The purpose of this society is to promote the understanding and preservation of wildlife and the environment that supports it. The society also promotes the cause of conservation of all natural resources."

The Board of Directors and Officers of the Francis M. Weston Audubon Society are deeply concerned about the environmental tragedy caused by the failure of an oil well drilling operation in the Gulf of Mexico. While the resulting millions of gallons of oil represent a horrific threat to both the coastal ecosystems that rim the Gulf as well as the life of its open waters, and probably beyond, we believe it also underscores and strengthens our opposition to offshore drilling along the Florida and Gulf coasts. In response to this ecological disaster and the impending assault on our beaches and marshes should oil and tar come ashore in Northwest Florida, we hereby present our position:

1. We remain opposed to offshore drilling for oil and gas, especially along Florida’s coast. The current oil leak proves that Florida’s coast is not protected by state or national boundaries.

2. We stand ready to provide technical assistance to Audubon of Florida and local agencies, both governmental and NGO, within our expertise as stewards of conservation and students of bird life.

3. We recognize that the responsible companies that caused the disaster are the primary workforce for cleaning up tainted ecosystems and damaged wildlife, and that the general public is limited in what it can do to assist. Nevertheless, should volunteers be sought to assist with beach cleanup and wildlife rescue, we encourage our members, who are interested and able, to receive proper training in hazardous materials (HAZMAT) operations.

4. We recommend that those who are interested in volunteering in other ways not requiring HAZMAT training consider registering with Audubon of Florida using this website: https://secure3.convio.net/nasaud/site/Advocacy?pagename=homepage&page=UserAction&id=833&autologin=true <https://secure3.convio.net/nasaud/site/Advocacy?pagename=homepage&page=UserAction&id=833&autologin=true>
Field Trips

■ Saturday, June 26, Native Medicinal Plants.
James Burkhalter will lead us on a field trip featuring native medicinal plants. We will look at plants growing along the Edward Ball Nature Trail on the University of West Florida campus. The trip will also include a visit to the Michael I. Cousins Herbarium that includes over 22,200 specimens. Expect easy walking. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the parking lot in front of the Target Store located near the intersection of University Parkway and Nine Mile Road. We plan to finish by noon.

■ Saturday, July 31, Meaher State Park Native Plants.
James Burkhalter will lead us along the two nature trails in this attractive little park located in the Mobile Delta in search of native plants and wildflowers. Expect easy walking. Bring a picnic lunch. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the parking lot of the Publix store located on the corner of Nine Mile Road and Pine Forest Road. We plan to return after lunch.

Chapter Meetings

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

■ Following the traditional summer hiatus, the next chapter meeting will be held in August. Look for details in the next issue of the Skimmer and on the Chapter website at www.fmwaudubon.org/.

Board of Directors Meetings

■ Saturday, June 26, 8:30 a.m. until 4 p.m., annual planning meeting.

Other Events

■ Wednesday, July 8, Florida Native Plant Society meeting, 6:30 p.m. Tryon Branch Public Library, 1200 Langley Avenue. Malcom Strickland, a volunteer with Operation Migration, will present “Recovery Efforts for the Whooping Crane.” The Whooping Crane is an endangered species and is the tallest bird in North America.

How to Become a Member of FMWAS

Fill out the form on page 8 to become a member of the National Audubon Society. With membership you will receive Audubon Magazine, the Florida Naturalist and the Skimmer. Mail your check to Francis M. Weston Audubon Society, P.O. Box 17484, Pensacola, FL 32522. Thank you.

The Birds We Don’t Know

by Ann Forster

News programs updating us about the oil spill and disaster often mention colonies of Brown Pelicans. They are big, obvious and beloved. It’s only natural that we worry most about the birds we know best, our friends, the near-shore birds. We see a Bald Eagle many mornings on the island across from our house. We have an active Osprey nest in our backyard and cringe at the thought of those beautiful birds coated with oil or feeding oiled fish to those wonderful babies. We have more Least Terns feeding out front than we have had in years...wouldn’t you know. A few Black Skimmers cruise by in the late afternoon right along the tide line. There are other species that we don’t usually think of as visiting the shore, but they will be impacted too. Doves land on the sand spit along the island and eat sand to provide grit for their crops. Fish Crows and Common Grackles patrol the beach looking for tidbits left by other birds or people, and Clapper Rails feed right at the edge of the cordgrass, which is sure to be contaminated.

A cohort of bird life that we don’t know very well—the most vulnerable of all—is the pelagic group. These ocean-going birds generally stay off the continental shelf where there is now reckless drilling for oil. We see them on such rare occasions that we hardly think of them as part of “our” avifauna. Spending most of their lives feeding or diving into the Gulf waters and resting on its surface, they don’t have a chance. Even if cleaning worked, they are nowhere near being recovered because they live so far from shore. Large rafts of phalaropes are often observed in winter from deep water fishing boats. Seasonally many species of ducks—scoters, scaup, and trans-Gulf migrants such as Blue-winged Teal and Shovelers—are way out there, all at risk. The first dead birds we saw on the news were Northern Gannets and Magnificent Frigatebirds. Even though they depend on offshore waters, we do see them from our beaches too. But their fate is representative of the disaster that all our familiar bird friends, and those interesting strangers from the deep, are facing.
passing pelican got me thinking. Is one day a year for counting backyard birds really enough? Shouldn’t I be aware of what’s flying through my own personal space on a more regular basis: feeding, holing up for the night, just passing through, or returning year after year and raising a family—that sort of “citizen science” thing?

And in a way I’ve been doing just that, counting yard birds that is, since we moved into this woodland-by-the-bay, 15 years ago. In fact I’ve made a kind of game of it, which I play against myself, like solitaire. If I have any need for an excuse to visit the bayside of our lot, I can find time to play—otherwise I might be obliged to do something more useful. So it’s a sly little game I play while wrestling with greenbrier and other unbridled creepers that menace my garden. I simply go about various tasks, binoculars dangling from my neck, pausing occasionally to scan the sky, the bay, the branches overhead. I set myself a goal of ten birds. Fewer species than ten means I lose, at least for that outing. Well it’s a game after all.

And I play it year round, hoping to reach ten before the telephone or some such interruption takes me away. And if ten is par, any extra bird is a plus—golf in reverse as it were. And beyond the pleasure it brings, I’ve concluded that over time, through this simple, albeit unscientific and highly subjective reckoning, a kind of mini-census begins to take shape.

I’ve learned who is here nearly every day, who shows up in a timely manner in spring and fall, and who is only in my garden because he’s probably lost. And from their numbers, I know that they recognize a friendly refuge as well. We have an abundance of mature native trees and shrubs, now hosting nests of thrashers, jays, doves, woodpeckers, mockingbirds, and wrens—all in apparent harmony. We use no pesticides, herbicides, or artificial fertilizers—something everyone should consider when planning a bird-friendly garden. And although I keep no formal charts, I’m aware of who has come in greater flocks, whose numbers have declined; and, sadly, who has not shown up at all.

And I always look for Brown Pelicans diving near my dock, or perching patiently on posts, waiting for the fishing to improve. I like them the best, ungainly in appearance yet graceful in flight. They are a daily reminder of the special nature of this place, and we even have them flying through our living room, in a Walter Anderson block print. More importantly, they remind me of the efforts made to save them from extinction not so many years ago. An old story in Tall Timbers, told by our own Francis Weston, reminds me of the bird’s catastrophic decline during the 1950s due to our poorly regulated use of pesticides.

And now this grand, iconic bird of the Gulf coast is once again in danger—again the victim of human carelessness. I wonder, with new alternative energy resources rapidly emerging, will we continue to endanger our Florida wildlife by allowing oil drilling in our magnificent, bountiful Gulf? Haven’t we learned our lesson by now?
Spring migration started slowly. The first three weeks of April, our optimum month for migrants, were dull, very dull. But on 22 April, the dam burst and migrants finally arrived with the Duncans and Cecil and Pam Brown tallying 17 species of warblers at Ft. Morgan. The remainder of the season produced great birding, culminating in a spectacular fallout at Ft. Pickens on 3 May. Patrick James and Alex Harper proved that good birding is not confined to our favorite haunts with good results at Gulf Islands National Seashore (GINS) Naval Live Oak Reservation.

Least Terns, Black Skimmers and Snowy Plovers have returned in numbers to their post-Ivan nesting areas at GINS. Eight Gull-billed Tern nests are among them, the most ever for our area. I write this with great trepidation for them as the trauma of the oil spill unfolds.

Winter Leftovers—The Green-tailed Towhee* that caused such a sensation last winter at Ft. Pickens continued to 12 March. The Lark Sparrows there lingered to 10 March (Bob and Lucy Duncan). The Ft. Walton Beach Spray Field's male Vermilion Flycatcher was last seen 4 March (Bob Duncan, John Grossa) and the Say's Phoebe* was present there to 23 March. Bill and Greta Bremser’s Dickcissel* stayed at their feeders to 9 March.

Cuckoo Invasion—This area is lucky to receive one seasonal report of the furtive Black-billed Cuckoo*, but this season was different, with no fewer than ten reports of this species that winters in South America. The first sighting was my own in my neighborhood on 21 April. Then followed Patrick James’s report of one at Naval Live Oaks on 22 April; another by Lucy Duncan at Ft. Pickens on 24 April; another the same day by Patrick James at Brown’s Pond, Naval Live Oaks; another on 25 April in Gulf Breeze by Lucy Duncan; yet another the same day at Ft. Pickens by Alan Sheppard; yet another on 26 April at Naval Live Oaks by Wes Tallyn and finally another by me near my home in Gulf Breeze on 28 April. The 4 May fallout produced two more at Ft. Pickens (Alan Sheppard, Carol Ascherfeld, Lucy Duncan). Why the influx this season? This is a long distance migrant. Did a strong El Niño year disrupt its normal migratory pattern? Who knows?

Other Sightings—Two hundred White Pelicans spotted by Chris Davis 10 March at Solutia, Inc. were on their way to breeding grounds in the Great Basin. Swallow-tailed Kites were reported by several observers with a maximum of 15 near Milton seen by Merilu Rose on 11 March. The classy Scissor-tailed Flycatcher is a species that winters in small numbers in south Florida and returns each spring to the southern plains. One lingered on a Pensacola Airport fence 24–30 March (James Pfeiffer, Powers McLeod). Another was present in Gulf Breeze 1 May (Bob and Lucy Duncan). Also present there 26–28 April was a rare Lincoln’s Sparrow* (Lucy and Bob Duncan). Handsome Lark Sparrows turned up 28 March at Perdido Key (Lloyd Davis) and in Pensacola 16 April (James Pfeiffer). A Red-throated Loon surfacing next to his boat 18 April in Gulf Breeze surprised James Pfeiffer. Thomas Barbig reported a very late Brown Creeper at his home on 11 April and a very rare Mourning Warbler* at Ft. Pickens 9 April. James Pfeiffer’s Upland Sandpiper* downtown on 4 May was at an unlikely location. At Opal Beach mud flats 10 May I found five species of plovers and a rare Wilson’s Phalarope*.

The Grand Finale—On 3 May, with a squall line moving slowly through the area, Lucy and I found ourselves at Ft. Pickens looking through windshield wipers at oaks laden with warblers. In spite of this handicap, we tallied 18 warbler species during this heavy fallout. Hoping the birds would not leave, we returned the next morning and were joined by Carol Ascherfeld, Laura Catterton, Patrick and Chris James, and Janet and John DeLorge. Most of the birds were still around and we found 18 warblers and 92 total species for the day just at Ft. Pickens. Besides the Black-billed Cuckoos mentioned above, the heavy fallout produced these rarities: Black-whiskered Vireo* (Bob Duncan et al.); Philadelphia Vireo* (Patrick James et al.); Yellow-bellied Flycatcher* (Bob and Lucy Duncan); and Shiny Cowbird* (Bob and Lucy Duncan et al.). The day was topped off with three Western Kingbirds* spotted by Alan Sheppard near our home in Gulf Breeze.

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.
In the Third World

by Ann Forster

I picked up an anthology of travel humor entitled There Is No Toilet Paper on the Road Less Traveled. The editor correctly points out that interesting travel articles are impossible when trips are problem free. Our recent trip to the Yucatán is a case in point. We had good lodgings, good food, good birds, gorgeous weather. The airlines were on time and so was our luggage. Well, honestly I am left to contemplate those things that could have gone wrong and how to cope with them.

Travel in the third world does require some thought and preparation to avoid problems.

Sickness—The most common ailments are gastrointestinal upsets. These are much less common than in the past thanks to the availability of clean water. Coca-Cola and Pepsi have facilities in every corner of the globe, so bottled water is available. USE IT! My guess is that 90% of GI problems start with contaminated water. Do not use water from the big bottle at the end of the hotel hall. It was probably filled with a garden hose. Use purified water for tooth brushing too. In the event that you do have an upset stomach—and remember you are changing foods, time zones, and probably eating habits too. In the event that you do have an upset stomach—and hotel hall. It was probably filled with a garden hose. Use purified water for tooth brushing too. In the event that you do have an upset stomach—and remember you are changing foods, time zones, and probably eating habits so some digestive excitement is to be expected—start with a mild remedy first. Chew Pepto-Bismol tablets. Don't leap straight into Imodium. Take both of these antidiarrheals with you and perhaps a general antibiotic. And they are not kidding about the toilet paper. Take some with you and replenish your stock at every hotel. Because toilet roll placement seems to be an afterthought, it is a good idea to locate the roll before sitting down. It may be over your shoulder or on the far wall.

Plumbing—One of the fun things about third world travel is the challenge of figuring out the plumbing if you are lucky enough to have some. In Spanish speaking countries “C” may signify Caliente or Hot so the hot and cold knobs may have switched places. This makes taking showers adventurous because you fiddle with the left hand knob hoping for more hot water and chances are it is going to be wrong.

Transportation—We have traveled mostly in Latin America. The roads are not good and some are incredibly bad. We have never had nerve enough to do our own driving, so when problems occur we go into our Zen mode and the driver/owner/guide gets it fixed in no time. That’s the beauty of hiring a guide or going on a tour.

In the Yucatán

by Lucy Duncan

After 15 days with a rental car, a map, and a smattering of Spanish, we finished our March 2010 trip to the Yucatán with a leisurely hacienda stay. We spent four days in colonial Mérida, visited remote Mayan ruins while staying at a jungle lodge, climbed the tallest Mayan pyramid, and recorded 206 species of birds. Only two hours from Houston, the Yucatán offers colorful motmots, araçaris and toucans—just a few of the 543 species of birds found there.

Driving in Mexican cities is an adventure. I’ve often thought that Mexicans grease the sides of their vehicles so they will slide past one another in tight traffic. Lots of horn blowing makes it seem that most vehicles run more on testosterone than gasolina! And yet you see few accidents. Mexico has finally erected highway signs taking most of the guesswork out of getting where you want to go. Bob (my husband) says a Mexican town is like a crab trap: You can get in pretty easily, but finding your way out is an adventure! (In Dzibilchchen, Campeche, we found ourselves following an ancient green John Deere through narrow streets to the edge of town where the farmer pointed us toward the highway!) The major highways are fine once you learn to look out for topes (speed bumps) in villages and towns and dodge derumbas (potholes). As every tope slows a wise driver, it becomes an economic opportunity for local vendedores selling juice, coconuts, fruit and Chiclets. Yes, Chiclets! When you stay in the city, you don’t need a car as taxis are everywhere and cheap.

City adventures. The free, bilingual magazine Yucatán Today is readily available, has city and area maps, and information about transportation, restaurants, hotels, artisan shops, museums, hospitals, gasoline stations, consulates, and more. However, it really should have a list of frequently asked questions, like ¿Donde esta el baño? (Where’s the bathroom?) A city map in hand and you’re ready to explore. Most hotel managers will recommend restaurants, but finding your own café is part of the fun. If all else fails, go to the zocolo, the plaza at the heart of every Mexican city or town. There you’ll find the main cathedral, restaurants, sidewalk cafés, museums, and ancient historical edifices. Activities crank up there around 6 p.m. when Mexico’s personality unfolds with dancing, concerts, speeches or comic routines, handicrafts, and families strolling in the evening air. Imagine every vibrant color and taste, and you’ve got the idea of the zocolo.

Birding.Luckily, the Zonas Arqueológicas (Mayan ruins) are among the best places for birding. The periphery of each site typically has forest and plenty of birds. Enthusiasm over the birds you see may attract attention from the locals. Jumping up and down and pointing is a sure way to do this. Be prepared for an entourage to walk along with you, each person scanning the vegetation and pointing out birds to you. And believe it or not, the locals see twice as many as you do even without binoculars!

Warnings. If you are in remote areas or staying in thatched buildings, turn on the light before going into the bathroom at night. Take our word for it. Our friend Pam found a boa constrictor wrapped around her toilet seat on our last trip, completely eclipsing the feisty scorpion in our basin! Frogs in toilets can create some surprise especially if they jump. So, use your flashlight at night both inside and outside. Anticipate the unexpected when driving, and no matter how delicious that roadside fresh-squeezed juice looks, think twice.
Marine ecologist Dr. Jane Lubchenco, administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, spoke at the National Museum of Natural History in March, over a month before the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Her message on restoring the bounty of the world’s oceans is particularly relevant to the Gulf spill catastrophe.

“We’ve truly begun to appreciate how vulnerable and valuable ocean ecosystems are. They’re so vast, so immense, that people previously assumed they were infinitely bountiful and infinitely resilient. We also now realize the full extent to which we depend upon oceans for our own well-being. Seafood is the sole or primary source of protein for more than a billion people worldwide. Half of Americans live in coastal areas. I’ve spoken with people all around the country, asking them, “What do you want from oceans, and what do you think we need from oceans?” Their answers boil down to: clean beaches, healthy seafood, abundant wildlife, vibrant coastal communities, stable fisheries, great recreational options, clean energy and good jobs. There are many other benefits that oceans provide—oxygen, for example, that we breathe, or protection of coasts from storms. But the full extent to which human well-being is dependent on healthy oceans is something most people haven’t appreciated. I would suggest that what we’re seeing globally is a very significant depletion and disruption of ocean ecosystems, but it is not hopeless.”

David Ringer, Audubon’s Mississippi River Initiative Communications Coordinator.

“I would like to see people make a connection to this incident [oil in the Gulf of Mexico] and their everyday behavior, to realize that our individual choices every day have a tremendous effect on the planet and all the life we share this planet with.”

We all get sheets of address labels from every known and some unknown organizations. One of the best uses for these labels is putting them in your books...especially your bird books. Bird books are forever being left on picnic tables or getting mixed up with the books of other birders on an outing. I keep a few of them in my travel kit to put on checklists and handouts so that I don’t lose valuable information. They’re also great for camera and scope lens covers. —Ann Forster

A Good Idea!
Awards Presented at FMWAS Annual Meeting and Banquet on May 27

The Conservation Award for 2010 was presented to the BCR Foundation for its diligent support of Audubon programs and the generous gift of the Nature Conservancy Betty and Crawford Rainwater Perdido River Nature Preserve. The award was accepted by Elizabeth Rainwater Woolf and Kenneth Woolf. 

**Pictured from left to right: Jim Brady, Kenneth Woolf, and Elizabeth Rainwater Woolf.**

Curtis Kingsbery Education Award 2010 was accepted by Rick and Molly O’Connor in recognition of their dedication to environmental education at Washington High School, at the Roy Hyatt Environmental Center and their research with the Diamondback Terrapin Working Group and the Florida Turtle Conservation Trust.

**Pictured from left to right: Rick O’Connor, Molly O’Connor, and Peggy Baker.**

The Business Environmental Award for 2009, presented to Navy Federal Credit Union, was accepted by Ms. Jamie McDonald, Assistant Vice President for Greater Pensacola Operations. The award recognizes the sustainable green building and development practices implemented by NFCU at its Pensacola facility.

**Pictured from left to right: Jamie McDonald and Peggy Baker.**

A Certificate of Appreciation was presented to Powers and Rosann McLeod who are always there when FMWAS asks, and who bring their special brand of enthusiasm to the chapter’s events.

**Pictured from left to right: Vickie Parker, Powers McLeod, and Lucy Michel. Powers received a Certificate of Appreciation (with wife Rosann). Vickie, Lucy and Powers were the banquet planners.**

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**Florida Science Olympiad Awards**—Ornithology Team students from Gulf Breeze High School won first and second places in the Florida Science Olympiad competition in April. Teams from high schools across Florida converged in Orlando for competitions in a wide variety of science subjects from physics and engineering to geology, anatomy and ornithology. The Ornithology Teams coached by Lucy Duncan were seniors Stephen O’Brien and Vincent Costers, who took first place, and freshman Rhett Oakley who single-handedly won second place. Congratulations to these students!
A shallow scrape in beach sand serves as a nest for Least Terns at Gulf Islands National Seashore.

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