

Until further notice, in lieu of canceling field trips, masks will be required by all participants on AAS Field Trips

Sunday, August 29, 2021 08:00 am

Watermelon Pond North Trail, Goethe State Forest

For our first Field Trip of the season, we have a new angle on an old favorite. Watermelon Pond has a Trailhead off SW 282 St (CR 337) which is West of the more familiar SW 250 St); it is managed by Goethe State Forest. We have Trip Leaders, Jason and Kelly O'Connor, who are knowledgeable birders and familiar with the site. The Blue Trail is quite long but they know a shortcut.

Watermelon Pond has unique combination of habitats including longleaf sandhill, sandhill wetlands, rosemary scrub, and hardwood hammocks. It's a good spot for birds like red-headed woodpeckers, bachman's sparrows, loggerhead shrikes, eastern meadowlarks, and kestrels, as well as wading birds and migrant songbirds. In this underbirded area there is always the chance for a surprise sighting. Last year, towards the end of August, Kelly & Jason were entranced by large numbers of Black Terns feeding over the wetlands. If these birds return this August and are present on the 29th, we will be with leaders who can find them.

There could also be chance sightings of local wildlife like gopher tortoises, gopher frogs, pine snakes, fox squirrels, and more.

Meet at Watermelon Pond - North Trailhead / Goethe which has a gravel entrance, parking area and even bathrooms. Difficulty 2

September 11, 2021

Blues Creek Ravine Preserve

Meet trip leader, Tim Hardin, the energetic top Alachua County eBirder for 2020 and 2021 so far, at the Preserve Trailhead parking area on NW 71st ST (off Millhopper Road), We will bird down 69th to the Trailhead.

This 160 acre recently opened Preserve, managed by Alachua Conservation Trust (ACT) is touted to have a "habitat that is an almost pristine example of a N Florida upland habitat."

September has been the month of maximum migrant diversity. We especially hope to see migrant warblers during our travel on the wooded trail.

The upaved trail is uneven in places and may have exposed roots or stumps. It could be muddy in times of frequent rain. It is less than a mile and will take us back to the dramatic steep ravine and Blues Creek.

September 19, 2021

Powers Park and Palm Point

We'll meet trip leader Barbara Shea at Powers Park to look for migrant warblers, tanagers, and thrushes in the trees along the boat channel and to scan the lake from the fishing pier. Then we'll travel to nearby Palm Point to search for more migrants in the live oaks and cypresses. Difficulty 1

September 25, 2021

Turkey Creek Preserve. Description & Directions

Officially opened in 2021 this 376 acre preserve with 5 miles of trails, gives us a chance to see many ecosystems. These include basin swamp, depression marsh, bottomland forest, hydric hammock, upland hardwood forest, black water streams and sinkholes. It serves to buffer adjacent San Felasco Hammock Preserve State Park and our drinking water.

Bought in 2009 through the voter approved Wild Spaces Public Places 1/2 cent sales tax and a grant from Florida Communities Trust. It took years to clean up debris and remove exotic species of plants, replacing them with natives. The trails a bridge and large parking lot have been added and the preserve continues to be managed by Alachua County

Lots of birding possibilities. Fall migration should be ramping up and bringing us a good variety..

We will take a nice casual 2-3 mile walk guided by accomplished birders Adam and Gina Kent. Trails are well marked, mostly wide and relatively flat. Be prepared by bringing water, sunscreen, bug spray and wear comfortable shoes. Long pants recommended. Masks and hand sani also recommended.

Meet us at the Main Trailhead parking lot at 6300 NW 93rd Ave at 0800, at the latest, please.

From SR 26/Newberry Road

Take NW 43rd ST North (R from 26)

Continue through town Past Milhopper Road almost to 441

But before 441 Turn Left or West on to NW 93rd Ave

Look for the large Parking Lot at the Trailhead on Right

(It is just a little past 59th Terrace)

From 441

Take 441 North out of G'ville past Turkey Creek Forest on L

There is a light at NW 43rd St. Turn Left and

Soon find NW 93rd Ave as above

Sunday, September 26, 2021

Santa Fe River Preserve - South Trail

Meet at the parking corral on State Road 121 4.5 miles north of LaCrosse. This 910-acre property is managed by Alachua Conservation Trust (ACT). Sam Ewing started birding at a young age and has many years of experience. A prior June Challenge winner, he will lead a walk along the 1.5-mile trail through hardwood forest and bottomland surrounding Santa Fe Creek in search of migrants. Wear rubber boots or old shoes you don't mind getting wet, as the trail can be soggy in places. Difficulty: 2.

October 2.2021. Barr Hammock Woodlands Trail (CLEP): Meet trip leader Stephen Hofsetter at the trailhead on SE 175th Avenue 1.5 miles west of I-75 (go west on County Road 234 and keep right at the fork). Barr Hammock is a forested land bridge between Ledwith and Levy Prairies, an environmental jewel that provides habitat for a wide diversity of upland and wetland species. We should see some migrant birds on this walk, but we'll be looking at everything – trees, wildflowers, insects, reptiles, whatever we find. Difficulty: 3.

October 3, 2021. Bolen Bluff Trail: Meet trip leader Debbie, Segal, President of Alachua Audubon Society (AAS) at the trailhead on US-441 at the south rim of Paynes Prairie. Bolen Bluff is one of Gainesville's perennial favorite birding locations, especially during increased songbird migration in the first part of October.

We will be watching out for fall migrants like Bay-breasted, Tennessee and Magnolia Warblers. Scarlet Tanagers, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, and Wood, Swainson's and Gray-cheeked Thrushes are all possible. Entry fee \$2 per vehicle. Difficulty: 3.

Saturday, October 9, 2021 8:00 a.m.

Newnans Lake State Forest - Pithlachocco Trail (East Trail):

Meet in the parking corral for the Pithlachocco Trails, directly across the road from the NFETC sign on State Road 26, three-quarters of a mile north of the junction with County Road 329B. Tim Hardin, will lead us along a 2.5-mile trail through a variety of habitats that include pinewoods, open oak woodlands, wetlands, and a bit of lakeshore. Plenty of migrant warblers and thrushes should be around. Flooding is a possibility this year, this trail could be muddy or wet especially nearer to Newnans Lake. Plan accordingly. Please remember to bring and wear your mask.

Difficulty 3

Sunday, October 10, 2021 08:00

Bivens Rim Forest Conservation Area

This little gem is nearby and often quite birdy. We will meet Caroline Poll at the Trailhead, to explore the trail along the northern shoreline of Biven's Arm. Caroline is one of the top eBirders for this Hotspot overall, and is #1 for bird species sightings in the month of October. You are welcome to come explore this small, easy to get to, 114 acre park with AAS and find some of the 139 birds reported here.

There is a small floodplain marsh, bottomland hardwoods and a mesic mixed hardwood forest further upland. The trail may be muddy or wet in places and does have some uneven ground. The trail can be narrow in places, don't forget to bring and wear your mask.

Weekend parking should be available in UF Department of Animal Science lot. The Trailhead main entrance is at the intersection of Shealy Drive and Richie Rd. Difficulty 2

Sunday, October 24, 2021

San Felasco Hammock Preserve State Park - Yellow Trail

Meet Sam Ewing at the Trailhead parking lot on Milhopper Road (\$4 per vehicle St Park fee) at 08:00 to go through sandy hammocks, pinelands and sandhills. We hope to see late migrating warblers such as Black-throated Blue and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks among others and possibly some arriving winter residents. The Eastern Wood-Pee-wee reliably nests along this trail in summer, maybe we will hear his distinct call before he leaves the area in early November. This is a long trail but with several cut offs, some rough ground and elevation change. It is mostly shady. Bring water, bug spray, sunscreen as needed.

Don't forget to wear your mask.

Saturday, November 6, 2021. 08:00 a.m.

Hague Dairy (University of Florida Dairy Unit):

Meet our intrepid trip leader, Tim Hardin, at one of the county's best spots for sparrows, blackbirds, and raptors, not to mention western strays like Yellow-headed Blackbird and Bronzed Cowbird. No sign up since Covid but park in the usual spot on the western side of the complex, labeled Classroom parking recently. We will respect and defer to the workers and cows. The required masks may be easy on this one, it does smell, well, like a dairy. Difficulty: 2.

Sunday, November 7, 2021, 8:00 a.m.

Camps Canal / Cone's Dike

Meet trip leader Scott Robinson at the Camps Canal trailhead. Scott studies the "ecology, behavior and conservation of birds." We will walk along the canal and then turn to the entrance to Cone's Dike. This trail extends out into the marshes on the east side of Paynes Prairie. We'll be looking primarily for sparrows and other newly arrived winter birds although some fall transients may still be lingering. Camps Canal Trailhead is on CR 234. Turn left (west) at the blinking light in Micanopy (the intersection of Hwy 441 & CR 234). Park off road at the bridge. Please remember to bring and wear your mask. Difficulty: 3.

Saturday, November 13, 2021 8:00 a.m.

Fox Pen Preserve

Fox Pen was acquired by Alachua Conservation Trust in partnership with Alachua County in 2019. The Preserve includes a diverse mix of longleaf sandhill habitat, flatwoods, wetlands, mesic hammock and shoreline at Moss Lee Lake. It also provides habitat for a diversity of wildlife including gopher tortoise, Northern Bobwhite, multiple reptile and amphibian species, and Florida black bear. The trails are unpaved, some places could be uneven, muddy or wet. The trailhead / parking area is close to 10777 Holden Park Road in Hawthorne. Take SR 20 towards Hawthorne and turn south onto US Hwy 301. Just after the Chevron station, turn left (east) onto 75th Ave (Holden Park Rd) and the Preserve will be about 2.5 miles on your left. We'll meet trip leaders Ivor Kincaid from ACT and Anne Casella from AAS there. Please remember to bring and wear your mask. Difficulty: 2.

Saturday, November 20, 2021 8:00 a.m.

La Chua Trail / Sparrow Alley – Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park

Meet trip leader Felicia Lee at the La Chua trailhead parking lot at 4801 Camp Ranch Road. We will explore this renowned hot spot. It has been one of the best spots for close study of various sparrows and other brush loving birds as well as wintering flycatchers, raptors and waterfowl. Take SE 15th Street past Boulware Springs Park. Before the road takes a hard turn to the left, look for the brown park signs on a spur road to the right – Camp Ranch Rd. If water levels precipitate trail shortening or closures, we will modify our routes and expand our exploration nearby. Please remember to bring and wear your mask. Difficulty: 2.

Sunday, November 21, 2021 8:00 a.m.

Sweetwater Wetlands Park

Meet trip leader Bob Knight, one of the designers of the Sweetwater Wetlands treatment system, and learn how the wetlands cleanse the wastewater that flows through the wetland cells. Bob is an advocate for Florida's springs, rivers, and aquifer and serves as the Director of the Florida Springs Institute. SWP is a very popular birding hot spot, and the berms surrounding the three large wetland cells provide a great view of water-dependent birds. We will search for ducks, rails, Marsh Wrens, Swamp Sparrows, and others. 325 SW Williston Road. Please remember to bring and wear your mask. Difficulty: 2

Saturday, November 27, 2021 8:00 a.m.

Newnans Lake State Forest – West Trail

Meet trip leader Barbara Shea to see what Gainesville's own State Forest just east of Gainesville has to offer this year. Designated a State Forest in 2015, this location has a variety of habitats, including a woodland trail. There is a newly completed Sparrow Trail Loop in the large field that dominates this section of the forest. We have seen various sparrow species here like Vesper and Field Sparrows. Grasshopper Sparrows have been reported here, too. The open sky can allow long looks at raptors like Bald Eagles and Red-tailed Hawks. American Kestrels favor this field, and wintering Tree Swallows are often seen foraging. There are small areas of wetland, too, and Common Yellowthroats can be, well, common. The parking lot is on SR 26, east from Gainesville, at 1580 NE 55th Blvd. It is on the left (west) past the Pithlachocco Trail entrance. Please remember to bring and wear your mask. Difficulty: 3.

Sunday, November 28, 2021 7:15 a.m.

Orange Lake by Kayak

Meet trip leader Matt Bruce at Heagy-Burry Park, 5040 NW 191st Place in the town of Orange Lake/Reddick. From Gainesville, head south on US-441 to the Alachua/Marion county line. From the county line, continue on 441 another 4.5 miles and turn left just past the Sunoco station onto NW 191st Place, which dead-ends at the park. You'll need to bring your own canoe or kayak for this trip. We'll paddle along the shores of McIntosh Bay to the point where it opens up to the main lake. Gulls, terns, ducks, and other open-water birds are possible, as well as marsh-dwelling species. Masks may be optional on this trip since social distancing will be easier while in our kayaks but bring one, especially for the time before we actually get on the lake. Difficulty: 3.

Saturday, December 4, 2021 8:00 a.m.

Lake City Treatment Wetlands

Meet trip leader Debbie Segal in the parking lot of Hitchcock's grocery store on US-441 in Alachua and caravan to the treatment wetland near Lake City. Or you can meet us at 8:30 at the SS Food Store/gas station a block west of I-75 at Exit #423 (in front of Wendy's). The Lake City Treatment Wetland is a series of nine wetland cells and was designed to cleanse wastewater before infiltrating the water into the aquifer where it then flows to the Ichetucknee Springs. We hope to see a plethora of waterfowl, wading birds, and perhaps some rarities as we walk the dikes separating the cells. While the Purple Martins have already migrated south, you will see the very successful nesting gourds that Alachua Audubon and Four Rivers Audubon installed, and where over 100 Purple Martin chicks were raised in 2021. This site is not open to the public and the gate will be closed after we enter, so please don't be late. Please remember to bring and wear your mask. Difficulty: 2.

Sunday, December 5, 2021 7:30 a.m.

Fort White Wildlife and Environmental Area (WEA)

Meet trip leaders Kelly and Jason O'Connor at 7:30 a.m. at the Hitchcock's grocery on SR 26 in Newberry to caravan to the trailhead in northern Gilchrist County. We'll explore some of the most beautiful sandhills in North Florida. Although this is an under-birded area, a good number of birds have been reported in November and December such as Northern Flicker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Wild Turkey, Blue-headed Vireo, several sparrow species including Bachman's, White-throated and Grasshopper, plus wintering warblers like Orange-crowned Warblers, and water birds along the Santa Fe River. This is only our second trip ever to this location and if you miss it, it will be next year before the next AAS Field Trip. Please remember to bring and wear your mask. Difficulty: 2.

Sunday, December 19, SPECIAL EVENT

Gainesville Christmas Bird Count: Contact Andy Kratter (kratter@flmnh.ufl.edu; 352-226-2462) or Bob Carroll (gatorbob23@yahoo.com; 352-281-3616) if you are interested in participating in this all-day event. To help with planning, please call as soon as possible. Difficulty: 3.

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