

Skimmer



Winter 2013
January-March
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The Francis M. Weston Audubon Society

Happy New Year

Sue Timmons

Holiday greetings to our Francis M. Weston family, all seven hundred of you! It's hard to believe another year has passed. Here we are again facing those pesky year end resolutions, that too often we forget, put aside, or in some way avoid acting upon—even before January arrives.

Well folks, I'd like to change that. I say this because I'd like to challenge YOU to make a resolution. As noted, there are more than seven hundred of you, the members of FMW Audubon. I'll bet that many of you thought you were simply subscribing to an interesting magazine about birds, and are perhaps surprised to learn that your subscription to Audubon includes a membership in our chapter, along with a host of activities for your personal pleasure and enlightenment, right here in Northwest Florida.

Our monthly meetings provide you with opportunities to hear and speak with authorities on all kinds of wildlife issues that affect us right here at home. Our regulars are a friendly group, welcoming newcomers and guests alike. Our field trip leaders are knowledgeable birders who know the territory and enjoy introducing beginning birders to the wonders of our woods and streams. We always manage to have spotting scopes and extra binoculars on hand to make birding especially rewarding for everyone present. We love challenges and are happy to share our knowledge in helping to identify those particularly troublesome little brown birds! And of course, you also receive this newsletter, *The Skimmer*, which tells you what's happening, who's speaking, and the destinations of our field trips and bird walks.

Larry Goodman



Our chapter is deeply committed to environmental education at all levels. We participate in a variety of projects and activities including Audubon Adventures with local school teachers, Earth Day, the Lumberjack Festival, The Munson Heritage Festival and others. We are also in partnership with the Escambia County School District in support of the Roy Hyatt Environmental Center. The Center provides natural history education to local school children, and we provide support by way of our very own naturalist.

Yes, we are an organization focused primarily on birds. But birds need trees and scrub for nesting, reproducing and surviving. And trees need roots in the earth, so we care also about trees, shrubbery, soil, storm run-off, water tables, aquifers—all the elements of a natural world, supporting life as we know it, and hope to keep it. With the participation of our members, we can do much to preserve the quality of nature here, in our own back yard of Northwest Florida. With the passing of another year, and at a time for dusting off that list of resolutions you always make—and break; make a resolution this year to get involved in protecting a wilderness, saving a bird.

Mostly, make a resolution, as I am doing, to do more for Francis M. Weston Audubon. At whatever level suits you, become more engaged in the activities and purposes of this chapter. I'm asking you to renew your commitment: come to our membership meetings, join our field trips! Discover what we can do for you and what you, in return, can do for this chapter. 2013 is upon us. Let us hear from you!

CALENDAR of EVENTS

Field Trips

All field trips are open to the public and free of charge, but contributions are appreciated. All experience levels are welcome. Bring binoculars and/or a spotting scope on birding trips. A camera, sunscreen, insect protection, appropriate shoes, hat, water, and snacks or lunch are recommended on all trips. Carpooling is encouraged. Questions? Call Lucy Duncan at 932-4792 or email her at town_point@bellsouth.net.

□ **Saturday, January 19**, Taminco Wildlife Sanctuary and Floridatown birding. Les Kelly will lead us to observe ducks and wintering passerines at Taminco / Air Products Wildlife Sanctuary and Floridatown, both near Pace. Some moderate walking in possibly wet conditions. Participation will be restricted and numbers limited. Contact Les no later than noon January 15 at 850-341-8574 or email at les4plan@bellsouth.net for reservations and to receive trip itinerary and rules. Plan to bring a picnic lunch. Following lunch we will visit the Floridatown Park to see the only population of Boat-tailed Grackles known in extreme NW Florida. Finish by midafternoon.

□ **Saturday, February 9**, Ft. Walton Beach landfill and ponds birding. Bob and Lucy Duncan will lead us to look for wintering birds at two of the area's more productive birding locations. Expect moderate walking and possibly wet conditions. Lunch in a restaurant. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the shopping center parking lot across the highway from Gulf Breeze Hospital. We will return by mid-afternoon.

□ **Saturday, March 16**, Big Lagoon State Park birding. Powers McLeod will lead the group in search of wintering passerines and shorebirds. Entrance fees from \$4 to \$6 per vehicle. Moderate walking in sand. Bring a picnic lunch. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the Big Lots parking lot on the east side of Navy Blvd. south of Hwy 98 in Warrington. Finish by early afternoon.

□ **Saturday, March 30**, Ed Ball Nature Trail Native Plants. James Burkhalter will lead us on a walk to observe the many native plants, including early spring wildflowers, along the Ed Ball Nature Trail at the University of West Florida. The trip will also include a visit to the Michael I. Cousins Herbarium. There will be a short side field trip to see the rare plant *Lepuropetalon spathulatum*, which has a common name of Little People. 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 will finish by noon.

Chapter Meetings

Pensacola State College, 7:00pm, Main Campus, Baroco Science Center, Room 2142, unless otherwise noted. Guests are welcome!

□ **January 24**—Mark Nicholas, Natural Resource Management Specialist at Gulf Island National Seashore, will present a talk entitled "Nesting Shorebirds at Gulf Islands National Seashore."

□ **February 28**—Larry Goodman, a birding enthusiast, amateur nature photographer, and retired biologist, will present some of his favorite photographs of birds and other critters observed when birding.

□ **March 28**—Mr. Sava Varazo, our Emerald Coastkeeper Director, will present a talk on environmental issues related to our local waters. Mr. Varazo is a life-long resident of Pensacola and has over three decades of professional experience working with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the Escambia County Water Quality & Land Management Division.

Board of Directors Meetings

□ **Jan. 3, Feb. 7, Mar. 7**—The Board meets at 7:00 pm at Trinity Presbyterian Church, Bayou Blvd., Pensacola. Meetings are open to all members.

Bird Walks

□ **Sun., February 17**, 9:00 am, Ann Forster and Jan Lloyd will help ID the birds in Ann's yard at 447 Cleary St., Pensacola and on the shoreline behind her house for The Great Backyard Bird Count. For directions, call 453-1660 or 572-2669.

□ **Sat., March 16**, 8:00 am—Wes Tallyn will lead a walk at Tarkiln Bayou to look for early spring migrants. For details, call 390-5525.

□ **Sat., April 6**, 8:00 am—Peggy Baker will lead a walk on the Heritage Trail in Milton. Details later.

Other Activities

□ **Feb. 15-18**—The Great Backyard Bird Count. See page 6 for more information.

Don't forget to check out our website at <http://www.fmwaudubon.org> and our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/FMWAudubonPensacola. There may be additional activities that come up before the next Skimmer publication. If so, we will post them!

In October, Jim Brady and I attended a Shorebird workshop in Panama City. The meeting included state and federal environmental personnel and volunteers with non-profit organizations who are concerned about the health of shorebird populations along the Gulf Coast of Florida. These agents go out and monitor nesting sites on regular intervals during breeding season. Their reports are then compiled on a data base managed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission.

The sites from our area included in this report are the Gulf Islands National Seashore and Big Lagoon State Park—both of which bring little good news to the nesting report. Tropical storm Debby washed over the island, wreaking havoc on nesting sites during the peak season for Least Terns and Black Skimmers. However, one bright spot was that Snowy Plovers, which fared well overall because most chicks

had fledged well before the storm.

The main threat our shorebirds are currently facing is from predation. Because shorebirds use scrapes on the open ground for nesting, these birds and their chicks are very vulnerable to predators. Predators include dogs, foxes, raccoons, coyotes, crows, ghost crabs, feral cats, and opossum. One colony of Black Skimmers in the GINS was totally annihilated by a pack of coyotes. There will be more information shared on the National Seashore nesting and predation control by Mark Nicholas at our January membership meeting.

The most encouraging news is that impacts from humans were less during 2012 than previous years with fewer reported car strikes and other disturbances. The education and stewardship program led by Alan Knothe, Audubon Florida, and volunteers paid off for 2012. Unfortunately grants which funded this stewardship program have

ended. Florida's Audubon chapters must now step up our efforts to continue shorebird stewardship and education. We need your help to keep our shorebirds safe.

There are a few nesting sites on Pensacola Beach and on Navarre Beach that are going unmonitored and shorebirds are threatened. Our chapter is looking for leaders to step up and adopt an area for monitoring and surveying. You can enlist other volunteers for assistance to help with monitoring during peak holiday weekends. Please let me know if you are willing to help. We can do our part to help protect these birds in our area. To get involved send me a note or call me, timmons.dana@gmail.com or 850-934-4521, and let's discuss how you can help.



D Kilby

FMW Audubon Partners with Milk and Honey

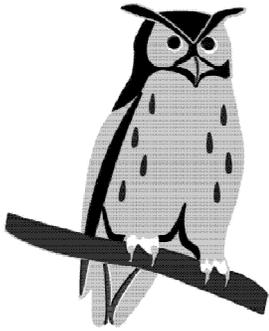
Jim Brady

FMWAS is excited to report an initiative that will move our chapter in a direction that it has listed as an annual goal for years, a goal congruent with our national and state offices goals as well; a goal in which we have not previously enjoyed particular success. Now, thanks to Audubon Florida, our state organization, we have an opportunity to move more positively this year than in the past. The goal, really two related goals, is to recruit to our mission a younger population, and to bring our conservation message to those portions of our population that are not currently well represented in our midst. A quick glance at participants at any of our meetings or field trips will reveal Audubon's long-time demographic, nationally, regionally, and locally: generally an older group, without many persons of color.

At the suggestion of our Education Chair, Mary Newman, and others, we have recently partnered with a local organization, Milk and Honey, regarding this new initiative. Milk and Honey serves at-risk children with after-school programs that expand their learning opportunities through tutoring and non-traditional experiences. Our

Audubon Naturalist, Jenn Butera, and I recently met with the leaders of Milk and Honey, Ms. Sonja Culliver and Rev. William Gulley. We proposed to introduce these students to the ecology of our Gulf beaches, emphasizing the importance of the shore to shorebirds, through a series of presentations and field trips in the spring. Our proposal was enthusiastically embraced. We then met with 15 very energetic elementary age children in their classroom at the Fricker Center. These kids are as excited about this program as Jenn and I are, and we are eager to begin right after the new year.

We are fortunate to be supported in this initiative by a modest grant from Audubon Florida, part of a larger grant from the Jessie Ball duPont Foundation. This funding will pay for Jenn's salary on this project, as well as sampling equipment and fuel for Milk and Honey's new mini-buses. We believe this partnership will help us take our message to a novel group of youth who will be among the future leaders of our community. As a bonus, we hope the youth will bring to their parents and friends a more immediate concern for the natural condition of our beaches.



FIELD NOTES

Bob Duncan

Fall migration never disappoints and this season was no exception. Fall is the time to seek out western vagrants, stray birds that get our adrenaline going and this fall was exceptional! Was the drought in the west responsible for some

great finds? Or was it some other factor? One thing we have learned in recent years is that some species such as **Ash-throated Flycatcher**, a bird that was subject to the Florida Ornithological Society Records Committee Review List just a few years ago, is now rare but regular and no big deal! The accounts that follow reveal what a great season it was!

Leading off a season replete with western strays were 2 **Clay-colored Sparrows*** and a **Lark Sparrow** found at Ft. Pickens on 24 Sep by Jerry Callaway. They lingered through Nov and were seen by many birders. This was followed by a **Groove-billed Ani*** spotted by Lucy Duncan there on 3 Oct. Only the 4th area record, a **Say's Phoebe*** was observed by Les Kelly, Larry Goodman (photo) and Bruce Furlow at the Taminco Sanctuary on 8 Oct. Another, the 5th record, was discovered at the Ft. Walton Beach Sewerage Treatment Facility (FWBSTF-Mama Rosa ponds) on 12 Nov by Malcolm Swan. It remained to 1 Dec and delighted many birders. A **Yellow-headed Blackbird*** was found and photographed by Jerry & Brenda Callaway at Ft. Pickens on 9 Oct. Another was at the FWBSTF 14 – 17 Nov (Bob Duncan, et al.).

Continuing the western flavor, no fewer than 6 **Ash-throated Flycatchers*** were discovered between 11 Oct – 19 Nov at Ft. Pickens, Gulf Breeze and the FWBSTF (Jerry & Brenda Callaway, Bob & Lucy Duncan, et al.) The area's 2nd **Crested Caracara*** was spotted on 13 Oct. by Sam Tagatz, Roberta Bonwit & Mary Jones on a FMWAS field trip while driving through Perdido Key! A **Franklin's Gull*** at Taminco Sanctuary was a rare find (Les Kelly, Larry Goodman, Bruce Furlow) on 22 Oct. Another was at NAS on 15 Nov (Annette Williams). James Pfeiffer and Patrick James ferreted out a very rare **Bell's**

Vireo at Ft. Pickens on 29 Oct. A **Sprague's Pipit*** was at the FWBSTF on 8 Nov (Bob Duncan) and a **Western Meadowlark*** was there 14 Nov (Lucy Duncan).

Topping off the list of great western strays was a gorgeous male **Bullock's Oriole*** gracing Vaughan Hedrick's feeders (photo) in Pensacola 12 – 26 Nov, only the 4th record since 2000.

INVASION OF THE NUTHATCHES!!!! **Red-breasted Nuthatches** staged a major incursion all the way to the Gulf Coast. Prodded on by scarce food resources to our north, these cute and very trusting little birds seemed to be everywhere. Reports from all over the area came in to the Duncans. This was the strongest movement to our area that veteran birders could recall. Invasion years can be few and far between, but this one was the best in our memory. At one time, the Duncans had 8 birds coming to feeders, with some birds allowing very close approach as feeders were replenished. Now if we could just get Purple Finches and Pine Siskins to do the same!

The FMWAS field trip to St. Marks – Wakulla Springs, 30 Nov – 1 Dec, was a great success. The weather was fair and mild and the fresh seafood was great. But the birding was even better! About 25 birders enjoyed a plethora of ducks observed at the various impoundments at St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. A total of 22 species of ducks were found, including hard-to-find **Black** and **Surf Scoters**, the latter allowing knockout looks. Usually trips there yield 15 or fewer duck species. Also found was a rare **Cinnamon Teal***. Birding the grounds of the Wakulla Springs Hotel, members spotted **Black & White Warblers**, **Red-breasted Nuthatches** and **Blue-headed Vireos**, among other interesting passerines. The boat trip on the spring took us within mere feet of manatees! We tallied 135 species for the weekend, a respectable list.

*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.*



Kristen Munson

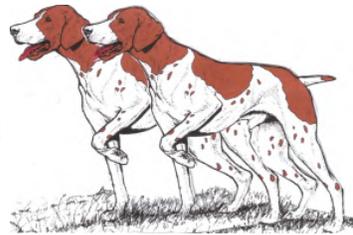
TRIPPING—Stalking Grouse

Lucy Duncan

Our friend Paul assured us we would see a Spruce Grouse. This elusive and heavily camouflaged species is known for sitting motionless in the forest surrounded by ferns, vines, and lichen-covered logs. You'd think a chicken-sized bird would be easy to spot, but its plumage mocks the understory blending into sun-dappled vegetation. Most people walk right by them – within *ten* feet even – and never even know they're there! We did too.

On this summer trip to Vermont, Bob and I were in the company of three award-winning field experts with a nose for finding grouse. Our prey was this denizen of forests that stretch across the northern U.S. and Canada, forests with which we are only slightly familiar. Paul Bruha was on the path behind us with Tippy and Nisse.

Stretched out single file, we walked a mountain base trail through ferns and low understory with towering trees on gentle slopes both left and right. Our trained eyes carefully searched the shaded forest floor, our ears tuned to any crack of twig or guttural cluck. The forest gave up no sound, no flurry of wings, no soft clucking calls. But Paul assured us.



After a few hundred yards, Paul called in a hushed voice. I turned to see him standing quietly with Tippy and Nisse on point at his flanks. The dogs had *smelled grouse* and stood frozen looking into the tangled forest downhill from the trail. They didn't even blink. In a moment, Paul said, "There it is," and I edged closer allowing my search to follow Paul's gaze. Yes, there it was - a male Spruce Grouse sitting alert and motionless in deep shade ten feet in front of me. Its chocolate brown face was accented with fiery red eyebrows, or combs, and the white-tipped breast feathers looked like snow on pinecone tips. Bob edged closer too, then we moved up on the bird for closer looks. The bird never budged. Neither did the dogs.

We left it where we found it, where the German Short-haired Pointers had stood stock still for ten or more minutes while we sated our views. Continuing up the trail we looked for another grouse...and you can guess who found the next one too.

BOOK REVIEW

Longleaf, Far as the Eye Can See: A New Vision of North America's Richest Forest

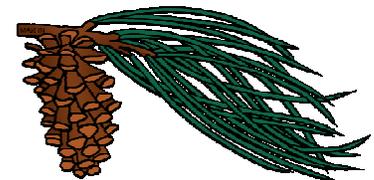
By Bill Finch, Beth Maynor Young, Rhett Johnson and John C. Hall

My Underwood family migrated to Northwest Florida in 1843. My ancestors came for the free range for their cattle under the longleaf pines. At family gatherings over the years, I was exposed to the historical legends of these magnificent southern forests. During the early years, the only time the sun was visible in downtown DeFuniak Springs was noonday because of the height of the longleaf pines. I did not fully appreciate the astonishing beauty of this wiregrass/longleaf ecosystem until I saw it for myself during the three-year Blackwater River State Forest Bird Survey. I did not understand the influence of the longleaf forest on southern culture until I read *Longleaf, Far as the Eye Can See*. This beautiful book is filled with the striking photos by Beth Maynor Young and contributes to a better understanding of the significance of the longleaf pine in this ecosystem.

At one time, these longleaf forests covered 92 million acres from Texas to Maryland. But today the longleaf pine can only be found on 3 million acres. Logging, suppression of fire, and other factors that affected this change are described in a compelling, entertaining narrative that traces this dramatic transformation. With the loss of this habitat, many other species (Red-cockaded Woodpecker, gopher tortoise, indigo snake, Northern Bobwhite and many more) became endangered. These authors who are also conservationists have created a guide to the longleaf pine's history, biology and the modern-day efforts to bring it back.

This book is a must read for all southerners, and for everyone who loves a beautiful woods.

"The longleaf pine, presiding over the biologically richest region of North America, is well served by this beautifully written book." — E. O. Wilson, from the Foreword



Phillipmartin.com

Peggy Underwood Baker

WHAZAT? or Birding Etiquette 101

Birding is just like a treasure hunt. Usually you know what treasure you are after and where to find it. On one field trip the (my) treasure was Wood Ducks. Husband Dana and I were on a FMW Audubon field trip to the Lake Martin Cypress Island Preserve in Louisiana. I had never seen a Wood Duck and was generally new to “organized” birding. Our chain of cars slowly drove along the dirt road encircling the lake. I watched intently for Wood Ducks while Dana drove and scanned for everything else. Then suddenly I saw one. I leaped out of the car, yelling “Wood Ducks!!!” and ran to the edge of the lake with my binoculars, only to watch them vanish deeper into the cypress. I was the only one who saw them and it was my own fault. I had been cautioned that they are secretive, sensitive creatures and I knew better than to make such a racket. But it’s *hard* not to get excited when you see a treasure...right???

Susanne Timmons



GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT

February 15-18 is the 2013 Great Backyard Bird Count!!

This event is a joint project of Audubon, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Canadian partner Bird Studies of Canada. The annual 4 day event engages bird watchers of all ages throughout the continent in

counting birds to create a real time snapshot of where the birds are. Each of us can participate in this free event and no registration is needed. Watch and count birds for at least 15 minutes on any day of the count. Although it may be called the Great BACKYARD Bird Count--you can count birds anywhere—at a nearby park, your schoolyard, a nature center, even the local landfill—anywhere there are birds! And you don’t have to be a bird expert. If you see a species you can’t identify, you do NOT have to report that species. Your observations are important because no single scientist or team of scientists could hope to capture so much information about birds around the world in only four days. The more people who participate, the better the snapshot we will have of where the birds are and how their populations may be changing from year to year. Please visit the official website for more information.

www.birdcount.org



CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

The 2012 Christmas Bird Count was held Saturday, December 15th. The weather was very cooperative with cool temperatures, light winds and sunny skies. Our area was covered by 12 teams with a total of 48 participants. The compilation was held that night at the home of Bill and Greta Bremser who also provided refreshments and a delicious dinner for the weary bird counters. Reports from 11 of the 12 teams were available with a reported total of 132 species counted, including several surprises. Most of the teams saw several Red-breasted Nuthatches which have erupted in our area due to a food shortage in the north. Other rarities include a Blue Grosbeak, Vermilion Flycatcher, Western Kingbird, Bronzed Cowbird and an area first, Cassins Kingbird. A more detailed report of the 2012 CBC will be provided by Bill Bremser in the next Skimmer.

BIRD NICKNAMES

Birds are often given nicknames. Some are common, for example, Redbird for the Northern Cardinal. Here are some interesting and funny bird nicknames we have found. Do you know of any others??



Steven D'Amato

1. Solitary sandpiper: *Puddlepiper*
2. American woodcock: *Meatloaf on a stick*
3. Rock pigeon: *Bronx petrel*
4. Belted kingfisher: *Aquakestrel*
5. Red-headed woodpecker: *Tri-colored woodpecker*
6. Bluethroat: *Rainbow in a Plain Brown Wrapper*
7. American Robin: *Lawn Plover*
8. Yellow-rumped Warbler: *Swarm Warbler*
9. Black-and-white Warbler: *Zebra Creeper*
10. American Redstart: *Flash Dancer*



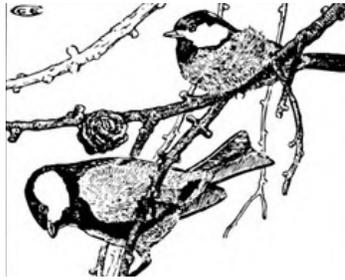
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I have made a singular, if not original, discovery. I think I've found the inspiration behind the best known song in Gilbert and Sullivan's best known comic opera, *The Mikado*. That is, I believe I know how William S. Gilbert came to write Titwillow.

First off, for one to make such a discovery it's necessary to have at least two parallel, if unrelated, avocations. Mine are *musical theater* and *birding*—and in this case, to a lesser degree, city park history, which in fact is what I was researching—through an article in the *Illustrated London News* of March 1884—when I

came across a brief notice of the discovery of a new bird species. Well, not altogether *new*, in the sense of a never before *seen* species, like some intrepid ornithologist might come across in the Brazilian rain forest, but rather the scientific determination that one British bird, the Marsh Tit (*Poecile palustris*), was in fact two separate species. The newly 'discovered' bird would henceforth be named the Willow Tit (*Poecile montanus*).

A light bulb lit in my head and I went quickly to Asimov's *Annotated Gilbert & Sullivan* for help. Sure enough, *The Mikado* opened on March 14, 1885, at the Savoy Theater in London, after a year's delay while Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan wrestled with the complexities of the plot. At last, needing a really spot-on song as a means of unscrambling the tangles and twists, Gilbert grasped a device for warming Katisha's icy heart, thereby resolving the kettle of fish: a lovelorn dicky-bird—*Titwillow*. Only a slight adjustment for the sake of meter was needed. Asimov, however, was clueless as to the real bird and its propitious discovery, ascribing 'willow' simply to Gilbert's penchant for its convenient use as a refrain word.



I am aware of course that Gilbert, non-birder he, would have been interested only in the bird's *name*. Like most songwriters it's the rhyme and meter that matter. It's why we have 'Red red robins bob bob bobbin' along. Likewise, ornithologists show no particular interest in

the *poetic* side of birds' names. They changed 'gallinule' to 'moorhen', and eliminated altogether one of the most rhythmic of bird names, 'the Solitary Vireo'. It just rolls off the tongue.

My research into the origins of the Willow Tit eventually led me to the

internet, where I learned that the split of the tit species was not officially recognized, by British bird Poobahs, until 1897. Could that mean that the 1884 article in the *ILN* was wrong? I next contacted G&S expert David Stone, hoping for help. Being first and foremost a G&S man he consulted a birder friend, who advised him, and me, of the later date. "Relocate the 1884 *ILN* piece," he advised me. I did better than that. I discovered a 'trivia' tidbit in Wikipedia, and I quote: "The bird (Willow Tit), was immortalized in Gilbert and Sullivan's 1885 operetta, *The Mikado*, in the song, 'Willow, tit willow'. A bittersweet victory it was, for in proving my case it also stripped me of my claim of original discovery. Someone had beat me to it. Maybe Gilbert himself told the press to what source he owed the song on which the plot of *The Mikado* turns. Maybe every Savoyard in 1885 knew the whole story.

Oh well, I have other bird-in-song challenges to mount:

*O winged friend I once did surely know
Adieu, o solitary vireo*

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Larry Goodman

Chapter Meetings

Jan. 24, Feb. 28, Mar. 28

Field Trips

Jan. 19, Feb. 9, Mar. 16 & 30

Bird Walks

Feb. 17, Mar. 16, Apr. 6

Details on page 2

Great Backyard Bird Count — Feb. 15-18

Details on page 6



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Outreach	Peggy Baker 564-1482
Skimmer Co-Editors	Jere French..... 932-8796
	Sue Timmons..... 934-4521
<i>Web Liaison</i>	Cheryl Bunch..... 572-5669
	http://www.fmwaudubon.org/ bunchc@cox.net

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 One year—\$7.00**

(Include a copy of your student ID with a check
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