Drilling to Disaster?

For the possibility of 10 months’ to three and one half years’ supply of oil, and a small, undefined number of jobs available to Florida’s work force, oil drilling off the coast of Florida seriously imperils our natural resources, as well as Florida’s tourism industry. The facts below support this conclusion.

- **FACT:** NOAA documents 32 oil spills, of every size and source, in the U.S. thus far in 2009.
- **FACT:** Since August 21 this year, 400 barrels a day have spilled into the Timor Sea off the northwest coast of Australia; 1400 barrels spilled 30 miles off Louisiana’s coast, producing a 16-by 3-mile oil slick described as a “rainbow” by Coast Guard aircraft; basketball-sized oil globs on the beaches of Padre Island, TX, where visitors were advised to use baby oil to remove the crude tar.
- **FACT:** Hurricane Katrina destroyed or damaged 167 oil platforms, almost shutting down Gulf oil production, and creating a 17,643-barrel oil slick that was visible from space.
- **FACT:** Oil spills in cold climates are somewhat easier to clean up and pose slightly less threat to ecosystems and wildlife than oil spills in warmer climates. Florida is subtropical, and any oil or toxin spill will have a significantly larger impact on human endeavors and wildlife, and the ecosystems which support those endeavors and that wildlife.
- **FACT:** The “loop current” in the Gulf of Mexico could transport any oil spill in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico along the entire coast of the Florida peninsula, contaminating heavily populated coastal areas, as well as those beaches and ecosystems that enable Florida’s tourism industry.

- **FACT:** An oil spill in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico has the potential to impact every Florida tidal estuary, Florida’s Ten Thousand Islands, Florida Bay, the Florida Keys and John Pennekamp State Park (the only coral reef in the lower 48 states, already impacted by climate change), and then flow north in the Gulf Stream to wreak havoc along the Atlantic Coast as far as Newfoundland.
- **FACT:** In 2005 former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld opposed oil drilling off the Florida panhandle due to the oil industry’s conflict with training operations from military installations that occupy the Florida Panhandle; Robert Gates, current Secretary of Defense, will soon oppose oil drilling off Florida for the same reasons, according to Florida Senator Bill Nelson.
- **FACT:** 37 million acres of seabed in the central and western Gulf of Mexico are already available for oil exploration; only 7 million of those acres (19 percent) have been leased and explored.
- **FACT:** The Interior Department’s Minerals and Mining Service (MMS) estimates that there are about 6.25 billion barrels of oil in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico; the oil industry claims 25 billion.
- **FACT:** The U.S. consumes about 20 million barrels of oil each day,

Continues on page 3.
Field Trips

- **Friday thru Sunday, December 11-13, St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge Birding.**
  Morris Clark will lead us on a long weekend birding trip to a great place to see a large variety of birds, including wintering waterfowl, wading birds and Bald Eagles. The pace of the trip will be moderate with some walking. We plan to arrive Friday in time to bird the afternoon and will finish Sunday around noon. A boat ride down the Wakulla River within the State Park will definitely be included. Rooms are being held for us at the Best Western Wakulla Inn and Suites, located on Highway 98 near Crawfordville. To make your room reservations call 850-926-3737 and ask for the FMW Audubon group rates (king at $65 & double queens at $75, plus tax). To sign up send a $25 per participant contribution to FMW Audubon Society, and call Morris Clark at 968-5498 and leave your name, telephone number and e-mail address, or e-mail him at morrisclark@cox.net. A detailed itinerary will be e-mailed in early December.

- **Saturday, January 16, Roy Hyatt Environmental Center Birding.**
  Peggy Baker and Morris Clark will lead us along some of the 2.5 miles of trails within the Hyatt Center’s property in search of wintering birds. Hopefully, this trip will add additional bird species to the database of birds using the property. Expect some moderate, but slow, walking on good trails. Bring a picnic lunch to be eaten outside on the picnic tables or inside if weather dictates. Hot coffee will be brewed at lunchtime. Jennifer Hale Butera, the Hyatt Center’s naturalist, will be with us for the day and after lunch will be happy to give a tour of the teaching facilities to anyone interested. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the Hyatt Center located at 1300 Tobias Road, which is on Highway 97 one mile north of Kingsfield Road. We plan to finish by early afternoon.

- **Saturday, February 13, Blackwater River State Forest Winter Birding.**
  Jan Lloyd and Ann Forster will lead us in search of wintering sparrows and other birds within Blackwater River State Forest. We plan to spend most of the time in the limited access Hutton Unit behind the locked gates. Expect moderate, non-strenuous walking. Bring a picnic lunch. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the University Mall parking lot in front of the J.C. Penney Store or between 8:00 and 8:15 a.m. in front of the Harold store. We plan to return by early afternoon.

Chapter Meetings

Pensacola Junior College, Main Campus, 7 p.m., Baroco Science Center, Room 2142, unless otherwise noted. Guests are welcome!

- **December 10, 7 p.m. “A Night with John J. Audubon.”** Celebrate the holidays by joining FMWAS members at the Pensacola Museum of Art (PMA) to view the Audubon exhibit and enjoy light hors d’oeuvres. There will be a brief talk on Audubon’s life, his style and work methods before viewing the exhibit. A $5 donation for entry will be accepted at the door. The meeting is at the PMA at 407 South Jefferson Street, Pensacola.

- **January 28, 7 p.m. “A Night in Central America.”** World-traveling birder and adventurer John Winn will present our program about his treks in Central America where he visited Guatemala and Belize. His program will include pictures of the vibrant tropical birds as well as an account of local lore and traditions. John’s life list is the envy of every birder, and the tale of his experiences will be fascinating.

- **February 25, 7 p.m. “Tales from the Great Florida Birding Trail,” presented by Mark Kiser, coordinator for Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.**
Drilling to Disaster, continued from front page

of which about 12 million are imported; the MMS estimate of oil in the eastern Gulf of Mexico equals about 10 months’ supply at current consumption rates; the oil industry claims this would supply oil for about three and one half years.

FAQ: Any oil found in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico would not be available for about 10 years, in all probability, with absolutely no guarantee that it would be sold to the U.S. market.

FAQ: The consumption of fossil fuels is the principal source of carbon compounds contributing to climate change, verified by scientific research.

FAQ: The concentration of carbon compounds in the atmosphere was 280 parts per million at the dawn of the industrial age, about 2 and one half centuries ago; today it is 387 ppm and rising, forecast to be as high as 500 ppm at the end of the twenty first century, again confirmed by scientific research.

FAQ: Climate change is a proven phenomenon, endorsed by more than 2500 scientists around the world, including every Nobel Laureate; the only variable is how climate change will ultimately affect life on Earth; humanity ignores the climate change reality at its peril.

FAQ: The oil industry is a notoriously dirty one: contamination of ocean and fresh water resources by spills and toxins that adversely impact life on Earth and threaten those natural ecosystems upon which life depends are historically and scientifically known facts.

FAQ: 964,700 Floridians depend upon the $65 billion tourism industry for their livelihood, which would be severely impacted by even the tiniest of spills; the high-paying jobs promised by the oil industry probably would not be filled by Floridians, because those skills do not exist in Florida’s workforce; those jobs would most likely be filled by foreign workers or from other oil producing states depressed by the current economy.

Thanks to Michael MacDonald, Clearwater Audubon, for the considerable effort that went into writing this statement.
**FIELD NOTES**

by Bob Duncan

■ **FALL MIGRATION WAS SLOW,** with moist, warm, southerly winds prevailing through the first half of October. Migration of neotropical birds through the area was disappointing, but the first strong front on 17 October and subsequent fronts brought birds and relief from the heat. Though the volume of trans-Gulf migrants was still disappointing, outstanding vagrants from the west made up for it, as reports below will attest. The spectacle of an estimated 4000 **Broad-winged Hawks** at Ft. Morgan and hundreds at Gulf Breeze was impressive to the lucky birders who got to see it. Ft. Pickens was the place to be to catch some great birding. Let’s hope the road re-opens soon. Space limitations prevent all the great birds reported to me for this exceptional season from being in this issue.

■ **WESTERN BIRDS EAST**—A few birds normally found in the western states usually stray to our area each fall season. This season was remarkable. Patrick James spotted a **Lark Sparrow** at Ft. Pickens on 27 September. This handsome bird was seen by many observers and last noted 2 November by Cheryl Bunch. On 30 September, Lucy, Laura Catterton and I found a **Groove-billed Ani*** there and it was relocated by Alex Harper on 2 October. A member of the cuckoo order and an odd-looking species, it is very rare in our area. A male **Vermilion Flycatcher*** and **Western Kingbird*** were found at the Ft. Walton Spray Fields by Don Ware and J. Bochanski on 1 October. Both are rare birds. On October 6, I found a **Bell’s Vireo*** at Ft. Pickens, only the eighth area record of this primarily western species. A **Swainson’s Hawk***, sighted in Gulf Breeze on 18 October, was part of a large movement of raptors on the heels of the front. Topping off the list of western strays, was an **Ash-throated Flycatcher*** near my home 29 October. Peggy Baker and I found another at Ft. Pickens on 1 November.

■ **AUDUBON FIELD TRIP**—Some outstanding birds were found at Ft. Pickens during the F.M. Weston Audubon field trip led by the Duncans on 10 October. The **Groove-billed Ani***, present since 30 September was re-found by Martha Clark, to the delight of 22 fellow birders. A **Lark Sparrow*** and **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** were also great finds along with 8 species of raptors and 7 species of warblers. Ft. Pickens usually has a few surprises for birders.

■ **OTHER BIRDS**—Two **Barn Owls*** were flushed by the Duncans behind Battery Langdon on 19 October and again on 4 November. **Cape May Warblers*** are very scarce in fall migration because they migrate down the Atlantic Coast and avoid our area, but Patrick James photographed an adult male on 30 October at Naval Live Oaks, no mean task! Larry Goodman, Betsy Tetlow and the Duncans found a handsome male **Yellow-headed Blackbird** at Ft. Morgan on 2 November. Ned McMath’s **Magnificent Frigatebird** seen from the Garçon Point Bridge on 10 November was probably related to Tropical Storm Ida. An adult female **Summer Tanager** at Sue Peters-Ferree’s feeder from 24 October to 6 November must have been quite a treat.

■ **HAWKS GALORE**—The strong front of 16–18 October brought a spectacle of hawks migrating down the Santa Rosa peninsula. With the right weather conditions this is a regular phenomenon. The ingredients? A strong front in late September or early October with northerly winds shifting to northeast. Buteos are dependent on thermals for migration and are reluctant to cross water. Young hawks tend to drift to the coast with strong north winds and end up getting channeled down the peninsula, where they mill about in aerial “kettles” near the end of the peninsula. Imagine seeing hundreds of **Broad-winged Hawks** overhead at one time! That’s what Alan Sheppard witnessed 17 October at the end of Fairpoint Dr. in Gulf Breeze, and the Duncans on 18 October. Another front on 17 November brought a staggering count of ten **Swainson’s Hawks*** to the Ft. Walton Beach Spray Fields, an all time maximum daily count, witnessed by Merilu Rose, Jan Osborn, Sam Taggatz and other lucky birders.

■ **BIRD OF THE SEASON**—The discovery on 1 November of a **Green-tailed Towhee***, a bird of the Rocky Mountains, by the Duncans at Ft. Pickens was only the third ever for the state, pending acceptance by the Florida Ornithological Society Records Committee. Seventeen birders had the excitement of seeing or photographing this truly rare bird before Ida closed the road.

Species with asterisks require documentation so that they may be processed to become part of the ornithological record.

The Skimmer welcomes reports of noteworthy birds. If you have something to report, please call Bob or Lucy Duncan at 932-4792.
**Tripping in a Strange Land**

By Ann Forster

We just returned from a birding/cultural trip to northern Argentina. We had visited the southern part several years ago and have wanted to do this trip for years. The strange part is that Argentinians still have a colonial mentality. Argentinians identify with their European origins much more than they feel patriotism for Argentina.

A history of oppressive governments has much to do with this attitude. One of the manifestations of Europeanness is the use of European trees and shrubs in all the large cities to the virtual exclusion of native plants. You could be in Spain or Italy—South American flora is barely there. However, once you leave the cities (especially in the mountains) the forests are almost pristine and are full of birds and mammals. We visited several national parks and archaeological sites and birded in major habitats such as chaco (dry scrub forest) and yungas (wet mountain forest).

One of the highlights of the trip was the visit to spectacular Iguazu Falls. The Iguazu and Parana Rivers merge into a gorge called the Devil’s Throat. The water was very high in both rivers so the roar and spray at the overlook was compelling if not hypnotic. The Argentinians have done a wonderful job building sturdy but unobtrusive catwalks which give excellent views of the major cataracts that cover more than a mile of canyons and cliffs. Great Dusky Swifts fly directly through the falls and have nests glued to the rocks behind the falls themselves. Watching a group of these large birds burst through the torrent was just astounding, and there were several places where you could look directly into a nest. This is the first time we’ve ever looked a swift in the eye.

Another highlight involved a mammal. We were in another national park, the Ibera Marshes. Nature trails radiate out from the headquarters and our guide chose one that promised sightings of howler monkeys. As we birded along, we had stopped to tape in a woodpecker when one of the group noticed a beautiful spotted cat (Geoffrey’s Cat) walking on a trail leading toward us. We all froze and admired its lithe, graceful approach. He got closer until he was next to our leader. He then flopped down on the ground and cleaned his face. As soon as we started moving, he joined us. It turned out that he showed up at headquarters as a sick, starving kitten. They nursed him back to health and he lives in the wild, but he repays them by delighting unsuspecting tourists.

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**Skimming PERILS from ABOVE**

by Jere French

So far they’ve missed me, the squirrel bombardiers that live in the large hickory shading our deck. I’ve inspected the hurled nuts and notice only superficial tooth marks, leading me to believe that the miscreants are nature’s foremost environmental wastrels, or worse, that having spotted me they’ve chosen to take aggressive action against the intruder to their turf and damn the waste. So there I am, trying to enjoy the ambient autumn weather with a sandwich and a good book, and making myself an irresistible target. Or so it seems from the fire I draw. And recently, to add more drama to the mix, a pure white queen has joined their ranks. We named her Bianca.

So now, with Christmas coming, Joan, always the considerate one, has taken to leaving bread crumbs on the railing for Bianca and her followers, but the jays, progeny of more combative Jurassic predators, run them off. Perhaps the squirrels have come to assume that I’m in league with the jays; and while I can’t say for certain that they single me out as their primary target, I’m reminded of an experience in a Costa Rican forest during which I was all of a sudden attacked by a troupe of spider monkeys who pelted me from the trees with anything at hand, and, paraphrasing Gracie Allen, “when I say anything, I mean anything.”

And thus the Eastern Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*), that squabbling squatter in our garden, continues his territorial hegemony, even spreading his improvident ways across the Atlantic to Britain and Europe. Some years ago when I was working at Manchester University, I looked out my office window one unusually warm and sunny December afternoon to observe what appeared to be an old acquaintance, racing from tree to tree in a familiarly demented way. I asked a passing Brit, “Your squirrels out there in the oaks, they seem very similar to our own.”

She turned two shades of red, and I wished I hadn’t opened my mouth. “Similar? They bloody well are your own! They ran our native squirrel out of the territory, they did! Just took over the whole bloody country!” She paused for breath then started on me again, shaking her finger. “And you lot can bloody well take ‘em back!”

“Happy to,” I said, rising to the challenge, “just as soon as you take back your cheesy sparrows and your odious starlings!”

We went to lunch to discuss arrangements for a prisoner exchange.
he first four months of the school year saw remarkable activity at the Roy Hyatt Environmental Center (RHEC). The October Open House success is eclipsed only by the dynamic implementation of the third and final year of a grant-supported curriculum targeting 10 Escambia County elementary schools.

Over 500 visitors joined businesses and environmental organizations at the open house. The Dauphin Island Sea Lab, the Department of Environmental Protection, Escambia Amateur Astronomy Association, Escambia County Department of Solid Waste Management, Greater Good Children’s Fest, Washington High School Marine Science, Florida Turtle Conservation Trust, Diamondback Terrapin Working Group, Gopher Tortoise Council, Nine Mile Spinal Center, Santa Rosa County Extension Service, and of course FMWAS, all manned displays. Volunteers from Washington, Pine Forest, and Catholic High Schools, FMWAS, Cantonment Rotary, and many friends energized the event.

Kudos to Audubon Naturalist—Naturalist, Jennifer Hale Butera, has been indefatigable in completing pre-field trip visits to all second and fifth grades in the target schools—contacting a total of 71 classes with 1068 students and their 71 teachers! She has trained volunteers who have adopted eight of the ten “bird schools”: Gloria Byrd at Weis; Jim Gordon at Semmes; Carolyn Tate at Ensley and Warrington; Jane Colgan at Yneistra and Spencer Bibbs; Mary Jean Miller at Holm; and Jane Barber at Sherwood. As part of the grant requirement and to further interest in birding, they will deliver bird feeders constructed by volunteer Charles Gaut to the schools and will keep them supplied with seed. If you are interested in helping with post-field trip visits or delivery of bird feeders/seed, please contact Jennifer Hale Butera at 850-324-3161 or jennhale8@yahoo.com.

Arrangements have been made for Jenn to present our duo of Eastern Screech Owls, “John” and “Jamie,” at three to six elementary school assemblies in Santa Rosa County this year. This marks the first chance to extend our program into schools in Santa Rosa.

Congratulations to Lee Freeman and Scout Troop 106!

The raptor cage at the Center was further secured and predator proofed. Eagle Scout Lee Freeman of Troop 106, Gulf Coast Council, prepared the cage for larger raptors we anticipate receiving in the future. His team of Scouts handily completed cage additions and adjustments for his Eagle project.

RHEC field trips—By fall break, field trips to RHEC were attended by over 1500 students and 270 adults, and Jenn and Molly O’Connor report a nearly full schedule through the end of the school year. They hope to top the 9000 students seen last year. Each student visiting RHEC receives a unit of Audubon Adventures keyed to one of the lessons they were taught that day, a wonderful way to reinforce that field experience!

Funding support—We are grateful for the funding support received from National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and Southern Company (Gulf Power) that allows FMWAS to retain Jenn’s energy and enthusiasm, and to the Audubon Adventures donors who help FMWAS provide each student with a special take-home lesson from the field trip. We need your continuing contributions and volunteer time to meet the matching requirements of the grant.
The Francis M. Weston Audubon Society fiscal year ended on May 31, 2009, and the Audit Committee has submitted their report. We would like to share the results with our members.

For the 2008-2009 fiscal year total revenues were $24,707.28 while expenses totaled $25,674.25. The net operating result for the fiscal year was a negative $966.97. While this appears to be a shortfall reported within the 2008-2009 fiscal year, the expenditures were met with contributions and a grant brought forward from the previous fiscal year.

Thanks to the generosity of our membership, we have been able to continue our support of Audubon Adventures and the Center Program at the Roy Hyatt Environmental Center while providing for the Society’s general operations.

The Francis M. Weston Audubon Society’s cash assets, consisting of a checking account and CDs, totaled $31,361.98 at the beginning of the fiscal year and $30,395.41 at the end of the fiscal year. As of May 31, 2009, the total value of the three CDs was $15,965.98.

The Pensacola Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will be held on Saturday, December 19.

Many western species have shown up in our area this fall, and we hope to find some of them on the CBC this year. We will record not just species but every single bird within our 15-mile diameter circle. Hundreds of CBCs, with thousands of volunteer observers, will be taking place all across the United States during the time frame of December 14 through January 5. This year is the one hundred tenth CBC conducted by the Audubon Society, a tradition started in 1900. The data gathered in CBCs are analyzed, and trends are shown depicting whether a species is declining, gaining or stabilizing.

Every person wishing to help during the CBC is very welcome. Expertise level is not a criterion for helping as each party leader is an expert. The more eyes and ears we have the better the results.

If you would like to help, please contact our compiler, Bill Bremser, at 850-934-3395 or e-mail billbremser@gmail.com.

There will be a compilation at 6 p.m. at Bill and Greta Bremser’s home with food and refreshments for all volunteers.

Hope to see you there.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is coming!

Birdwatchers coast to coast are invited to participate in the 13th annual Great Backyard Bird Count, Friday, February 12 through Monday, February 15, 2010. Participants in the free event will join tens of thousands of volunteers of all levels of birding experience to count birds in their own backyards, local parks or wildlife refuges.

Each checklist you submit helps researchers learn more about how the birds are doing—and how to protect them. Last year, participants turned in more than 93,600 checklists online, creating the continent’s largest instantaneous snapshot of bird populations ever recorded.

Taking part in the Great Backyard Bird Count is a great way to get outside with family and friends, have fun, and help birds—all at the same time.

Check our website www.fmwaudubon.org or http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/ for more information.
**JOIN NATIONAL AUDUBON** and this chapter with a one-year introductory membership for only $20 ($15 for students and seniors). You will receive Audubon Magazine, the Florida Naturalist and the Skimmer. Fill in the form below and make checks payable to National Audubon. Mail all membership forms to FMWAS.

Our online edition of the Skimmer is in full color at www.fmwaudubon.org (<http://www.fmwaudubon.org>)

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