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and



Santa Fe Audubon Society - Florida

Santa Fe Audubon Society

Melrose, FL

**JANUARY 2022
NEWSLETTER**

Happy New Year

Join The Annual



February 18 - 21, 2022

GBBC

Launched in 1998 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) was the first online citizen science project (sometimes referred to as "community science") to collect data on wild birds and display results in near real time. Birds Canada joined the project in 2009 to better support participation in Canada. In 2013, the GBBC became a global project when it started using the app eBird (world's largest biology related citizen science project) for data entry.

Project Goal

Each February, for four days, the world comes together for the love of birds. During these four days people are invited to spend time in their favorite places watching, counting, and reporting as many birds as they can find. These observations help scientists better understand global bird population trends right before Spring migrations.

For 2022

In 2020 a new website was designed to make understanding and recording your 4-day count easier than ever. Santa Fe Audubon encourages everyone to participate. The minimum time requirement is only fifteen minutes, and you can do it in your own backyard or any other favorite birdwatching spot.

For further details and rules for participation, see the website: <https://www.birdcount.org>



by Bill Chitty

Getting ready for the 2022 Kestrel nesting season entailed removing a nest box from a tree, moving several poles and boxes to new locations, repair of several boxes, and building two new poles. Those chores attended to, last week five volunteers spent a day and a half cleaning 25 of the boxes and refilling them with fresh wood shavings.



One box had a sleeping (gray morph) Eastern Screech-owl and the team decided to come back later rather than bother the owl for box cleaning.

We also tested the use of an endoscope on a telescoping pole as a "peeper pole" to look into the nest boxes without moving or lowering the box. Results of the testing were inconclusive, but it appears to be of some use at least. We will find out how useful in April when official monitoring begins.



Bill and Betty trying out the peeper pole.

THE NATIVE PLANT CONNECTION

Your yard – and the kinds of plants in it – matters to birds! As natural area for birds continue to decrease, so do native plants and the important food sources they provide for birds.



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker enjoying *Beautyberry*.



Why are native plants important for birds?

In a word: insects. Virtually all land birds – 96% - require insect food for their young. Native plants support healthy populations of insects, including caterpillars, that breeding birds feed their nestlings. However, nonnative plants contain foreign compounds that most native insects won't eat. Without insects for food, baby birds starve. By adding native plants to your yard, you can help restore the imbalance created by non-native plantings and ensure the survival of future generations of birds.

Pokeweed,
loved by many bird species,
Red-eyed Vireos feast on
these berries.



What are native plants?

Native plants are those that occur naturally in an area. Florida is home to thousands of native plant species. Many are stunningly beautiful; some occur nowhere else in the world. Over many millennia, our native wildlife – including birds – have adapted to the resources provided by the native flora. Native plants are, in a real sense, "home" for our birds.

Chiappini Farm Native Nursery

Open Monday thru Friday 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM

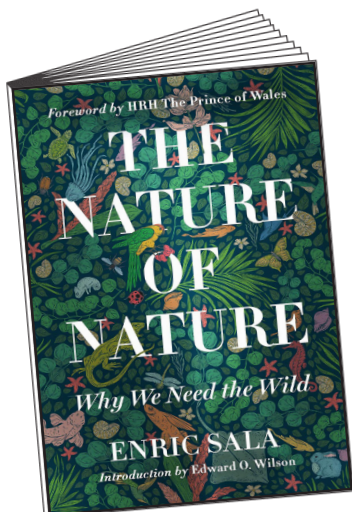
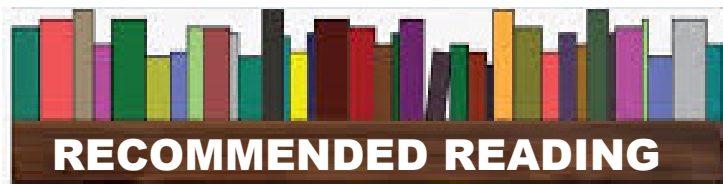
Masks and social distancing required.

<https://chiappinifarm.com>

To learn more about native plants in our area:

<https://www.audubon.org/plantsforbirds>

Also, visit <https://www.fnps.org> Florida Native Plant Society for info and plant lists and sources.



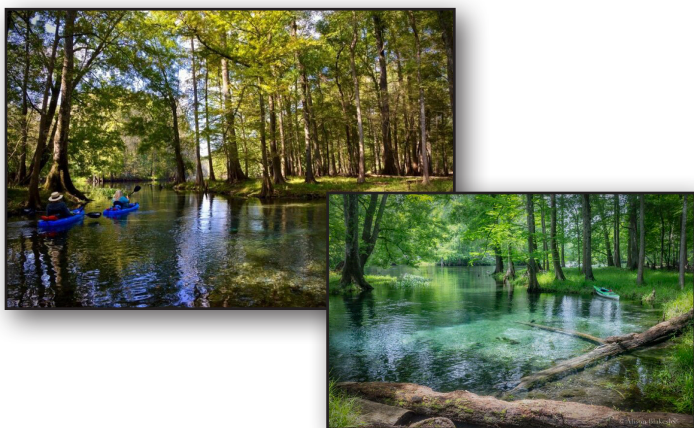
In this inspiring manifesto, an internationally renowned ecologist makes a clear case for why protecting nature is our best health insurance, and why it makes economic sense. Enric Sala wants to change the world--and in this compelling book, he shows us how.

Once we appreciate how nature works, he asserts, we will understand why conservation is economically wise and essential to our survival.

GOOD NEWS

SAWDUST SPRINGS

In mid-December, Alachua Conservation Trust (ACT) purchased Sawdust Spring and 139 acres of pristine bottomland hardwood forest along the Lower Santa Fe River. Connected to the Devil's Ear Spring Priority Focus Area and part of the Florida Forever Project Area, this third magnitude freshwater spring and its surrounding landscape are top-priority conservation areas for the State.

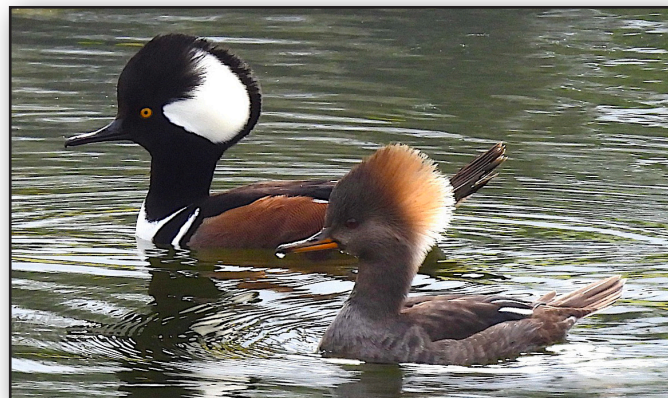


Spotted with rain lilies and towering cypress trees, the property is also full of karst features and includes nearly a mile of riverbank directly on the northern bank of the Santa Fe River. ACT will manage the property to benefit water quality and operate it as a public preserve with passive recreation. At one time, the property was slated for a bottled watering plant. The remnant wells of which can still be seen on the property.

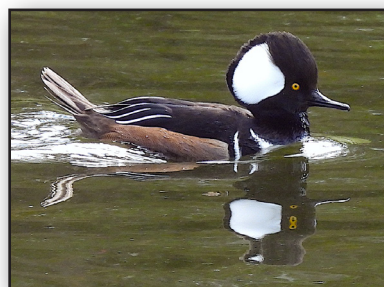
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BIRD OF THE MONTH

HOODED MERGANSER (*Lophodytes cucullatus*)
band code "HOME"



"Hooded" is something of an understatement for this extravagantly crested little duck. Adult males are a sight to behold, with sharp black-and-white patterns set off by chestnut flanks. Females get their own distinctive elegance from their cinnamon crest. Hooded Mergansers are fairly common on small ponds and rivers, where they dive for fish, crayfish, and other food, seizing it in their thin, serrated bills. They nest in tree cavities; the ducklings depart with a bold leap to the forest floor when only one day old.



COOL FACTS:

Hooded Mergansers find their prey underwater by sight. They can actually change the refractive properties of their eyes to improve their underwater vision. In addition, they have an extra eyelid, called a "nictitating membrane," which is transparent and helps protect the eye during swimming, like a pair of goggles.

The oldest recorded Hooded Merganser was a male and at least 14 years, 6 months old....in Mississippi in 2009. He had been banded in Minnesota in 1995.

For more information about Hooded Mergansers, and test your duck and waterfowl skills, visit:

www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Hooded_Merganser/overview

Fun Fact:

A group of ducks has many collective nouns, including a "brace", "flush", "paddling", "raft", and "team" of ducks.



Christmas Bird Count 2021

The 2021 Melrose Christmas Bird Count, organized and sponsored by the Santa Fe Audubon Society and held on December 16th, was a hugely successful event, thanks to the 72 volunteers who searched for and tallied birds in the many natural areas that occur in the designated 15-mile diameter Count Circle. Many intrepid volunteers began before dawn, straining their ears to hear the calls of owls and whip-poor-wills and the rustling wings of woodcocks. And as the sun lifted up, the army of volunteers was in full force surveying for birds around the many lakes, parks, rail trails, and other natural areas within the count circle.

One of the great birding spectacles that quietly occurs on Lake Santa Fe is the large evening roost of gulls during the winter months. As the winter afternoons build, a river of snowbirds stream in from the north until the collection of mostly Ring-billed Gulls, but also Herring, Laughing and Bonaparte's Gulls, swell to several thousand birds. The gulls roost on top of the water in the middle of the lake during most winter nights and then lift off of Lake Santa Fe after dawn the following morning.

The gulls feed during the day north of Lake Santa Fe, probably at landfills like Jacksonville's Tillman Ridge or the New River Regional Landfill. During this year's Christmas Bird Count, almost 4,000 Ring-billed Gulls were tallied on Lake Santa Fe. The big challenges were trying to assign a number to such a wide swath of gulls that kept building and moving as the afternoon progressed, as well as trying to pick out the few other gull species amongst the raft of Ring-billed.

While the gulls utilize the lake for their nocturnal roost, many other water-dependent birds including ducks, loons, grebes, eagles, herons, and kingfishers spend their winter dining on fish and other aquatic prey in this large and deep-water lake. The Melrose Christmas Bird Count capitalizes on the abundant and diverse collection of water birds by recruiting volunteers with pontoon boats and a crew of birders to zigzag across the lake to identify and tally the birds.

The challenges of surveying birds from a boat are great. Bright and blinding sun, skittish birds, especially ducks that take wing when a boat approaches, even slight waves that cause binoculars to sway up and down, and wind that feeds more waves.

This year's bird crew on Lake Santa Fe tallied a tremendous number of individual birds and identified many species. But perhaps the most exciting moments were finding a rare Surf Scoter that was nestled amongst the thousands of Ruddy Ducks, followed by an even rarer Red Phalarope doing its lazy spin on top of the water. These observations mark only the fourth record for Surf Scoter and the second record for Red Phalarope in Alachua County.

The other birding teams of volunteers were making waves as well – although from the shores around Lakes Brooklyn, Geneva, Lily, Magnolia, Opal, Elizabeth, Hutchinson, Winnott, Wall, and other water bodies, as well as in the many fields and forests of the Melrose Count Circle.

Several records were set during this 32nd consecutive Melrose Christmas Bird Count. A Limpkin was spotted north of Keystone Heights, and a Ruby-throated Hummingbird - a species common during the summer but absent during the winter – was recorded west of Melrose. Several rare sparrows were added to the sightings - Bachman's, Henslow's, White-throated, and Grasshopper. Other rarities included a Barn Owl and a Hairy Woodpecker.

As the afternoon came to a close, 20,458 individual birds, representing a record-setting 132 species, were added to the record books. The Melrose bird survey results will be added to the national database of Christmas Bird Counts, which represent the world's longest-running wildlife census and contributes invaluable data to bird populations nationwide. Santa Fe Audubon Society would like to thank the numerous private businesses and residences who gave us permission to survey their properties. We are fortunate in the Melrose Count Circle to have many lakes and other natural areas, as well as an army of volunteers and landowners who value the beauty and presence of birds.

*Laura Berkelman
Melrose Circle Christmas Bird Count, Compiler*

2021 Christmas Bird Count

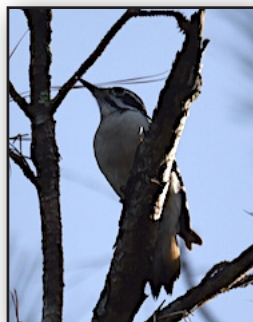


Two rare birds on Lake Santa Fe
Surf Scoter

Red Phalarope



Hairy Woodpecker



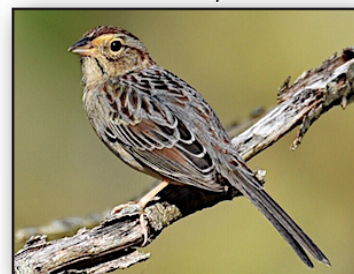
Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks
& Glossy Ibis



Eastern Bluebirds



Bachman's Sparrow



Northern Cardinal



American Kestrel



Sandhill Cranes



Chipping Sparrows

