

# The Crane

Volume 64 Number 3 January – February 2023

## FIELD TRIPS

Below are some of our upcoming weekend field trips. Please note that we are transitioning to our newly redesigned [website](#) and our [Facebook](#) page as the primary sources for the most current list of field trips. *The Crane* will continue to list all finalized trips as new issues of the newsletter are released but please check the above sources often to find the most recent details of our field trip dates and descriptions.

### **Big Day! Sweetwater Wetlands Park and Beyond! January 1, 2023 at 8:00 am.**

Meet trip leader and AAS chapter vice president Tim Hardin for the first birding trip of the year! Tim is the Alachua County Big Year record holder (263 total species in 2021) and an eBird reviewer for Alachua County. We'll meet up at the parking lot of Sweetwater Wetlands Park (SWP) to start your year list off with a bang. Although this trip will begin at SWP, participants will have the option to progress to other sites based on input from Tim and the group (most likely follow-on destinations include Hague Dairy, Cellon Creek Blvd, and/or others such as Cones Dike trail). Tim anticipates that trip participants of this free guided birding trip can tally at least 100 different bird species by the end of the day but don't be surprised if the day ends up with 120+ bird species seen or heard by day's end. Difficulty: 1-3 depending on your level of participation.

### **Dudley Farm Historic State Park, January 1, 2023, 9:30 am.**

A second, more leisurely New Year's Day bird walk. Join us at Dudley Farm – a wonderful place to visit. Meet Tedd Greenwald and Mary Ellen Flowers at the Visitor Center. Bluebirds, Kestrels, Pileated Woodpeckers and more are expected. After birding, there is an old

farmhouse to visit, some outbuildings, a garden, a gift shop and a small museum. The address is 18730 W Newberry Rd, Newberry. Entrance fee is \$5 per vehicle unless you have an annual state park pass. View their website [here](#). Dudley Farm is on the US National Register of Historic Places and is a designated National Historic Landmark. Difficulty: 1.

### **Friday Evening through Sunday, January 20-22, 2023. Tall Timbers Research Station and St Mark's National Wildlife Refuge**

What did Florida look like 200 years ago? Join us at Tall Timbers Research Station (TTRS) near Tallahassee and find out. We'll tour the research station area and

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**Trip Difficulty 1:** Trip within easy access to the vehicle and/or level terrain; one mile or less. **2:** May involve uneven terrain; one to two miles. **3:** May involve elevation change, uneven terrain, and/or greater than two miles.

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*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 Mar – April issue: February 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. Additional advertisers are welcome. Please contact the editor for more information at [contact@AlachuaAudubon.org](mailto:contact@AlachuaAudubon.org)

learn the important role fire plays in upland ecosystems. We will search for White-breasted & Brown-headed Nuthatches, Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, Bachman’s, Henslow’s and Grasshopper sparrows, to name a few. Jim Cox (director of the Stoddard Bird Lab at TTRS) will be our trip leader. Included in this field trip will be a birding trip to St Mark’s National Wildlife Refuge on Saturday afternoon and led by Don Marrow, and then another bird outing on Sunday to a splendid longleaf pine forest. Tall Timbers Research Station has a lodge with eight rooms available for rent at \$50.00 per night for single occupancy or \$70 per night for double occupancy. Each room has two twin beds, and the lodge has a full kitchen facility available for our use (although you are welcome to secure other lodging). Camping is available next to the Lodge for \$25 per night. Pre-registration for field trip attendance is required by calling or visiting Wild Birds Unlimited (352-381-1997). Since there is a limited number of lodge rooms to rent, pre-registration for lodging or camping is also required. Meet at Tall Timbers at 3:00 PM on Friday (13093 Henry Beadel Rd, Tallahassee, FL 32312) to bird around the lovely forest, including seeing roosting Red-cockaded Woodpeckers. Difficulty: 3.

**Saturday, January 28, 2023, 8:00 am  
Hickory Ranch Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park**

The prairie basin at Hickory Ranch is one of the most bird-active and diverse parts of the prairie this winter but it's only accessible by special arrangements with park management, *and will require pre registration at Wild Birds Unlimited to attend.* Join Friends of Paynes Prairie board member and park volunteer Bubba Scales for this special event. Hickory Ranch provides an opportunity to view wintering flocks of ducks, Sandhill Cranes, and other waterbirds. The field trip will be limited to 20 people, however, a second group of 20 may be considered depending on the interest. Meet at the Hickory Ranch facilities at 9300 CR 234, Micanopy. (This location is about 1.5 miles west of Cones Dike.) The ground is uneven and likely will be wet and muddy so waterproof shoes are suggested. Please do not be late as you will not be allowed to walk unattended at this site. Difficulty: 3.

**Saturday, February 4, 2023, 8:00 am  
Alligator Lake Park with Four Rivers Audubon**

Meet in the pavilion/main parking lot in Colombia County where trip leaders from our neighboring Audubon chapter will lead us as we bird the first 100 yards or so of the central dike and then the Montgomery Trail on the main dike that surrounds this marshy 338-acre lake. We will be looking for waterfowl, wading birds, and woodland species. This site has often produced unusual birds. The entrance is off SE Country Club Road at 420 SE Alligator Glen in Lake City. Difficulty: 2-3 depending on your level of participation.

**Sunday, February 19, 2023, 8:00 am. Prairie Creek Banding Lab**

Meet AAS board member and banding lab director, Jonathan Varol, at the Prairie Creek Bird Banding Lab (7204 Co Rd 234, Gainesville, FL

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32641). We will walk the trails to check the mist nests, and watch AAS volunteers and spring college interns as they carefully extract the netted birds, collect scientific data, and then band and release the birds. Difficulty: 1.

**Saturday, February 25, 2023, 8:00 am. Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive**

Lake Apopka, the fourth largest lake in Florida, is in the headwaters of the Ocklawaha chain of lakes. It has been the site of significant marsh and floodplain restoration and the creation of a marsh flow-way system that filters Lake Apopka's waters by circulating lake water through restored wetlands. The wildlife drive meanders for 11 miles through the eastern portion of the property. We should see a large number of bird species. Wintering ducks are a highlight. Bring scopes if you have them since ducks may be far away in the impoundments. We should see over 70 species.

Meet trip leader Alan Shapiro at 8:00 am to explore this birding hotspot. The address is 2850 Lust Rd, Apopka. Take I-75 South to the Turnpike South, and then get on 429 North. Get off on Ocoee-Apopka Road and head north. Go left on Harmon, then right on Binion, then left on Lust Road. Gather at the small parking area on the right just before the gate at the Wildlife Drive entrance where Alan will be waiting. From Gainesville, meet at the Target parking lot on Archer Road at 6:00 am to carpool so we minimize the number of cars on the wildlife drive. If anyone wants to stick around, we can go for lunch and Alan will take us to another area in the afternoon. Difficulty: 1

**Saturday, March 4th, 2023; 8:00 am. Fox Pen Preserve**

Meet Danny Rohan (352-281-5921) at the trailhead and parking area located near 10777 Holden Park Road in Hawthorne (2.6 miles down Holden Park Road off Highway 301). Managed by Alachua Conservation Trust (ACT), this 578-acre preserve contains a diverse mix of longleaf sandhill habitat, flatwoods, wetlands, mesic hammock, and shoreline of Moss Lee Lake. We will visit the North Florida Sandhills Grassland Bird Habitat Restoration site, a multi-year restoration project with AAS, ACT, UF GREBE, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service to learn about the ongoing work to expand grassland bird habitat in the region. Difficulty: 2

**Saturday, March 18th, 2023, 8:00 am. Longleaf Flatwoods Preserve (CLEP\*)**

Meet trip leader Stephen Hofstetter at the Longleaf Flatwoods Reserve on CR-325. We'll hope to see Bachman's Sparrow, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Red-headed Woodpecker, and others, but they won't be our primary quarry; we'll be looking at everything – trees, wildflowers, insects, reptiles, whatever we find. Drive east on Hawthorne Rd. to CR-325, then right on CR-325 for 2.3 miles. Difficulty: 3.

**\*Conservation Lands Education Program (CLEP)**

Trips noted as CLEP highlight lands that protect plant and animal life and focus on their history and uniqueness.

**Saturday March 25, 2023, 8:00 am**

**Hague Dairy (University of Florida Dairy Unit)**

Meet trip leader Zachery Holmes at the dairy where we will be searching for sparrows, blackbirds, raptors, and any western strays. We will hope for water levels conducive to shorebirds and/or waterfowl as well. Park on the western side of the complex, labeled Classroom Parking. Trip participants are asked to respect and defer to the workers and cows in an effort to maintain our amicable relationship with the dairy staff. We will sign in at the office.

Difficulty: 2. *Note: There are no restrooms on site.*



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## Audubon Evening Programs

### Saturday, Jan 14, 2023 at 7:00 PM on Zoom North Florida Sparrows: Identification and Ecology

Join Adam Kent as he shows us how to identify sparrows found in North Florida. Once you understand the basics of the combination of distribution, behavior, and appearance for this fascinating group of birds, you can begin to chip away at the term “little brown job” and get more out of your sparrowing experience.

An Anhinga sparked Adam’s passion for birds when he was a child. Since then, an enthusiasm for the natural world has led him to a variety of biologist positions including assessing sites for the Great Florida Birding Trail, working as Florida’s first Scrub-Jay Conservation Coordinator, and currently as a biological consultant and natural history tour leader. One of Adam’s birding highlights was making recordings that led to the description of a new species of bird in Mexico, the Nava’s Wren. Adam has been leading sparrow identification workshops since 2000.

Join the Zoom Meeting: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83723144735>  
Meeting ID: 837 2314 4735



*Top photo: Chipping Sparrow  
Bottom photo: LeConte's Sparrow  
Photos by Chris Burney.*

### Tuesday, Feb 7, 2023 at 7:00 PM on Zoom Understanding Paynes Prairie State Park: A Dive Into Managing For Wildlife on the Prairie

Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park is a regional treasure among nature enthusiasts, especially birders, and a major contributing factor to the community's sense of place. Meet Brian Law (*left photo*), the biologist who manages the park's natural features and hear what he has to say about ongoing and upcoming efforts to pre-



serve and restore the habitats that support the diversity of wildlife that birders and the community at large have come to know and love. Park volunteer, Friends of Paynes Prairie board member, and former owner of Wild Birds Unlimited, Bubba Scales (*right photo*) will join Brian to highlight some of the most notable ornithological events occurring in the prairie over the past year or so. Join us as we discuss the park like you have never heard about it before, the park that makes Gainesville so unique!

Join the Zoom Meeting: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81212519834>  
Meeting ID: 812 1251 9834

*If you would like to receive a reminder prior to each program, please send an email to [programs@alachuaudubon.org](mailto:programs@alachuaudubon.org).*

### Past AAS Programs Available Online

AAS evening programs are recorded and posted on our YouTube channel. Watch them online at your leisure from the [Programs](#) page of our website at [www.alachuaudubon.org/programs/](http://www.alachuaudubon.org/programs/) or visit our [YouTube Channel](#).

Tickets go on sale Friday, January 6th, 2023!

## 2023 Backyard Bird Tour



## Mark your calendars for February 18th!

- Tickets will be \$12 and will be available for purchase at Wild Birds Unlimited, 4212 NW 16th Blvd, Gainesville.
- One-day self-guided tour through some of Gainesville's premier backyard birding habitats.
- Learn how to attract birds to your own yard with different foods, water sources, and plants. Educational displays and birding experts at each house.
- See brightly colored winter visitors such as Baltimore Orioles, American Goldfinches, and many others.

If you have any questions please contact Christina Opett at [ctina0824@gmail.com](mailto:ctina0824@gmail.com) or [contact@AlachuaAudubon.org](mailto:contact@AlachuaAudubon.org).

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## 2022 John Hintermister Gainesville Christmas Bird Count: a Recap

The 2022 John Hintermister Gainesville Christmas Bird Count was a smashing success. Our grand total was 174 species, just one short of our record 175 species in 2018. At the compilation dinner on the night of the count, we thought we may have equaled or even surpassed the record, but the powers that be have determined that the Whooping Crane does not count toward the total (they are considered introduced and not established), and the observer retracted the Red-eyed Vireo, because of lack of documentation. But 174 is our second-best species count ever and a very high count for anywhere in Florida! Last year's 169 species was good enough to top all the State's 82 CBCs. This is especially remarkable, considering that our count is found far inland and away from any salt water habitats and their attendant bird species.



Andy Kratter, CBC Co-compiler. Photo by Tedd Greenwald.

This year's count got off to a cool start, with enough wind to add a bite and make finding those skulking sparrows much more difficult. The sun poked out now and again to warm us up a bit, and at the end of our long day, made a nice sunset. Thankfully we did not get any dreaded precipitation, which hammered us at the end of last year's CBC.

The stars at the compilation, this year held at the Prairie Creek Lodge, are the bird species that were found that are not on our list of 163 regularly occurring species. By far the shiniest star was the first Broad-billed Hummingbird ever documented on a Florida CBC. This adult male had been frequenting hummingbird plants and a feeder at a residence near the north end of Barr Hammock for one week. The gracious homeowner, Irma McLaughlin, has allowed scores of birders at her place to view this special visitor, which should be in northwest Mexico this time of year. Other great finds were a Dark-eyed Junco at Westside Park, a Tennessee Warbler at Sweetwater Wetlands, a Northern Rough-winged Swallow in the Prairie Basin, a Vaux's Swift returning on UF Campus, two Rufous Hummingbirds, a Western Tanager in NE Gainesville, two American Black Ducks on the prairie basin, two Nashville Warblers, four White-faced Ibis on the prairie basin, three Peregrine Falcons, an Ash-throated Flycatcher at Persimmon Point, a Least Flycatcher on Cone's Dike, a Canvasback on the Prairie Basin, a Yellow-crowned Night-Heron on the Prairie Basin, and a Gray-headed Swamphen at Sweetwater Wetlands.

The John Hintermister Gainesville Christmas Bird Count is becoming well known for leading the nation in species with the highest counts. This is testament to the great and cohesive community of birders and ornithologists in and around Gainesville. Last year, we had 14 such species, and this year we will no doubt be exceptional again. Several notable high counts in 2022 included 215 Snail Kites (which smashed the National all-time record set by us last year), 140 Rusty Blackbirds (are they making a rebound from their decades-long decline?), 1576 Palm Warblers, 146 Black and white Warblers, an amazing 19820 American Robins, 74 Barred Owls, 60 Green Herons, 12359 Ring-necked Ducks, 45 Laughing Gulls, and 324 Muscovy Ducks. Notable misses were Eurasian Collared-Dove, Red-breasted Merganser, and Dunlin. Thanks to all the team captains, observers, and co-compiler Bob Carroll.



American Robin. Photo by Tedd Greenwald.

(Continued next page)

**Species list** (bold-faced species = rarity; bold-faced count = high count): Black-bellied Whistling-Duck 3718, Snow Goose-Blue 3, Snow Goose-White 1, Muscovy Duck **324**, Wood Duck 235, Gadwall 225, American Wigeon 125, Mallard 9, **American Black Duck 2**, Mottled Duck 452, Blue-winged Teal 1427, Northern Shoveler 98, Northern Pintail 497, Green-winged Teal 1409, **Canvasback 1**, Redhead 4, Ring-necked Duck 12359, Lesser Scaup 80, Bufflehead 8, Hooded Merganser 151, Ruddy Duck 30, Northern Bobwhite 11, Wild Turkey 49, Pied-billed Grebe 74, Horned Grebe 3, Rock Pigeon 29, Common Ground-Dove 12, White-winged Dove 4, Mourning Dove 272, Whip-Poor-Will 5, **Vaux's Swift 1**, **Broad-billed Hummingbird 1**, **Rufous Hummingbird 2**, Ruby-throated Hummingbird 2, King Rail 9, Virginia Rail 14, Sora 87, **Gray-headed Swamphen 3**, Purple Gallinule 7, Common Gallinule 997, American Coot 1716, Limpkin 304, Sandhill Crane 6717, **Whooping Crane 1**, Killdeer 486, Least Sandpiper 160, Wilson's Snipe 114, Long-billed Dowitcher 173, American Woodcock 2, Spotted Sandpiper 3, Greater Yellowlegs 60, Lesser Yellowlegs 37, Bonaparte's Gull 164, Laughing Gull **42**, Ring-billed Gull 384, Herring Gull 2, Forster's Tern 19, Common Loon 3, Wood Stork 113, Double-crested Cormorant 763, Anhinga 326, American White Pelican 4, American Bittern 21, **Least Bittern 9**, Great Blue Heron 231, Great Egret 310, Snowy Egret 225, Little Blue Heron 383, Tricolored Heron 223, Cattle Egret 152, Green Heron **60**, Black-crowned Night-Heron 169, **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron 1**, White Ibis 2569, Glossy Ibis 743, **White-faced Ibis 4**, Roseate Spoonbill **8**, Black Vulture 309, Turkey Vulture 1097, Osprey 23, Bald Eagle 139, Northern Harrier 68, Sharp-shinned Hawk 7, Cooper's Hawk 17, Accipiter, sp. 1, Snail Kite **272**, Red-shouldered Hawk 195, Red-tailed Hawk 41, Barn Owl 3, Eastern Screech-Owl 26, Great Horned Owl 51, Barred Owl **74**, Belted Kingfisher 70, Red-headed Woodpecker 24, Red-bellied Woodpecker 469, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker 76, Downy Woodpecker 194, Northern Flicker 15, Pileated Woodpecker 165, American Kestrel 49, Merlin 6, **Peregrine Falcon 3**, **Least Flycatcher 1**, **Ash-throated Flycatcher 1**, Eastern Phoebe 577, Vermilion Flycatcher 3, Loggerhead Shrike 26, White-eyed Vireo 67, Blue-headed Vireo 76, Blue Jay 188, American Crow 928, Fish Crow 102, Crow, sp. 13, **Northern Rough-winged Swallow 1**, Tree Swallow 1205, Carolina Chickadee 394, Tufted Titmouse 423, Brown-headed Nuthatch 3, House Wren 242, Sedge Wren 44, Marsh Wren 80, Carolina Wren 491, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher 671, Golden-crowned Kinglet 2, Ruby-crowned Kinglet 761, Eastern Bluebird 354, Hermit Thrush 90, American Robin **19820**, Gray Catbird 240, Brown Thrasher 14, Northern Mockingbird 116, European Starling 8, Cedar Waxwing 464, House Sparrow 36, American Pipit 7, House Finch 83, American Goldfinch 218, Ovenbird 16, Northern Waterthrush 13, Black-and-White Warbler **146**, Orange-crowned Warbler 116, **Nashville Warbler 1**, **Tennessee Warbler 1**, Common Yellowthroat 320, American Redstart 2, Northern Parula 1, Palm Warbler 1576, Pine Warbler 201, Yellow-rumped Warbler 3028, Yellow-throated Warbler 63, Prairie Warbler 6, Wilson's Warbler 1, Yellow-breasted Chat 2, Eastern Towhee 52, Field Sparrow 3, Chipping Sparrow 1487, Vesper Sparrow 11, Savannah Sparrow 196, Grasshopper Sparrow 9, Henslow's Sparrow 4, Song Sparrow 42, Lincoln's Sparrow 1, Swamp Sparrow 410, **Dark-eyed Junco 1**, White-throated Sparrow 19, White-crowned Sparrow 8, Summer Tanager 2, **Western Tanager 1**, Northern Cardinal 496,



Indigo Bunting 1, Painted Bunting 15, Red-winged Blackbird 8294, Eastern Meadowlark 120, Rusty Blackbird **120**, Common Grackle 1154, Boat-tailed Grackle 1515, Brown-headed Cowbird 1112, Baltimore Oriole 49.

By Andy Kratter

*Bonaparte's Gulls.*  
Photo by  
Tedd Greenwald.

## The 2022 Christmas Bird Count – Melrose Circle

The 33<sup>rd</sup> annual Christmas Bird Count of the Melrose Circle was NOT rained out in spite of the severe weather warnings predicted for the area! On December 15, 2022, 61 participants fanned out across the 15-mile diameter circle center at the intersection of SR 100 and CR 219, spanning from Florahome to Earleton and touching on Melrose Landing to Camp Blanding and Gold Head Branch State Park.

Exciting finds included an evening virtual cloud of American Robins with an estimated flock size of 100,000 individuals, a Ruby-throated Hummingbird that had not left for the year and the rare Field Sparrow. Very disappointing was the fact that no one spotted a Green Heron.

Volunteers surveyed in cars, on foot and in boats to cover this big circle for birds. The species count at 113 beat the average and tied for seventh place in the 33-year history and dropped from last year’s historic high count of 132. However, we set a record for the highest number of individual birds: 122,718 individual birds were reported, beating the old high count of 28,842 set in 2021. Note that this will be reported as 112,556 individuals and an explanation is included at the end.

Although we never know if a decline in the species count is due to an overall decline in species populations or just the conditions of the surveyors – the weather, the number and skill level of the participants, we do know rain affected the hours of people in the field this year.

By the numbers:

	<u>Species Counted</u>	<u>Individuals Counted</u>	<u>Number of Observers</u>
1 <sup>st</sup> Place Year	132 in 2021	112,556 in 2022	71 in 2021
2 <sup>nd</sup> Place Year	126 in 2020	28,842 in 2020	64 in 2019 (tie)
3 <sup>rd</sup> Place Year	123 in 2019	20,458 in 2021	64 in 2020
2022 Place	113 for 8 <sup>th</sup> place	1 <sup>st</sup> place	61 for 4 <sup>th</sup> place

A word more on the American Robins and how reporting of individuals works. Every one of the 18 reporting teams spotted robins. In fact, they reported 10,201 robins not counting the giant cloud of robins. They seemed to be everywhere! And it’s unusual for 100% of the teams to see any one species. The next closest was 16 teams reporting the Northern Cardinal. No doubt some of the birds crossed from one territory to another. So, when reporting our data to National Audubon and Cornell University, we round to the nearest level of magnitude. In other words, 110,201 American Robins are reported as 100,000. 3,016 Ring-billed Gulls are reported as 3,000, and so on.

Finally, Santa Fe Audubon Society would like to thank all of the many private property owners who allow us to visit their properties to conduct this annual survey.

By Laura Berkelman



*Above: Dedication!!*

*Left: Alachua Audubon members Tim Hardin, Adam Kent, Jose-Miguel Ponciano, and Scott Robinson, along with Santa Fe Audubon members and pontoon boat owners, Virgil and Celina Rohman, as the sun sets on Lake Santa Fe. Photo by Debbie Segal.*

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## Ichetucknee / Santa Fe / O'Leno (FLIS) Christmas Bird Count

The 14<sup>th</sup> running of the Ichetucknee/Santa Fe/O'Leno Christmas Bird Count (FLIS CBC) was held on Tuesday, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022. This year's 15-mile wide circle, centered near the town of Fort White, involved 39 participants (14 new to the count) who birded by car, foot, and canoe/kayak. Many participants came after a day of rest from the Gainesville CBC and included birders from the Four Rivers Audubon, Alachua Audubon, Florida Park Service, and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

The FLIS CBC covers many natural and state-managed lands including Ichetucknee Springs State Park (ISSP), O'Leno State Park, River Rise Preserve State Park, Gilchrist Blue Springs State Park, Fort White Wildlife and Environmental Area, multiple Suwannee River Water Management District properties, the lower Santa Fe River, the entire Ichetucknee River, and private lands of varying uses (commercial, residential, agricultural, and silvicultural). Three of the five teams concentrate their efforts on public lands while the other two focus on the remaining rivers, uplands, private lands, and neighborhoods. Teams were eager to gather again for an evening Count Up Supper at the ISSP Education Center after two years amiss.

As birders planned for the day, the weather forecast yet again didn't seem very optimal and they had concerns for another cold rainy day. Despite the forecast, they all rallied forward into what turned out to be a decent overcast day with nobody getting wet from rain (although falling into the river is a different story!). The rain held off until after the Count Up supper began, measuring at only 0.35 inches. The weather station at ISSP recorded a daily low of 49.0°F and a high of 61.5°F. Surface winds were mostly light-breezy and variable, ranging from calm to 10 mph from the NE. River levels seem to be a little below average but were flowing at a decent rate.

The FLIS CBC recorded 8,848 birds, up from 7,179 last year. A record high of 107 species were observed, with three of these recorded during count week. These birds included 13 high records, 3 tied records, and 4 species new to the count. High counts were observed for Double-crested Cormorant (17), Great Egret (29), Ring-billed Gull (27), Belted Kingfisher (34), Red-bellied Woodpecker (242), Downy Woodpecker (110), Pileated Woodpecker (132), Carolina Chickadee (222), Tufted Titmouse (304), Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (165), Ruby-crowned Kinglet (306), Yellow-throated Warbler (27), and Grasshopper Sparrow (6). Species with tied records include Black-crowned Night-heron (2 / 2017, 2018, 2020, 2021), Winter Wren (3 / 2020), and Merlin (1 / 2009). The Count group was excited to see its first occurrences of Hairy Woodpecker (1), Tri-colored Heron (1), Lesser Yellowlegs (2), and Summer Tanager (1).

Many thanks to the dedicated team leaders and birders who continue to make the FLIS CBC a success! We are super thankful for a GREAT group of volunteers who schedule this day into their active holiday season. Please mark your calendars for Tuesday, December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2023 to join us on our 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary!!

By Ginger Feagle

### Mary Landsman Remembered

In this modern world of loud bluster, Mary was a dignified, gentle, and quiet soul. She was a long-term member of Alachua Audubon who was primarily interested in birding. She had a small circle of lady friends who would go out birding together, she often attended the weekend field trips, and she would on occasion join with a birding expedition to places like south Texas or Latin America. I especially enjoyed her company during two of these birding expeditions.

Mary had a very positive impact on the kestrel nest box program by finding and getting permission for us to use the Shay property west of San Felasco Hammock for putting up and maintaining kestrel boxes. Second only to the Metzger Property in value for producing kestrels, there are regularly three and sometimes four active kestrel nests there each year. Finding and getting permission for good locations for kestrel boxes is the key to having a successful nest box program.

Mary was a delightful friend and I will miss her.

By Bob Simons

**Sweetwater Wetlands Park &  
Alachua Audubon Society**

Present

**Wednesday Bird  
Walks at the Wetlands**



**When:** Every Wednesday @ 8:30 am  
from September - May

**Where:** Sweetwater Wetlands Park -  
Entrance Pavilion

Walks are free with park admission fee (\$5/vehicle)  
Bring water, binoculars, sunscreen, and walking shoes



**Are Birds Hitting Your Windows?**

A staggering number of birds are killed by collisions with windows every day. This is having a grave impact on bird populations nationally. Follow these links for solutions and suggestions on how to prevent such needless deaths. Methods range from simple, inexpensive do-it-yourself projects to affordable and attractive window treatments you can purchase.

[Acopian BirdSavers](#)

[Stop Birds Hitting Windows](#)

[Glass Collision Solutions](#)

Alachua Audubon board member Eric Amundson has installed window treatments at his home with great success. He is available to speak with you about these methods. Send an email to [contact@AlachuaAudubon.org](mailto:contact@AlachuaAudubon.org)



*Ovenbird  
killed by a  
window  
collision.*

**Suspect a crime against Florida's birds, fish, wildlife or natural resources? See an injured animal? Report incidents to FWC's Wildlife Alert Reward Program online or call 888-404-3922. From your cell phone call \*FWC or #FWC, or send a message to [Tip@MyFWC.com](mailto:Tip@MyFWC.com). Learn more at [MyFWC/contact/wildlife-alert](http://MyFWC/contact/wildlife-alert).**



**Did You Know?**

Caterpillars dominate nestling diets in 16 out of 20 bird families. Carolina chickadees rear their young almost exclusively on caterpillars. To rear one clutch of nestlings until they fledge, chickadees must catch from 6-9 *thousand* caterpillars! They need landscapes with plants that support insects.

**Please plant native plants  
and avoid insecticides!**

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## Interns Wrap Up the Semester

*AAS Fall 2022 interns wrap up their semester long internship by describing their experiences below.*

### **Natalie Bever**

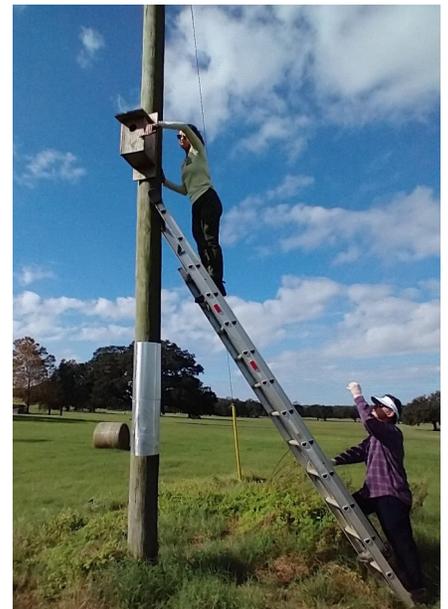
I had the most rewarding and amazing time being an AAS intern. Throughout the semester, I learned how to collect birds, band birds, and ID birds, all of which are great skills to have going into grad school. My love for birds began when I was seven years old, so I am incredibly grateful to continue growing that passion while gaining experience for my career. My favorite bird to band was by far the Gray Catbird because they are the most interesting to age; if the wings are grey and uniform, it's an AHY (after hatch-year), and any sign of rusty tips indicates it's a HY (hatch year). I never expected to band so many different species of birds, and I feel confident now in my bird ID skills. One of the most important lessons I learned in my time as an AAS intern was the value of efficiency. Most birds banded were small, meaning they couldn't stay in the small holding bags for long without injuries. I had to work quickly yet efficiently to band the birds without creating any lethal complications. As the semester concludes, I appreciate all I have learned throughout the semester at the Prairie Creek Banding Lab. Not only did I gain field and avian experience, but I also created friendships I hope I carry with me throughout the rest of my undergrad. If you are thinking about applying to become an intern, I highly recommend that you do.



### **Jessica Martin**

My internship for Alachua Audubon Society was a dynamic and educational experience. As an Intern, I had the opportunity to work closely with experienced staff members and learn about the various conservation efforts and initiatives the chapter is involved in. I also had the chance to participate in field work, such as bird counts and habitat restoration projects, and assist with event planning and outreach efforts. Overall, this internship provided a hands-on, immersive experience in the field of conservation and environmental education, and a chance to make a positive impact on local bird populations.

*Jessica inspects a kestrel nest box.*



### **Chance McGarey**

I have mixed feelings about ending my time at the banding lab. While it does feel nice to finish something, I've had such a great time doing this internship it's hard to imagine moving on. From this experience, I've gotten so many practical skills I can use for professional work and I've gotten hands-on with birds in a way that I never would've thought would be possible a few years ago before moving to Gainesville. Additionally, working on the kestrel boxes in the area has given me the opportunity to meet and work with so many awesome people and is so rewarding knowing that I'm having a positive impact on the wildlife in my area. I'd recommend this internship to anyone who is considering it even just a little bit; it's definitely worth every second of time put into it.

*Chance befriends a Tufted Titmouse.*

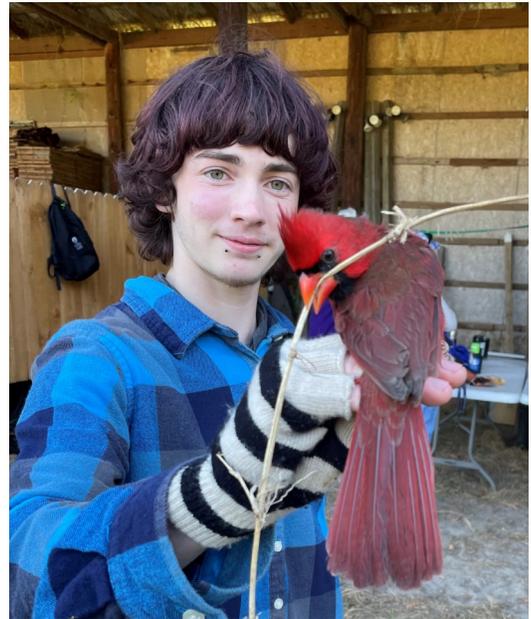
### Mason Rowe

During the Fall 2022 semester, I interned with Alachua Audubon at the Prairie Creek Bird Banding Lab and the Native Plant Garden. Both projects were great educational experiences that helped me learn a lot about fieldwork and communicating natural science to the public. The Prairie Creek Bird Banding Lab allowed me to work with several other interns as well and a bunch of enthusiastic volunteers and bird experts. I learned how to extract small birds from mist nets and how to hold and handle these birds. We were also taught how to band birds as well as collect data through aging and sexing certain species. As part of this project, we talked about the benefits and techniques of bird banding to tour groups and taught people how to safely release the birds after being banded.

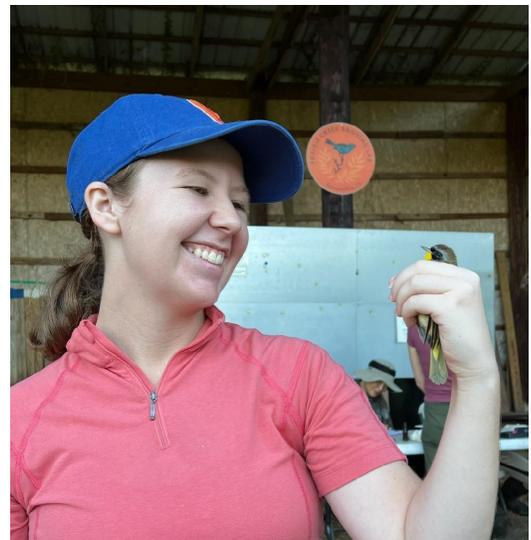
The other project I worked on during this internship was the Native Plant Garden, located next to the bird banding lab. I worked on my native plant ID while weeding and mulching with other friendly and hard-working volunteers and helped start a website for the garden. This project encouraged creativity in coming up with new ways to communicate with visitors and native plant enthusiasts through signage and an online native plant guide. This was a great experience and I would encourage others to apply in upcoming semesters!

### Abigail Willer

From day one, I knew that this experience would be special. I gained many practical field working skills, greatly expanded my bird identification skills, practiced educating the public, and most of all I learned how to work as a team. I am so thankful to have had this wonderful opportunity to gain all of these skills that make me a more well-rounded future wildlife biologist! I got to work with some amazing birds and even more amazing people. I definitely think the white-eyed vireos stole my heart! I now have a new appreciation for birds, and even hope to work with them in the future.



*Mason holds a Northern Cardinal which has been given a stick to prevent biting fingers (which really, really hurts!)*



*Abigail holds a Common Yellowthroat.*



### College Student?

Check out the GREBEs—the University of Florida Audubon Campus Chapter focused on teaching college students about the importance and beauty of the avian world. Our mission is to guide students in bird identification, explain the role of birds in daily ecosystem functions, and emphasize how to conserve them through local birding trips, community outreach, lectures from professionals in ornithology, and hands-on field experience such as banding workshops. UF and Santa Fe College students are eligible to join. Contact them via email at [grebeuf@gmail.com](mailto:grebeuf@gmail.com).



## Birding Courses Offered

*Calling all bird enthusiasts!* Develop or refresh your skills in identifying the birds in our region. Santa Fe College Community Education, in partnership with Alachua Audubon, offers bird watching courses. Each course consists of 4 field trips to local natural environments, guided by local birding experts. Field trips begin at 8:00 AM, and each trip lasts 2-2.5 hours. Register online for the courses at the [Santa Fe College Community Education](http://sfccollege.edu/cied/communityed/index) website: ([sfccollege.edu/cied/communityed/index](http://sfccollege.edu/cied/communityed/index)) Click on “Registration,” “Take a Class,” and “Outdoor Adventures.” The course number is NAT00003.1B6. Or register by phone by calling the registrar at 352-395-5193.

Course Fee: \$49.00. Register early as classes fill quickly.

*Note: Must be at least 18 yrs old to register. Prior experience is not necessary, but you must bring binoculars.*

Course dates:

**Winter 2023:** February 11, February 18, February 25, March 4

**Spring 2023:** March 18, March 25, April 1, April 8

**Registration opens January 9th for both sessions.**

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## Monthly Birds and Brews

The AAS Birds and Brews event continues to be popular with both new and experienced birders. Meet the first Sunday afternoon of the month at [First Magnitude Brewery](#), 1220 SE Veitch St. Arrive early as parking can be scarce. There will be an Alachua Audubon table set up and **loaner binoculars will be available**. It is a lovely time of day for a leisurely stroll around the Depot Park ponds to look for birds. Then we'll return to First Magnitude for an optional brew and conversation.

*All birding skill levels are welcome!*

Next event: Sunday, February 5<sup>th</sup> at 4:45 p.m.



## Treatment Wetlands – A Triple Crown for Birds, Birders, and the Environment

*(Reprinted by permission from the American Birding Association.)*

We stationed ourselves across the expansive marsh, well before dawn, ready to tally any species whose voice we could discern. The almost-full moon inched closer to the horizon and should have illuminated the wetlands but the intermittent fog partially cloaked the bulrush and cattails. A Limpkin trumpeted out a call and two more answered with a wail, the first entry on our nocturnal checklist for the 2021 Gainesville Christmas Bird Count.

The quiet returned and we were mesmerized by the calmness we could feel and the vastness we couldn't fully view but knew surrounded us. A trailing grunt sliced through the silence followed by a drawn-out chuckle. A Virginia Rail and Sora were added to our infant checklist.

A cluster of aging cypress trees, their outlines visible through the pre-dawn fog, interrupted an otherwise uniform view. The middle tree in the small island was now a skeleton while those surrounding it were still reluctant to shed their foliage. Silhouettes of birds, large birds, were hunkered on the branches. I set up my spotting scope hoping to identify the shapes that we could barely see. Great Blue Herons, Wood Storks, White Ibis, and Double-crested Cormorants were added to our list.



*One of the many resident Limpkins at Sweetwater Wetlands Park. Photo by Duncan Kabinu.*



*A Virginia Rail, typically an elusive bird, briefly seen scurrying through the wetland plants at Sweetwater Wetlands Park. Photo by David Campione.*

As one of the birds stretched out its neck, I became giddy and called out, "Roseate Spoonbill." And then a Great Horned Owl quietly delivered a series of hoots from a cluster of small trees in the opposite direction.

It was barely 6:30 and as darkness still prevailed, an outline of ducks whistled towards us. Ten Black-bellied Whistling Ducks lifted up from the wetlands and were v'ing their way north to their diurnal roost. And as if on cue, one small flock of vocal whistlers after another alerted us to their presence by their characteristic call. We tallied 74 black-bellies winging over our middle station and could hear even more whistlers lifting off east and west of us over the adjacent wetland cells.

After the pre-dawn flight of whistling ducks subsided, new sounds radiated from the marsh. We heard chatters and babbles as the wetland residents started waking up. Our three teams of birders were strategically spaced perpendicular across the three wetland cells of Sweetwater Wetlands Park so we could attempt to quantify the clouds of blackbirds that would soon erupt from the aquatic reeds.

The preamble gave way to movement and in the early dawn light, the action commenced. Blackbirds began rising from their collective nocturnal roost – Common Grackles, Boat-tailed Grackles, Brown-headed Cowbirds, and Red-winged Blackbirds - lots of red-wings. "Count by 50's," I called out to my birding partner, who I noticed was shocked by the sheer number of birds erupting from the marsh.

The blackbirds' signal to rise was heeded by others and soon more species began crisscrossing the wetlands. A pair of Mottled Ducks with tawny-colored, extended necks zoomed northward. Six smaller, more agile ducks – Blue-winged Teal – flashed their blue wing patches as they banked just above the wetland.

Chuckling calls emanated from pockets of the marsh and we tallied American Coots, Common Gallinules, and a Pied-billed Grebe. Small waders tiptoed along the water's edge and we added Tricolored Heron, Little Blue Heron, and Snowy Egret to our Christmas count. A flash of pink caught our eyes and we turned to see a pair of Roseate Spoonbills land on the berm a few telephone pole lengths away. My birding partner paused to snap some



*A Snail Kite hunting for an apple snail over the marsh at Sweetwater Wetlands Park. Photo by Duncan Kabinu.*

photos. “Those aren’t very common here,” I smiled as we admired the pastel birds.

The morning scene that unfolded in front of us in late December at Gainesville’s Sweetwater Wetlands Park likely replays in similar versions with each rising sun. On that special morning – the start of the day-long Christmas Bird Count – five of us volunteer bird counters were the fortunate ones to experience this magic of nature.

Avian prizes continued to fly onto our bird list. Marsh Wrens, Swamp Sparrows, and Common Yellowthroats hunkered in the dense willows and bullrush, while a Purple Gallinule balanced on the spindly stems of fire flag. Northern Harriers and a Snail Kite glided low over the mosaic of marsh plants, and a juvenile Cooper’s Hawk streamlined to the island of cypress trees. American Crows flew lazily above while Wilson’s Snipe hastened to their next protective hideaway. As we focused our binoculars on a dozen Glossy Ibis gliding down to a water-filled gap, a single Black-crowned

Night Heron winged across our view.

A wooded upland perimeter marks the northern boundary of the wetlands and this contrasting habitat concentrates and funnels those species that are averse to the open marsh. Here we spied more list-growing species. Ovenbird, Black-and-white Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler, an abundance of Blue-gray Gnatcatchers and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and all three mimickers – Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, and Northern Mockingbird. We concluded our coverage of this 125-acre park by noon with a whopping 93 species and four rarities – Least Bittern, Roseate Spoonbill, Snail Kite, and Wilson’s Warbler.

Sweetwater Wetlands Park is a relative newcomer to the birding scene. Having just opened its gates to visitors in 2015, Sweetwater now hovers in the top 30 Florida eBird hotspots with 259 species recorded at the park. And with over 10,000 eBird checklists (and growing daily), Sweetwater Wetlands Park is well established as a nature-based Florida destination for many out-of-town birders.

Like many municipalities, the City of Gainesville needed to upgrade its disposal of treated wastewater before discharging the nutrient-enriched effluent to the environment. Known as reclaimed water by wastewater engineers, the reclaimed water that underwent treatment at the City’s Main Street Water Reclamation Facility still contained nutrients and pollutants that exceeded safe enough concentrations for off-site disposal.

A vast drinking water aquifer underlies most of Florida as well as the southern reaches of Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. And the daily discharge of reclaimed water by Florida’s hundreds of wastewater treatment facilities, whether to land-based or aquatic systems, provides a cumulative pollution source to Florida’s underground drinking reservoir. The City of Gainesville was no different. For over six decades the city has sent its reclaimed water to Sweetwater Branch where this small tributary delivers the treated effluent onto Paynes Prairie, an expansive marsh that slowly drains into Florida’s drinking water aquifer.

In 2010, the City of Gainesville was faced with a decision on how to further cleanse its reclaimed water, with the two primary choices being to upgrade the existing water reclamation facility to achieve higher levels of nutrient and pollutant removal, or construct a treatment wetland that could naturally strip out the lingering pollutants down to a level comparable to rainwater. The City’s decision to build a treatment wetland was based on many factors, most importantly, construction and long-term operational costs, and achieving a consistently high-quality effluent. And thus, Sweetwater Wetlands Park was born.

According to Brett Goodman, Water and Wastewater Treatment Operations Director for Gainesville Regional Utilities, “Constructing the treatment wetland saved the City of Gainesville over \$13 million dollars compared to

the cost of upgrading the existing water reclamation facility.” And the savings continue annually because managing a natural wetland system is far cheaper than running an upgraded water reclamation facility.

At Sweetwater’s state-of-the-art wetland system, water slowly winds through three parallel marshy cells where the man-made wetland performs its magic. Nitrogen and other pollutants are stripped from the city’s lingering waste stream by a complex and natural assemblage of microscopic bugs called denitrifying bacteria. The final product – nitrogen concentrations knocked down four-fold to less than one part per million – is achieved through synergistic interactions between vigorously growing wetland plants, a water environment that is nearly devoid of oxygen, and a gazillion bacteria that chow on the plants’ organic matter.

Although not apparent to the thousands of visitors who stroll along the raised berms at Sweetwater, the wetland system was designed to be resilient to extreme weather conditions.

“It survived Hurricane Irma in 2017 without any notable damage to the berms, wetland cells, or plant communities,” explained Chris Keller, President of Wetland Solutions, Inc. and one of the design engineers for Sweetwater Wetlands Park.” And because the water control structures were designed to protect the wetland cells during extreme flow events, operator intervention is not needed during unsafe weather conditions. In fact, when a treatment wetland system is designed and sized properly, as in the case of Sweetwater, the plant community and attached microbes just do their thing without requiring day-to-day adjustments or manipulation.”

Biologically, treatment wetlands exhibit very high plant productivity which translates into a rich and complex food base that supports a diverse population of wildlife. And because the City of Gainesville made the extra commitment to invest in public use facilities, the boardwalks, raised berms, and observation platforms facilitate the ease of wildlife watching. The annual Christmas Bird Counts are a testament to the avian richness at Sweetwater. Since its inception in 2015, the Christmas counts from this new city park have hovered between 90 and 105 species.

Birds are not the only type of wildlife easily viewed at Sweetwater. Alligators – from newborn to mammoth size – populate the three wetland cells. Given the abundance of this local icon, both the reptilian ones that reside in the marsh and the humans who cheer on the University of Florida’s fighting Gators, it’s no wonder that the engineers added enough squiggly lines to the blueprints to create a wetland design that formed the shape of an alligator head.



*An aerial photograph of the 125-acre Sweetwater Wetlands Park depicting the profile of an alligator head. Photo provided by Gainesville Regional Utilities.*

Gainesville’s Sweetwater Wetlands Park is no exception to the avian richness that follows the construction of treatment wetlands. Other acclaimed birding hotspots are scattered across the sunshine state and are recognized by birders as Orlando Wetlands Park, Green Cay Wetlands, Wakodahatchee, Viera Wetlands, the Everglades Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs), and the Celery Fields. All of these public-use wetland systems were designed to protect downstream water quality by removing nutrients and other pollutants from the incoming waste stream.

Those created wetlands represent a success story for cost-effectively improving water quality, protecting Florida’s vulnerable water supply, ensuring quality wildlife habitat for both common and declining species, providing nature-based venues, and enhancing local economies through nature-based tourism. However, far more municipalities have stagnated in their ability to reduce their pollution footprint. Some municipalities still deliver their treated effluent to rivers or creeks that wind their way to the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico. And hundreds

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of other wastewater facilities continue to discharge their reclaimed water to rapid infiltration basins or spray fields that provide minimal additional cleansing before the nutrient-laden effluent infiltrates down through Florida's sandy soils to the drinking water aquifer.

Florida is not unique in constructing treatment wetlands for water quality improvement. Many nationally known treatment wetlands in Arizona, California, Oregon, Texas and other states continue to attract both bountiful bird populations and scores of birders, while inconspicuously purging pollutants from the incoming water.

In heavily birded southern Arizona, birders at Tucson's Sweetwater Wetlands have tallied 317 species, making that treatment wetland the top eBird hotspot in Pima County and fourth highest in Arizona. And with over 25,000 eBird checklists, Tucson's Sweetwater reigns as one of the most popular birding sites in Arizona.

While northern California's Arcata Marsh represents the City's innovative wastewater treatment facility, many birders recognize the marsh complex as the "birdiest" location in Humboldt County. Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary clearly occupies the county's top eBird hotspot position where 340 species have been documented across more than 9,800 eBird checklists.

Similarly, just 400 miles north of Arcata Marsh in neighboring Oregon is another top reigning hotspot. Fernhill Natural Treatment System was designed as a constructed wetland complex to polish and cool treated wastewater in order to protect the downstream Tualatin River ecosystem. This number one county hotspot claims 250 bird species.

Tyrrell Park Cattail Marsh in southeastern Texas performs a similarly protective role for the adjacent Hillebrand Bayou. This 900-acre wetland system provides the final stage of wastewater treatment of Beaumont's municipal wastewater, while maintaining valuable habitat for wildlife species, including the 289 species of birds that have been observed at the site.

**Birders, outdoor photographers, and other nature aficionados** flock to treatment wetlands all over the country. While searching for those avian gems, most visitors are oblivious to the critical role that constructed wetlands play in both cleansing the incoming water and protecting downstream receiving water bodies. The ecological, recreational, and ecotourism benefits are wide-ranging and represent a triple crown winner for birds, birders, and the environment.

By Debbie Segal

*Debra Segal is a retired environmental scientist. During her 25-year career, she helped design, create, and restore many wetlands throughout Florida including Gainesville's Sweetwater Wetlands Park. She is president of the Alachua Audubon Society in Gainesville, Florida.*

### **Alachua Audubon Wins Award**

The Alachua Audubon Society's Prairie Creek Bird Banding Lab was awarded the Best Chapter Education Project Award by Audubon Florida. In 2019, Alachua Audubon established a Bird Banding Lab at Prairie Creek Lodge under the direction of Dr. Katie Sieving and Jonathan Varol. The mission of the lab is to provide training and instruction to students and conservation professionals in the methods and techniques of avian conservation as related to bird banding and tracking. In 2021, a native plant garden was established to provide additional opportunities for programming and to promote the importance of native plants for wildlife. Alachua Audubon interns learn mist netting techniques at the banding lab and the lab is now regularly hosting groups for educational purposes.

### **Alachua Audubon Awarded "Plants for Birds" Grants**

Alachua Audubon has been awarded a \$2000 grant from the Audubon Florida/Florida Power and Light Plants for Birds program and a \$1000 grant from National Audubon Society's Collaborative Grants program. The funds will be used in a partnership with Maggie Paxson, teacher and chair of the science department at Gainesville High School, to convert an approximately 1-acre section of the campus to a teaching garden that will contain native trees, shrubs and plants. The goal is to increase science engagement through outdoor education and nature journaling.



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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 [Alachua Audubon.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.

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