Recent changes in winter crane use of Paynes Prairie. — William Bartram visited Alachua Savannah (Paynes Prairie) in what is now Alachua County, Florida, in 1774 when it was relatively dry. He provides an early account of the prairie and its wildlife (Van Doren 1928, Travels of William Bartram, New York, Dover Press). The prairie has been described by subsequent authors under conditions ranging from complete inundation to those of a very dry prairie (White undated, Ecosystem Analysis of Paynes Prairie, Univ. Fla. School of Forest Resources and Conservation, Research Report No. 24). During drier periods since at least the 17th century, the prairie has been intensively grazed (Arnade 1965, Cattle raising in Spanish Florida, St. Augustine Historical Society Pub. No. 21; White, op cit). For some years prior to acquisition by the State of Florida in 1970, the prairie was a commercial cattle ranch. The State now owns 18,000 acres, including a majority of the prairie basin and portions of the surrounding uplands. Private ownership accounts for about 3,000 acres of the approximately 15,000 acres of prairie basin. This private land continues to be used for grazing and, to a lesser extent, agriculture.

The prairie has been known as a major wintering area for Greater Sandhill Cranes (*Grus canadensis tabida*) in Florida (Williams and Phillips 1972, Auk 89: 548; Walkinshaw 1975, Cranes of the World, New York, Winchester Press). Williams and Phillips (op. cit.) estimated a peak wintering population of 1,000 cranes in January 1969 and 1,800 cranes in January 1970. The peak during January 1977 was less than 400 cranes.

Winter crane use has principally been on that part of the prairie east of Highway 441. Cranes roosting on this part of the prairie have been observed since fall 1971. On 17 January 1972, 252 cranes roosted at one of the three main roost sites on the prairie. On 28 November 1973, 166 cranes went to roost at this site. One hundred and twelve cranes roosted there 15 January 1974, 10.7% of which arrived from feeding areas off the prairie. Previously no birds were observed arriving from feeding areas off Paynes Prairie. On 21 January 1975, of 81 cranes roosting at the site, 53.1% arrived from off the prairie. No observations were made during 1976, but on 1 February 1977, 137 cranes roosted at two sites on this same area of the prairie, and all of the birds had been feeding on the privately owned areas of the prairie. Periodic roosting counts at the other two main roosting areas on the prairie indicate a similar trend.

During this same 6-year period, there has been a dramatic increase in the population of Greater Sandhill Cranes in eastern North America (Shroufe 1976, Proc. Int. Crane Workshop 1: 51-58; Melvin 1977, Fla. Field Nat. 5: 8-11). Since the winter of 1973-1974

there has been an increase in the number of cranes wintering on agricultural lands in Marion and Lake Counties. Three birds color marked on Paynes Prairie in February 1974 and February 1976 were subsequently observed wintering on areas in these two counties during 1975 and 1977. Many cranes which previously wintered on Paynes Prairie now are apparently wintering elsewhere.

Since State acquisition, land-use practices on the prairie have changed substantially. The intensity of cattle grazing was reduced and finally eliminated in 1975. The effects of grazing were to be replaced with fire and water management, but increases in vegetation height have made much of the prairie unattractive to cranes. Some increased crane use has resulted from controlled burning of several hundred acres during 1976-77. About 95 cranes foraged throughout the winter on these burned areas. However, the increased crane use noted for the roost area during 1977 was probably the result of expanded cultivation and grazing on the private land adjacent to the state holdings. It is hoped that controlled burning can be continued and expanded and that other positive management practices will be implemented. It would be unfortunate if an area so uniquely suited for Sandhill Cranes did not support an appropriate winter population.— Stephen A. Nesbitt, *Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Wildlife Research Laboratory, 4005 S Main Street, Gainesville, Florida 32601.*

Laughing Gull breeds in northeast Florida. —Although the Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*) is widely distributed along the Florida coast during the breeding season, it only breeds in a few widely scattered localities, chiefly the Tampa Bay area (Howell 1932). The species has recently established a large breeding colony at Merritt Island, Brevard County, which contained 1050 nests in June 1974 (Jim Baker in Ogden 1974) and 1350 pairs in 1975 (A. E. Ellis in Ogden 1975). In "about 1866" the species bred in "large numbers" on an island in the Halifax River near Port Orange, Volusia County (Howell 1932).

On 30 May 1976 we found a single pair of Laughing Gulls nesting on (Big) Bird Island in Nassau Sound, Duval County, Florida. The nest contained two eggs, and we observed an adult incubating. On 8 June Loftin returned during a very high tide and found the two eggs awash. The adults were wheeling and screaming overhead. On 10 July the first nest was gone, but another nest, also with two eggs, was about 10 m from where the first had been. This is very late for a first nest of this species in Florida (Dinsmore and Schreiber 1974), therefore it was probably a second effort by the same pair of birds. On 25 July there were two downy chicks in the nest. On 1 August no young