



Phone 863.465.2571  
123 MAIN DRIVE ★ VENUS, FLORIDA 33960

To: Highlands News-Sun

From: Archbold Biological Station

Date Published: May 26, 2017

Author: Archbold Biological Station

### **Overlooked and Imperiled Sparrow Gets the Spotlight**

Newcomers to Highlands County are often impressed with the local bird life. Sandhill Cranes, Roseate Spoonbills, and Great Egrets dazzle with their size and beauty. Wood Storks feed in roadside ditches and Osprey nest in trees and on utility poles. Locals appreciate the delicate beauty of Tree Swallow flocks in the evening and know to await the appearance of Swallow-tailed Kites as one of the first signs of spring. Over 200 kinds of birds can be seen in Highlands County and some are better known than others. “There is one bird in Highlands County that most people who live or visit here have never heard of, and that’s unfortunate, because it’s Florida’s rarest and most imperiled one,” says Archbold’s Education Coordinator Dustin Angell. He aims to change that with a new photo essay called “Saving the Florida Grasshopper Sparrow.”

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology published Angell’s photos in the spring issue of their *Living Bird* magazine. The 10 page story, told through 31 photos and minimal text, was their first time using a photo essay format instead of a more traditional written article. The photos show off Florida’s beautiful wild places and highlight the work of conservation biologists from nonprofits and agencies, including Archbold’s research on the sparrows that live at the Avon Park Air Force Range. The photo essay shows the sparrow and its home, describes how loss of habitat and other factors are hurting this found-only-in-Florida sparrow subspecies, and demonstrates

how wildlife biologists are trying to keep the bird from going extinct in the wild, which some worry will happen in as little as the next ten years.

Angell's photos are giving the sparrow some much needed attention. The *Living Bird* is an award-winning publication known for articles about birds and conservation. Its website, *All About Birds*, which also published the story, receives over 70 million page views from 15 million users annually. The Executive Director of Cornell University's Lab of Ornithology, Dr. John Fitzpatrick, thinks the sparrow's photo essay is important: "The Florida Grasshopper Sparrow story was a signature piece for us to carry, as this endangered bird represents a flagship species for one of America's rarest and most beautiful habitats – the dry prairie of central Florida. This happens to be a habitat that I personally know and love, so it was a special privilege for me."

Archbold's Director of Avian Ecology, Dr. Reed Bowman, works directly with the Avon Park Air Force Range to oversee Florida Grasshopper Sparrow monitoring on their property. Bowman says, "Over the last 10 years, the sparrow population across its entire range has declined by nearly 90%, even as we implemented management intended to benefit it. Our work now balances continued research on the wild birds and creation of healthy captive populations so that if the worst happens, we might still save the sparrow through reintroductions."

"This bird may be gone before most people in Florida have even heard of it or the hard work of the people trying to save it," claims Angell. "Emotionally, that really bothers me, because it is almost like it's going extinct twice." Angell says his photos have a purpose, "I hope they teach us to be thoughtful about the trade-offs we've made in Florida in order to enjoy our current lifestyle. It's not about guilt or blame, but recognizing those losses as part of our story and deciding what we want our next chapter to be."

**Photo 1: One of the Florida Grasshopper Sparrows in a captive breeding program**  
**Photo: Dustin Angell**



**Photo 2: Archbold researchers with a Florida Grasshopper Sparrow at the Avon Park Air Force Range**

