists for the last 3 years to study post-fledging dispersal and mortality of Snail Kites (dissertation research for PhD candidate Caroline Poli).

For all of this work, ARCI's goal has been to inform sound management actions with reliable data to make lasting contributions to international bird conservation. The support of donors, notably including the Alachua Audubon Society over the years, has been essential to pursuing this goal. ARCI's ecologists are excited to be embarking on this new research journey with AAS, in this newly occupied portion of the Snail Kite's range.

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*Summer Tanager. Photo by Becky Enneis.*



*Red-headed Woodpecker. Photo by Deena Mickelson.*

### Thank you, Becky!

Alachua Audubon and all participants in the June Challenge would like to give a big thank you to Becky Enneis for hosting the June Challenge Awards party. Becky came up with the idea for the June Challenge many years ago and dozens of people look forward to it every year. She also compiled the many photos submitted by the Challengers. *We appreciate all that you do, Becky!*

## Kestrel Nest Box Program Results for 2018-2019

*(Continued from page 7)*

The area around Watermelon Pond was the most productive, with 7 kestrel boxes being occupied by pairs of kestrels and 5 being occupied by screech owls. The other really active area is in northwest Alachua County beginning with the area around the intersection of Millhopper Road with CR 241 and extending from there up toward High Springs, Alachua, and Hague. This area had 9 boxes occupied by pairs of kestrels (see photo), but no boxes occupied by screech owls. There were two boxes occupied by pairs of kestrels near Evinston (southeast of Micanopy).

We are unable to do enough monitoring to know the success rate of the nesting attempts. We get photos of eggs in the box and chicks in the box with our pole camera or by climbing up to the box on the ladder but are not able to visit each box frequently enough to see the young birds as they fledge.



*Kestrel chicks in the Chestnut Hill box taken by Karen Brown on 4/25/19 using the pole camera.*

Our efforts to control fire ants seem to have paid off as we haven't found any evidence of mortality by ants this year. We have been putting Amdro around each box location each time we visit an actively used box. The box on top of Chestnut Hill on the north side of NW 94<sup>th</sup> Avenue is an extreme example. It had many large fire ant nests near the cabbage palm that supports the kestrel box. By the time there were kestrel chicks in that box, we had eliminated the ants within 100 feet of the box, and the two chicks that were in the box were not bothered by ants (see photo taken by the pole camera) and seemed to have fledged successfully.

We have only inadvertently checked on a few of the many bluebird boxes that have been put up over the years, but the few we checked seemed to be doing fine.



*Bob Simons checks a nest box after the brood has fledged. Whitewash inside the door indicates recent use.*



*Checking a kestrel box at the Watermelon Pond unit of Goethe State Forest with the pole camera.*

*Trokon Johnson is holding the pole, Cayley Buckner is watching the monitor, as Emmitt Zugar looks on. All are UF students. Photo by Bob Simons.*



*Baby kestrels in a nest box on the Metzger Tract at Watermelon Pond. By Cayley Buckner on 5/9/2019*



*Five kestrel eggs in a box at Watermelon Pond on the Metzger Tract owned by Alachua County. Photo by Cayley Buckner on 5/9/2019.*

*By Bob Simons*

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*The Crane*  
July – August 2019

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Please send any questions to  
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