

# The Crane

Volume 62 Number 6 July– August 2021

## Message From The President

The countdown is on! Alachua Audubon will commence with the much-anticipated birding field trips starting in early September.

The AAS field trip committee, consisting of Barbara Shea, Adam Zions, and Michael Brock, is currently planning the weekend field trip schedule. Those birding locations are sure to include local migrant hotspots in September and October when warblers, thrushes, tanagers, grosbeaks, and other neotropical migrants pass through our region, as well as other locations in November and December where winter visitors will settle in. Look for the fall and early winter field trip schedule in the September/October edition of *The Crane* newsletter.

The **Wednesday bird walks at Sweetwater Wetlands Park** will also begin in September and will occur each Wednesday morning beginning at 8:30 am from September 1<sup>st</sup> through the end of May. The Santa Fe College Continuing Education program will start up this fall and AAS will once again lead the **bird watching class** which is held each Saturday morning for four consecutive weeks. The schedule and registration form will be available through SFC.

Alachua Audubon's **Birds and Brews** bird walks started up in April and occur on the first Sunday of each month. Birders gather at First Magnitude Brewery (1220 SE Veitch Street) then stroll over to Depot Park for a casual bird outing. Start times vary throughout the year so check the AAS calendar [here](#). An optional brew from First Magnitude is a refreshing end to this bird outing.

AAS just held our annual planning meeting and we laid out a framework for many conservation, avian, and educational programs. Read on for highlights of our upcoming programs and projects.

Soon after **Sweetwater Wetlands Park** (SWP) opened, AAS began contributing to the park through enhancement of avian educational projects. We designed and continue to print and supply the park with the *Let's Start Birding* brochures, their most popular brochure at the park. AAS is funding a large-scale whiteboard map that will be mounted at the entrance pavilion and serve as a location map where visitors can mark their notable wildlife observations. This map is in the final review stage and should be in place very soon. Alachua Audubon is in the early stages of providing educational signs that will be installed at the overlook structures around Cells 2 and 3. These signs will be designed by artist and former AAS board member, Chris Burney. Just recently, AAS donated 15 pairs of Nikon binoculars and three Sibley field guides to the City of Gainesville Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs Department to be used for their many staff-led educational programs. The binoculars will be used this summer for the summer camps at Morning-side Nature Center, and then during the school year at SWP for the many ranger-led programs.

The **Prairie Creek Preserve Bird Banding Lab** was in full operation this past spring semester and we look forward to even more energy and excitement this fall

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*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 Sept – Oct issue: August 15<sup>th</sup>

Content of *The Crane* 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 more information.

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with the gathering of college interns, volunteers, and the AAS leaders of the banding lab, Jonathan Varol and Dr. Katie Sieving. Several exciting additions will be implemented before the fall semester begins. Three beautiful new and informative signs depicting avian anatomy (see images in the [last issue](#) of *The Crane*) were designed by Chris Burney and will be installed at a nearby kiosk. A native plant garden has been planted and is flourishing thanks to Jonathan Varol and the voluminous rain this summer. Look for AAS-sponsored field trips to the banding lab this fall and winter..

As a way of making bird watching more accessible to county residents, AAS will partner with the Alachua County Public Library to implement a **binoculars backpack lending program**. AAS is purchasing five sets of backpacks, binoculars, and birding field guides and will donate these items to the public library system. Based on a highly successful program in Palm Beach County, the backpacks containing a pair of binoculars and birding field guide will be available for check-out through the Alachua County Library system in the near future.

AAS voted to help fund the **UF GREBE Audubon Campus Chapter's** educational activities through an annual \$500 donation. GREBE stands for Gators Ready for Exceptional Birding Experiences.

Alachua Audubon will also contribute to the **Gainesville High School Birding Club** by donating two pairs of binoculars and a spotting scope and tripod. GHS teachers and avid birders, Leigh Larson and Maggie Paxson, have installed a network of bird feeders outside their two classrooms so students can learn about feeder birds throughout the school day. Additionally, these teachers established a birding club and take students on monthly bird outings. **AAS would like to expand the donation of binoculars to this birding club by appealing to our members to consider donating any extra pairs of binoculars to help more students enjoy the beauty of birds.** If you would like to help, please send an email to [Contact@AlachuaAudubon.org](mailto:Contact@AlachuaAudubon.org).

AAS will continue our highly successful **college internship program** this fall by selecting up to five college interns. Those chosen will have the opportunity to learn about mist-netting and banding birds, participate in the kestrel nest box program, and other avian-related projects.

After the 2021 COVID hiatus, the **Backyard Birding Tour** is now in the early planning stages and is slated to occur in early 2022. This popular event provides an opportunity to tour 5-6 selected yards and learn how to attract and enhance bird activity in your own surroundings. If you have a particularly bird-rich yard and would like to be considered for inclusion in the tour, please contact Christina Opett or Bubba Scales at Wild Birds Unlimited (see their ad on [page 11](#)).

Given the extraordinary success of Sweetwater Wetlands Park as a nature destination and water cleansing facility, Gainesville Regional Utilities is proposing a second treatment wetland on the west side of Gainesville. Like SWP, a new treatment wetland will require several years of design and construction before it becomes operational. AAS is already a stakeholder in this exciting new project. Our first contri-

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bution will be to conduct baseline bird surveys semimonthly during the two-year design period while the site remains in its existing upland state. This baseline data will demonstrate the changes in avian populations as the site transitions from an upland to a constructed wetland.

As noted above, Alachua Audubon has outlined an ambitious schedule for the 2021/2022 year that emphasizes avian education, conservation, and science. **Would you like to partner with Alachua Audubon and support specific programs?** If so, here are some suggestions.

**Buy a Birding Backpack** – AAS has committed to purchasing five backpacks and equipping them with a pair of binoculars and a field guide. Help us increase that number. Each donation of \$175 will add another birding backpack and make birding more available to the public.

**Donate a New or Used Pair of Binoculars** to the GHS birding club and help us introduce more high school students to birding. Binoculars cost approximately \$125, however, your extra set of used binoculars will be gladly accepted. If you would like to help, please send an email to [Contact@AlachuaAudubon.org](mailto:Contact@AlachuaAudubon.org).

**Sponsor a College Intern** – AAS provides valuable internship experiences to college students who learn and practice mist-netting, bird banding, nest box monitoring, and more. Interns receive a \$400 scholarship at the completion of their program. Consider contributing to the AAS college internship fund with any amount. Read about the positive impacts of this internship on the students in the [last issue of The Crane](#).

**Purchase Mist Nets for the Bird Banding Lab** – mist nets at the Prairie Creek Bird Banding Lab need replacement after a year of heavy use and sun exposure. The full set of 20 mist nets and poles will cost \$2,500 but any donation to this important project is greatly appreciated. *Donors will be treated to a tour of the Bird Banding Lab this fall.*

**To donate any amount**, scroll down to the **Donate** button on our [Membership Page](#), choose or enter an amount, and add a note (the note option is available once you are logged in to PayPal) stating the program you are donating to. You may also send a check and a note to AAS at the address on the last page of this newsletter.

We are very excited to restart our field trips this fall and look forward to seeing familiar birding friends as well as meeting new birders.

Debbie Segal

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## Are you looking for the 2021 June Challenge results?



If so, please see the write-up by the wonderfully witty Rex Rowan starting on [page 5](#). The month-long annual event held quite a few surprises and was well attended by both birds and birders. A wrap party was held at the lovely home of Becky Enneis that features one of the largest live oak trees to be found in a back yard anywhere in Alachua County. After food and beverages were enjoyed by all, winners were announced and prizes awarded. These included a lovely stained glass artwork depicting a Green Heron for 1<sup>st</sup> place, created and donated by Stephanie Haas. This was followed by a slide show featuring spectacular bird images from participants. Read Rex's article to find out who the winners were.

*June Challengers at San Felasco Hammock.  
Photo by Pratibha Singh.*

## Audubon Evening Programs

July Evening Program, Tuesday, July 13 at 7:00 p.m.  
Scott Flamand—Two Weeks in Thailand

Scott Flamand will share stories and photos of birds and wildlife from his adventure in Thailand in early 2020. Join him for photos of dozens of bird species including: Bulbuls, Hornbills, Sunbirds, Treepies, and Laughingthrushes. He will also include many mammals and a handful of herps.

Note: Many of you attended the standing-room only program a few years ago when Scott shared his birding trip to India. We're sure you will enjoy this talk too!

The link for the July 13 program is [here](#), or find it on the AAS website under [Programs](#).



*Black-throated Laughingthrush  
by Scott Flamand.*



*Katie Sieving with a Tufted Titmouse.*

August Evening Program,  
Wednesday, August 4 at 7:00 p.m. Changes in Attitude: Latitudinal  
Shifts in Social Roles within Avian Mobs of North America

Katie Sieving is a professor in the UF Dept. of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation who broadly studies the ecology and conservation of wild birds. Specific interests of her lab are social and behavioral ecology, effects of human actions on avian communities, and she has had a life-long interest in the complex vocal abilities of titmice and chickadees!

The link for the August 4 program is [here](#), or find it on the AAS website under [Programs](#).

*Would you like to be reminded when our programs are nearing? If so, send an email to [programs@alachuaaudubon.org](mailto:programs@alachuaaudubon.org) and you will be sent an email reminder prior to each program.*

### Past AAS Programs Available Online

Miss one of the AAS evening programs? Watch them online at your leisure from the [Programs](#) page of our website at [www.alachuaaudubon.org/programs/](http://www.alachuaaudubon.org/programs/)

“Bird Bling: How Banding Birds Aids Conservation” presented by Adam DiNuovo

“Building Birding Skills” by Adam Kent

“A Fight Against Time” about the critically endangered Nordmann’s Greenshank by Philipp Maleko

“A New Wetland in Gainesville!” presented by Gainesville Regional Utilities.

“Conservation Ecology of Short-tailed Hawks, Swallow-tailed Kites, and Snail Kites” by Gina Kent.

## Results of The June Challenge for 2021

Thanks to extremely low water levels at Paynes Prairie, conditions for the 18th annual June Challenge were the best we've had in nine years. They weren't quite as good as they were in 2012, when there was low water at Newnans Lake as well. Newnans was a bird bonanza that June, producing Blue-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Ruddy Duck, Common Loon, American White Pelican, Reddish Egret, Semipalmated Plover, American Avocet, Greater Yellowlegs, Lesser Yellowlegs, Spotted Sandpiper, Semipalmated Sandpiper, White-rumped Sandpiper, Stilt Sandpiper, Franklin's Gull, Least Tern, Gull-billed Tern, Black Tern, Forster's Tern, Royal Tern, and Black Skimmer. The arrival of Hurricane Debby on June 26-27 brought Sooty Tern and Magnificent Frigatebird to round out our lists. That year, the June Challenge winner found 126 species, twelve more than the previous record. I mention all this just to properly frame the accomplishment of this year's winner, who didn't have low water at Newnans or a tropical storm to help him out—and yet he beat that total.

The winner was **Tim Hardin**—our collective reaction [here](#)—with an astonishing 127 species. **Dylan Hasemann** and **Jason Chen** tied for second place, with 122 each. We actually had ten birders who got 110 or more species! It was a remarkable month. Thanks to the low water on the Prairie we had lingering spring-migrant Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Semipalmated Plovers, and Least and Semipalmated Sandpipers. But even without that, the list of birds seen in June was amazing. We had lingering waterfowl, Blue-winged Teal and Ring-necked Ducks. We had one spring-migrant warbler, an American Redstart, and one fall-migrant warbler, a Black-and-white. We had an early fall-migrant Belted Kingfisher. We had Savannah Sparrow and Chipping Sparrow summering for the first time in Alachua County history! We had Snail Kites, perhaps for the last year (depending on how well the apple snails weathered the drought), and two other rare hawks, Short-tailed and Broad-winged. We had Canada Geese, which seem to be settling into Alachua County permanently. We had a reliable Yellow-crowned Night-Heron at the end of La Chua and a reliable Whooping Crane at Cones Dike. The Gray Catbird at Tumblin Creek Park was back for its seventh year in a row (the American Robins in NE Gainesville didn't show up for the first time since 2014, though one was seen by a visiting birder at Longleaf Flatwoods). We had stray coastal species, Brown Pelican and Royal Tern, which are semi-regular, plus a Magnificent Frigatebird, extraordinary for *not* being storm blown, no doubt summoned solely by Tim's force of will.

And best of all, we had a remarkable number of participants, 45 of them (eleven of them new to the Challenge!), who made up one of our most crowded and competitive fields ever. One of those, **Judith Hunt**, shared her impressions:

"The June Challenge has come to an end, but my introduction to birding in Alachua County has certainly not! I am a first-time participant and a newcomer to Florida who did a lot of birding in Arkansas before the pandemic hit. My first year in Gainesville was spent solitarily exploring the hotspots listed on the web site. These very places, plus more, were part of the June 1st field trip organized by Rex Rowan. In the early morning dark, I met a whole slew of silent, expectant birders scanning the horizon for nighthawks. Wow! People—and birds! Life was beginning again. Longleaf Flatwoods gave me a life bird, the Bachman's Sparrow, and a new venue for future exploration. Sweetwater and Newnans Lake were already on my radar but visiting them with 30 experienced birders gave me lots more birds. Later in the month I got another life bird and another new site: the Burrowing Owl at Watermelon Pond. What a unique opportunity to see so many families of Burrowing



*June Challenge winner Tim Hardin.  
Photo by Karen Brown.*

Owls; they came out to their 'front door' to greet us. And, actually, that's what I felt about all the welcoming birders who greeted me and welcomed me to the community. **Barbara Shea** and **Tina Greenberg** worked with me to sight many more birds. Curiously the 'sighting' stipulation of the June Challenge came at a time when I had scheduled cataract surgery on both eyes. I was doubly grateful that I could, indeed, see 81 birds, a modest accomplishment for my first June Challenge."

The month's best bird—the year's best bird so far, for that matter—was not seen by a June Challenger. **Gianna Arcuri** was getting ready for an Ultimate Frisbee game on the evening of the 16th when she glanced out her second-floor apartment window and saw a dove at the bird-feeder on her balcony. She wrote, "I knew this was something I had never seen before. I kept saying there is no way this is a Mourning Dove, there is no way this is a Common Ground-Dove, there is no way this is a White-winged Dove." She got some photos and sent them to her employer, who happens to be Bubba Scales at Wild Birds Unlimited, and Bubba confirmed her suspicion that this was an Inca Dove, a species never before recorded in Alachua County. Gianna saw it again the next morning, "very briefly," and obtained more photos, but it flew away and neither Gianna nor anyone else has seen it again.

We had two birders in the under-16 category this year, **Liam Watson**, who saw 80 species, and **Owen Parks-Church**, who saw 60. Congratulations to them, and congratulations to all of you who accepted The June Challenge and braved the summer heat. Well done! I look forward to seeing you again next June.

And now, without further ado, here is the complete list of participants and the number of species they saw.



*Burrowing Owl. Photo taken on Watermelon Pond road by Jason Chen.*

By Rex Rowan

- |                    |                      |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| Tim Hardin 127     | Paul Kroeger 96      |
| Jason Chen 122     | Carol Ward 96        |
| Dylan Hasemann 122 | Glenn Israel 94      |
| Chris Cattau 120   | Austin Gregg 93      |
| Tina Greenberg 119 | Raci Ulusoy 93       |
| Xiao Hu 116        | Pelin Karaca 92      |
| Anne Casella 114   | Eric Link 92         |
| Bob Carroll 113    | Jon Graham 91        |
| Jerry Pruitt 112   | Erin Kalinowski 91   |
| Cat Lippi 110      | Tom Wronski 90       |
| Rex Rowan 109      | Matt Bruce 88        |
| Maggie Paxson 108  | Judith Hunt 81       |
| Danny Lippi 107    | Josh Watson 81       |
| Barbara Shea 107   | Liam Watson 80       |
| Anne Barkdoll 105  | Frank Goodwin 76     |
| Sam Ewing 101      | Geoff Parks 70       |
| Pratibha Singh 101 | Phil Laipis 66       |
| Rick Wolf 101      | Emily Schwartz 65    |
| Becky Enneis 100   | Nora Parks-Church 63 |
| Brad Hall 99       | Owen Parks-Church 60 |
| Hanna Radcliffe 98 | Bob Simons 47        |
| Susan Jacobson 97  | Erika Simons 35      |
| Howard Adams 96    |                      |



*Blue Grosbeak. Photo by Tom Wronski.*

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And here's the complete list of 133 species reported in the county during the month of June.

- |                                 |                                   |                              |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Black-bellied Whistling-Duck | 52. Tricolored Heron              | 102. Carolina Wren           |
| 2. Canada Goose                 | 53. Cattle Egret                  | 103. Gray Catbird            |
| 3. Muscovy Duck                 | 54. Green Heron                   | 104. Brown Thrasher          |
| 4. Wood Duck                    | 55. Black-crowned Night-Heron     | 105. Northern Mockingbird    |
| 5. Blue-winged Teal             | 56. Yellow-crowned Night-Heron    | 106. European Starling       |
| 6. Mallard                      | 57. White Ibis                    | 107. Eastern Bluebird        |
| 7. Mottled Duck                 | 58. Glossy Ibis                   | 108. American Robin          |
| 8. Ring-necked Duck             | 59. Roseate Spoonbill             | 109. House Sparrow           |
| 9. Northern Bobwhite            | 60. Black Vulture                 | 110. House Finch             |
| 10. Wild Turkey                 | 61. Turkey Vulture                | 111. Bachman's Sparrow       |
| 11. Pied-billed Grebe           | 62. Osprey                        | 112. Chipping Sparrow        |
| 12. Rock Pigeon                 | 63. Swallow-tailed Kite           | 113. Savannah Sparrow        |
| 13. Eurasian Collared-Dove      | 64. Cooper's Hawk                 | 114. Eastern Towhee          |
| 14. Inca Dove                   | 65. Bald Eagle                    | 115. Yellow-breasted Chat    |
| 15. Common Ground-Dove          | 66. Mississippi Kite              | 116. Eastern Meadowlark      |
| 16. White-winged Dove           | 67. Snail Kite                    | 117. Orchard Oriole          |
| 17. Mourning Dove               | 68. Red-shouldered Hawk           | 118. Red-winged Blackbird    |
| 18. Yellow-billed Cuckoo        | 69. Broad-winged Hawk             | 119. Brown-headed Cowbird    |
| 19. Common Nighthawk            | 70. Short-tailed Hawk             | 120. Common Grackle          |
| 20. Chuck-will's-widow          | 71. Red-tailed Hawk               | 121. Boat-tailed Grackle     |
| 21. Chimney Swift               | 72. Barn Owl                      | 122. Black-and-white Warbler |
| 22. Ruby-throated Hummingbird   | 73. Eastern Screech-Owl           | 123. Prothonotary Warbler    |
| 23. King Rail                   | 74. Great Horned Owl              | 124. Common Yellowthroat     |
| 24. Common Gallinule            | 75. Burrowing Owl                 | 125. Hooded Warbler          |
| 25. American Coot               | 76. Barred Owl                    | 126. American Redstart       |
| 26. Purple Gallinule            | 77. Belted Kingfisher             | 127. Northern Parula         |
| 27. Limpkin                     | 78. Red-headed Woodpecker         | 128. Pine Warbler            |
| 28. Sandhill Crane              | 79. Red-bellied Woodpecker        | 129. Yellow-throated Warbler |
| 29. Whooping Crane              | 80. Downy Woodpecker              | 130. Summer Tanager          |
| 30. Black-necked Stilt          | 81. Northern Flicker              | 131. Northern Cardinal       |
| 31. Killdeer                    | 82. Pileated Woodpecker           | 132. Blue Grosbeak           |
| 32. Semipalmated Plover         | 83. American Kestrel              | 133. Indigo Bunting          |
| 33. Least Sandpiper             | 84. Great Crested Flycatcher      |                              |
| 34. Semipalmated Sandpiper      | 85. Eastern Kingbird              |                              |
| 35. Spotted Sandpiper           | 86. Eastern Wood-Pewee            |                              |
| 36. Lesser Yellowlegs           | 87. Acadian Flycatcher            |                              |
| 37. Greater Yellowlegs          | 88. White-eyed Vireo              |                              |
| 38. Laughing Gull               | 89. Yellow-throated Vireo         |                              |
| 39. Royal Tern                  | 90. Red-eyed Vireo                |                              |
| 40. Wood Stork                  | 91. Loggerhead Shrike             |                              |
| 41. Magnificent Frigatebird     | 92. Blue Jay                      |                              |
| 42. Anhinga                     | 93. American Crow                 |                              |
| 43. Double-crested Cormorant    | 94. Fish Crow                     |                              |
| 44. American White Pelican      | 95. Carolina Chickadee            |                              |
| 45. Brown Pelican               | 96. Tufted Titmouse               |                              |
| 46. American Bittern            | 97. Northern Rough-winged Swallow |                              |
| 47. Least Bittern               | 98. Purple Martin                 |                              |
| 48. Great Blue Heron            | 99. Barn Swallow                  |                              |
| 49. Great Egret                 | 100. Brown-headed Nuthatch        |                              |
| 50. Snowy Egret                 | 101. Blue-gray Gnatcatcher        |                              |



*Northern Bobwhite. Photo taken at Watermelon Pond road by Xiao Hu.*

## My First June Challenge

At the beginning of June, I was occupied with other things and couldn't bird as much as usual, so I wasn't considering winning one of the top places in the June Challenge. Instead, I decided to try my best whenever I could go out. Since it could also be my last June Challenge before I graduate from UF and move, I wanted to get the most fun out of this event. When I pulled out the likely bird data of Alachua County in June from the eBird website, I estimated that I would most likely see 100 to 120 species during the month, depending on how hard I could try and how much luck I would have. I ended up with 122 species. That means I pushed my limit further than I thought. During the Challenge, I added to my list two lifers—Broad-winged Hawk and Yellow-breasted Chat—and three county lifers—Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Royal Tern, and Magnificent Frigatebird. It was much more productive than I expected!

There were many memorable stories during the Challenge. Some were about arriving at the scene as quickly as possible. The day Rex Rowan and Bob Carroll spotted the Royal Tern at Powers Park by Newnans Lake, Tim and I carpooled there right away after receiving the alert from Bob. Dylan Hasemann also arrived soon after. We scoped in the rain for about twenty minutes. Thanks to Tim, we all saw the tern after he managed to locate it in the rain. I got a few pictures before it started pouring. Four days later, I just made it in time again to see the Magnificent Frigatebird, a bird that I would never imagine seeing in Alachua County. If I had arrived five minutes later, I might have missed it.

Seeing birds like the Royal Tern and the Magnificent Frigatebird was exciting. As they didn't stay for long, it was either a hit or a miss. However, for some other birds, one knows what type of habitat they live in, sometimes even the exact location of them, but they may be too secretive to see. So there are always plenty of tries and fails involved. Finding birds like these was the most rewarding for me. Before seeing the Yellow-breasted Chats at Cones Dike Trail, I hiked miles and miles to look for them at different places, including Bolen Bluff Trail, La Chua Trail, and Camps Canal, again and again. The Savannah Sparrow at Sweetwater also took me a few attempts to see. But the moment I saw them, I knew what I believed was true—they were there and I would find them. Of course, luck also played a role—I never found that Brown Pelican.

This June Challenge was one of the best events I have ever participated in over the years in Alachua County. It not only encouraged me to explore the county that I have been living in since 2015 but also helped me connect with other birders, who I found are among the friendliest and kindest people. I enjoyed the field trips that we went on together and when we shared the timely birding information with each other. And, of course, the moments when we ran into each other chasing rare birds. I hope I will come back to participate again so this will not be my last June Challenge.



*Jason Chen tied for 2nd place.  
Photo by Karen Brown.*



*Broad-winged Hawk. Photo taken at Powers Park by Jason Chen.*

By Jason Chen

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## My June Challenge Experience

Having moved to Gainesville last August, this was my first June Challenge and it was a wonderful experience. I had just gotten my first birding camera and was excited to use it during the month. I knew field trips would be occurring and I was looking forward to birding with others for the first time. The June Challenge proved to be a lot of fun. Not only did I get to learn about the birds that reside here in the summertime, but I was also introduced to many other great birders. Everyone was so helpful and shared their wisdom with me about birding in Alachua County. This is the friendliest and most active birding community I have met, and I am glad to be part of it.

This month provided many memories that I will carry with me in the future. One noteworthy sighting was that of Yellow-breasted Chats. I had searched several times for them earlier in the month with no luck. I trudged through tall grasses and braved the hot afternoon sun but to no avail. I knew these were elusive birds, but I became determined to find them. After a recent sighting of them was reported, I decided to take the advice of some other birders and check out Cones Dike Trail. After hiking out three miles to the area of the sighting, I hid behind some reeds and silently waited. Soon afterwards, I watched as a brilliant olive-green and yellow bird flew out of the thicket and began to sing from a snag. I was elated to experience my first ever sighting of a Yellow-breasted Chat. Suddenly, another Chat appeared and finally a third emerged! I was blown away at my luck. I snapped some great photos of all three birds and watched in awe of their presence as they sang away from their tall perches. I could have stayed there all day watching them but, as sunset approached, I was forced to head back home. I will never forget the happiness that moment brought me and how it reminded me of why I love birding so much.

Another memorable point in the Challenge was when I received word that a Royal Tern had just been sighted at Newmans Lake. I quickly gathered my equipment, ran out the door, and raced off in my car. Upon arriving at Powers Park, I was joined by Tim Hardin and Jason Chen. Thunderstorms surrounded us but we were determined not to let this opportunity pass us by. We scanned and scanned and scanned the lake but no tern. One of the storms reached us but we still did not relent as the rain came pouring down. Even though drenched by the rain and lashed by the wind, we still kept watch over the lake. Finally, we glimpsed a tern flying about 100 yards away from us. We watched as it dove into the lake and flew about. We confirmed the ID and headed home happy, just as the storm grew more intense.

Persistence and determination are two words, that to me, describe the character of the birders of the June Challenge and show what makes this event so special.



*Dylan Hasemann tied for 2nd place.  
Photo by Karen Brown.*



*Yellow-breasted Chat. Photo by Dylan Hasemann.*

By Dylan Hasemann

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## Some Nature's Gems Are For Eyes Only

In 2015, I bought my first pair of binoculars to "officially" start birding. Despite the fact the Leupold binoculars gave me the crispest view I've ever had, I quickly stalled after being able to identify the wading birds at Sweetwater Wetlands Park and La Chua Trail. How do I tell all the yellow-orange-brown-looking warblers? What are the differences between female Green-winged teal and Blue-winged Teal? As a new birder, I just could not memorize all the features behind the eyepiece. I registered with eBird but there was no place to upload photos at that time.

Then I bought my first camera with a telephoto lens, just to record what I've seen on my little birding trips, mostly accompanied by my roommate who is patient enough to wait for me identifying common bird species. A camera is indeed a game-changer for me. Finally, I can carefully pixel-pick birds' features with the Sibley guide. I even photographed a Wilson's warbler that I didn't even know was a rare find in Alachua County.

Did I just mention pixel picking? This is when photography gets even worse than drug addiction. Getting higher photo quality is a never-ending journey. I switched from M43 to APS-C, then to full-frame. My lens becomes longer with an even larger aperture. Yes, my photos are getting better, but the happiness with even better photos is less than before. I spent much more time on photography websites than on bird-related content. I almost forgot why I picked up cameras in the first place.

About the end of May, I opened my Facebook page and accidentally found the Alachua County Birding group. I was amazed by the friendly atmosphere in the group. I've heard stories about how competitive birders can be, and just like the European birders in *The Big Year*, I was never a big fan of that. So I had doubts when I heard about the June Challenge, but the friendly community on Facebook gave me a different perspective. So I joined the June 1st field trip.

What a wonderful experience! As a newcomer to the group, I didn't feel strange at all. The June Challenge is still about who sees the most bird species, but no one ever waited for a second to share the new bird they saw. This is a new experience about sharing and competitiveness. More importantly, after finding the Eastern Wood-Pewee at San Felasco, I picked up something I've lost for years: the bliss when I finally found a bird and the will to look for it.

Then it comes to the two lifers I had during the Challenge, both of which were never captured by my camera. The first is the Broad-winged Hawk. When I was walking on the south side of US 27 and looking for the snag shown in Tim Hardin's videos, a really dark hawk just jumped off right beside it, showing the barred, pale underbody. That's the tiniest hawk I've ever seen. It quickly disappeared into the trees behind me and never showed up in the following hour. The next bird was much tougher: Yellow-breasted Chat. When Dylan Hasemann told me the last half mile on the trail is "soggy", I thought it was just wet after daily rainfall. So I went there in the morning, hoping it would be drier. After a 3-mile walk on Cones Dike, I realized the whole half-mile trail is underwater, at least 3 inches deep. There's no way I can get there with dry feet. After hesitating around for half an hour, and after I found a Yellow-billed Cuckoo nearby, I finally decided to go. Half a mile under water, mud, and sand, my sneakers have a new face every time I pulled my feet up. Fifteen minutes at the spot, nothing but a few blackbirds and Cardinals. Suddenly, a Blue Grosbeak started to sing, "Finally something to look at," I said to myself. A minute later, the branch under the Grosbeak was shaken for a second. I looked down under, and there it was, a Yellow-breasted Chat with its striking bright yellow breast plumage and high-contrast black-and-white face marking. After matching all the features I knew, I reached for my camera but the same branch is empty. I followed down the trail, which was now a creek, but it never perched in open branches again. I waited for 45 minutes, nothing had happened but a few distant calls behind the high grasses. I should have felt really frustrated, but I was not. Instead, the bliss when I first saw the bright yellow patch lasted long and strong. It was way past lunchtime and I still have 3 miles to get back to my car. Our good old Florida sun unleashed its full power over my head and the sand really tried to carve into my feet when my shoes got drier. Was all that a great day in June? Indeed! I even saw a female wild turkey on my way back, another new June bird!

The June Challenge to me made the usual hot Florida summer into an exciting journey, and it brought back the true meanings of birding to me: seeing one is already such a great present from nature. Taking a sharp, beautiful photo still gets me excited, but I just understand a bit more about birds: sometimes, those gems are for eyes only. And even if I can't see them, like Eastern Screech Owls that I tried to see five times, I'd like to quote Rex's words at the end of the June Challenge party, to all the birds around us, "It has been a pleasure."

By Xiao Hu



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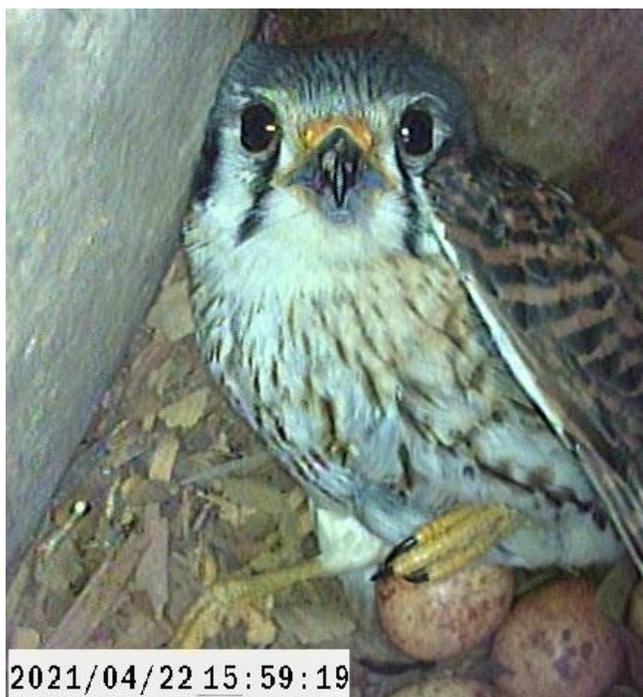
## 2021 Kestrel Nest Box Program Report

Nest box construction, nest box maintenance, and monitoring took a hit from COVID-19 for both the 2020 and 2021 seasons, but we did maintain the most frequently used boxes and do enough monitoring to continue providing places for kestrels to nest and to record the results. We had a great group of interns again this season and were able to work with them beginning in March. Interns assisting the kestrel box program this year were Chloe Arbogast, Carolina Bello, Grayson Koch, Alexandra Scott, and Veronica Simeoni. Prior to March, Karen Brown, Erika Simons, and I inspected nest boxes and added nesting material to get them ready for use. Karen also put up a new box to replace one that was falling apart at one location. Many of the boxes are getting old and will need replacing soon.

North of Alachua County, we had two boxes used by kestrels and one used by a screech owl. This result is down considerably from previous years. We had better results in Alachua County where 16 boxes were used by kestrels in both 2020 and 2021. This is down slightly from 2019 when we had 19 boxes used by kestrels. Screech owl use of the boxes was 5 in 2021, 3 in 2020, and 6 in 2019. This year two boxes were used by Great Crested Flycatchers, at least two by



*AAS interns Grayson Koch, Lexie Scott and Chloe Arbogast help monitor kestrel nest boxes. Photo by Bob Simons.*



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*Female kestrel and eggs. Photo taken using a pole camera.*

flying squirrels, and one by a fox squirrel. Two of the kestrel boxes were used by Eastern Bluebirds this year. We don't monitor most of the bluebird boxes we have installed, but one of the three we did check had an active bluebird nest. We were also surprised to find a trio of dead Cuban tree frogs in one bluebird nest box following some freezing weather before nesting had begun.

The one kestrel box that we monitor in Marion County has been used by kestrels every year for 14 years. The debris in this box had gotten so thick that it almost filled the interior. We removed most of it so the birds had space for continued nesting.

The boxes that do best for kestrels, based on our results, are the ones that are out in open fields, away from adjacent trees that provide flying squirrel access, are well protected from disturbance, and are in areas where pesticides are not used

(kestrels eat insects). Screech owls can inhabit kestrel boxes regardless of where they are located. We continue to add metal banding around nest box trees and poles to discourage predators, and to add fire ant bait to prevent fire ant attacks on chicks (their primary predator in nest boxes).

With regard to disturbance, even the gentle disturbance of peeking into the box with our pole camera can be quite upsetting, as is evident from the photo Erika took of an adult screech owl exiting a box as the pole camera enters.



*A screech owl disturbed by the pole camera flies from the nest box.  
Photo by Erika Simons.*



*Karen Brown assisting with nest box maintenance.  
Photo by Bob Simons.*

As in other years, we were able to get photos with our pole camera of kestrel and screech owl eggs, babies, and adults. We also got photos of bluebird eggs, Great Crested Flycatcher eggs, and flying squirrels in some of the boxes.

by Bob Simons



*Kestrel checks huddled in a nest box.  
Photo taken with a pole camera.*

**Stuck—A Poem by  
Sidney Wade**

the great blue  
heron balances  
on water  
weeds  
and pulls  
at a long  
dead stick  
I've seen  
him fly  
these things  
into the high  
dead tree  
to build  
his rigid nest  
but this one  
is truly stuck  
no  
he's pulling  
at the body  
of a cornsnake  
whose tail  
is knotted  
firmly around  
the stick  
his head and  
half his body  
are already  
far down  
the gullet  
the heron can't

unknot the tail  
from the stick  
so he regurgitates  
the top half  
to work  
a better angle  
and now  
the snake dangles  
limply as  
the great bird gnaws  
the gold-red knot  
with his hard  
yellow beak  
and swallows  
again  
an hour passes  
the bird works  
the cornsnake clings  
the sun shines  
the wind blows  
kites and egrets  
hawks and swallows  
soar in the brilliant  
light of this design  
in which every  
living bird  
and beast  
is obliged  
to feast  
on the living  
to live



*Eastern Meadowlark. Photo taken at  
Cellon Creek Boulevard by Bob Carroll.*

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**Alachua Audubon Seeks Bird Photos**

Alachua Audubon Society members are encouraged to submit photos for several new posters being designed for our festival display and potentially other uses. Each member may submit up to 20 photos for consideration. Please follow these guidelines when submitting your photographs:

1. Photos should be of birds from the [Alachua County Bird List \(ACBL\)](#) found on the AAS website under the Local Birding Resources tab, then Local Birding Info.
2. Photos should have resolution of 1MB or higher.
3. Filename should include ACBL name, location found, and photographer name (for photo credit). For example, GREEN HERON\_SWEETWATER WETLANDS\_LEE BLACK.JPG

Contact Eric Amundson with questions at [artmouth09@gmail.com](mailto:artmouth09@gmail.com).

If you are unsure of your membership status, please contact Karen Brown at [AlachuaAudubonMembership@gmail.com](mailto:AlachuaAudubonMembership@gmail.com). Individual membership costs only \$15 and is a good investment in local conservation efforts.

So many excellent photographs were submitted to Becky Enneis for The June Challenge after-party, it was difficult to choose just a few for the newsletter. Below are some favorites.



*Hummingbird nest by Dylan Hasemann.*



*Wood Stork. Photo by Xiao Hu.*



*Roseate Spoonbill. Photo by Erika Simons.*



*Ruby-throated Hummingbird. Photo by Xiao Hu.*



*Purple Gallinule. Photo taken at Sweetwater Wetlands Park by Danny Lippi.*

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*The Crane*  
July – August 2021

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**To join National Audubon, please go to [AlachuaAudubon.org/Membership](http://AlachuaAudubon.org/Membership) where you will be directed to their membership page.**

*Alachua Audubon is a 501(c)3 organization.*

### Audubon Membership Explained

**To join Audubon at the local level**, please visit the AAS website where you may use PayPal to pay by credit card. You may also complete the membership form to the left, or print a form at [AlachuaAudubon.org/Membership](http://AlachuaAudubon.org/Membership). Choose the membership level that is appropriate for you. Mail the completed form with your check, payable to **Alachua Audubon Society**, to the address provided.

**To join Audubon at the National level**, go to [AlachuaAudubon.org/Membership](http://AlachuaAudubon.org/Membership) where you will be directed to the NAS membership page. Your introductory membership will be credited to our local chapter and you will become an annual member of the **National Audubon Society**, **Audubon Florida** and **Alachua Audubon**, with one-year subscriptions to **National Audubon** magazine, **Audubon Florida Naturalist** magazine, and Alachua Audubon's bi-monthly newsletter, *The Crane*.

Please send any questions to  
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