When I fly I try to get a window seat, avoiding cart bumps on the aisle or being squeezed in the middle. The window doesn’t really offer much of a view, except when we’re banking for a landing and I can get a fair picture of the city below—Denver, Dallas, or Houston. I’m familiar with them all, and others much like them—those gray gridirons, more foreboding than welcoming. But when I’m returning home, and the city below is Pensacola, I keep my eyes glued to the window. There’s the Blackwater River winding down toward the Gulf, the Escambia and the Yellow. There’s the Perdido as well, the three bayous, and now Pensacola Bay, and the Gulf shimmering in the sunlight. And coming closer there are the houses, stores, offices, peeking out from under the spreading trees—our awesome live oaks, magnolias, and pines, and I feel renewed again by this view of home, anxious to land yet wishing to stay aloft a little longer, lingering over the beauty of this place. Home, a green world, life in balance.

But Pensacola was once an even greener place, vestiges lingering on in North Hill where large and small homes mingle under heritage oaks, and streetcar rails still peek through the old brick streets. Elsewhere, however, growth has tarnished the downtown and denuded the surrounding countryside in a reckless drive toward ‘modernization’. Postwar Pensacola joined the rush into the new age of the automobile, resulting in the poorly conceived developments visible today in abandoned shopping centers, toxic industrial sites, high speed roadways that have pulverized once beautiful rolling hills and split up communities, meandering creeks and streams reduced to sewers and settling ponds. Within a decade or so that gentle prewar city came to resemble so many other decaying downtowns of the postwar era, subverted by ill-planned suburban sprawl.

Everywhere we were conned by the old Faustian razzle-dazzle, and too often we’ve been bamboozled into accepting the stupefying sameness of those cookie-cutter subdivisions and strip malls with their mini-mansions and plasma tv in every room, four car garages, concrete verandas, a couple of tree sticks, a swatch of sod, and springing up around the corner the ubiquitous drive-thru chain stores, CVS, Big Mac, Subway, Safeway, Pizza Hut, Radio Shack.

We can do better. We can support the restoration of a good city, and save what’s left of the green world still surrounding us. We mourn the live oak slaughter on Scenic Highway, the armed invasion of Blackwater, the unneeded widening and lengthening of roadways, the treeless parking lots, the toxic borrow pits, land fills and other atrocities done in the name of ‘progress’, but with the diligence of caring people we can turn things around. Downtown is lively and inviting again, and with the passage of Amendment One we have a good start toward preserving and nurturing Florida’s wilderness and wildlife, including the Florida Panther. Good planning with a thought to preservation and protection of our heritage and our natural amenities, is not only possible but absolutely necessary to a healthy environment—and maintaining that elusive balance of life.
Field Trips

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, April 11. Ft. Pickens Birding. April is prime time for Spring Migrants, and our leader, Daniel Stangeland, will find them if they’re here. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the Office Depot parking lot in Gulf Breeze across from the Gulf Breeze Hospital. Bring a picnic lunch if you wish. We will finish by noon.

□ Saturday, April 18. Ft. Morgan Birding. Still at the height of migration, Bob and Lucy Duncan will lead this trip looking especially for every bird out there! We will picnic at Ft. Morgan and complete our checklist. Then, conditions permitting, some of us will venture by ferry (for cost of ferry 1-251-861-3000) to Dauphin Island for more of the best of the birding sites on the northern Gulf Coast. Expect moderate walking. Meet at the Food World grocery at 4051 Barrancas Ave. just east of Navy Blvd. and depart at 7:30 a.m. There is a small entrance fee to Ft. Morgan.

□ Saturday, April 25. Big Lagoon State Park. Native Plants. James Burkhalter leads us to explore this native plant field trip. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the Big Lots parking lot on the east side of Navy Blvd. south of U.S. Hwy 98. We will look for the Yellow-flowered Milkweed found only here, and for the Odorless Bayberry, which may be a State ‘champion.’ Bring a picnic lunch if you wish. We will finish by noon. There is a small entrance fee to the park.

□ Saturday, May 30. Tarkiln Bayou Preserve State Park. Native Plants. James Burkhalter will lead us to see native plants in habitats from pine flatwoods to pitcher plant bogs. Expect easy walking. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the Big Lots parking lot on the east side of Navy Blvd. south of U.S. Hwy 98. We will look for the Yellow-flowered Milkweed found only here, and for the Odorless Bayberry, which may be a State ‘champion.’ Bring a picnic lunch if you wish. We will finish by noon. There is a small entrance fee to the park.

□ Saturday, June 27. Escribano & Grassy Point WMA. Native Plants. James Burkhalter leads us to this remote area on a native plant discovery trip. Meet at the NE corner of University Town Plaza (formerly University Mall) where J.C. Penney is located on Davis Highway at 7:30 a.m. or wait at the corner of the OLF-Chocotaw Road and Hwy 87 about 7:45 to 8:00. We will finish by noon. Bring a picnic lunch, drinks and snacks; and insect repellant. These shoreline areas will have no-see-ums.

Birdwalks

In April, we are having four Birdathon birdwalks at Ft Pickens. See page 6 for details and how to sign up to participate.

Board of Directors

Apr 9, May 7—The Board meets at 7:00 pm at the First Presbyterian Church, 33 East Gregory St. Meetings are open to the public. Date and location may change. Please contact a Board member to confirm date, time and location if you wish to attend. The June board meeting will be a planning day. Check with any board member for details.

Earth Day, April 18
Bayview Park, Pensacola
**Chapter Meetings**

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

- April 23, 2015. Ms. Cindy Coster will present a program entitled “Some Birds from our three years in Sierra Leone.” Cindy will also have some copies of her book “Where am I from? – Where are YOU from?” on sale for $20 a copy, $5 of which will be donated to the Audubon Society. Cindy’s book is biographic and includes birding in the Antarctic and Ecuador.

- May 21, 2015. Chapter Annual Meeting, see below.

- June, 2015. No chapter program meeting.

**Chapter Annual Meeting and Banquet**

**Save the Date!!**

Thursday, May 21, is the date of our annual FMW Audubon Society meeting and banquet. It will be held again in the Azalea Trace Auditorium, 10100 Hillview Road, Pensacola. The evening will begin at 5:30 pm and includes a silent auction, raffle, cash bar, dinner, speaker and election of next year’s officers. Invitations will be mailed to the membership on May 1 and will include the name of this year’s speaker and a proposed slate of officers.

www.FMWAudubon.org

www.facebook.com/FMWAudubonPensacola

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**President’s Message**

YOU'RE INVITED!! to Audubon Academy

For the past 7 years, Audubon Florida has presented Audubon Academy, a weekend of programs, workshops and field trips for chapter members from all 44 Florida chapters. These activities enhance leadership skills and demonstrate best chapter practices while building a network of local birders across the state. This year, we are presenting Academy on a regional basis to encourage more participation. The four chapters in NW Florida (Apalachee, Bay County, Choctawhatchee, and FM Weston) are sponsoring a one day Academy on Saturday, May 9, 2015, in Panama City. Since migration will be winding down, this will be a perfect opportunity to make a trip to Panama City for an early morning birding walk followed by a series of workshops centered on chapter growth. CHAPTER GROWTH, as in growing chapter membership; growing a more diverse demographic in your chapter; growing participation in chapter activities; and growing our conservation presence in our communities.

There will be a nominal registration fee to cover lunch and workshop materials. We are arranging motel rooms and informal social activities for those who want to drive over the prior evening. Look for more details at fmwaudubon.org or call me at 850-456-5083.

It won't be complete without YOU--You're invited!!

James A. Brady

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**Audubon Naturalist Hired**

We are pleased to welcome **Aki Masunaga** as our naturalist. Aki will be working with a variety of projects at the Roy Hyatt Environmental Center including a pilot project for middle school students. She has an M.S. in Biology from University of West Florida, a B.S. in Biology from Mars Hill University, North Carolina and previous teaching experience.

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**In Memory—Muriel Elizabeth “Betsy” Tetlow**

Betsy served as our chapter treasurer and was a faithful member and volunteer in many areas. Our sympathy to her family, extended family and friends. She will be greatly missed.
FIELD NOTES

Bob Duncan

What a winter! Never have so many longed for so long for warmer weather! Birdwise, it started very slowly with folks complaining about the lack of birds at their feeders. But by February, things picked up, with several feeding stations reporting abundant American Goldfinches, Pine Siskins and some Purple Finches. American Robins and Cedar Waxwings followed on schedule with large flocks stripping berries in late February. It was not a winter for exceptional rarities, however. One would think all that cold and snow up north would have driven at least a few Redpolls and Snow Buntings our way. As of this writing (14 March) the first Purple Martins and Barn Swallows have arrived and Northern Parulas are here in numbers, a prelude to the waves of spring migrants yet to come.

A Wood Thrush* at Taminco Eastman 1 Dec began some of the month’s rarities which should have been far to our south (Les Kelly, Bruce Furlow, Larry Goodman). December rarities continued with a male Wilson’s Warbler* which also should have been in the tropics, finding itself in the Duncans’ yard in Gulf Breeze on 6 Dec. Apparently it found it to its liking, as it is still present as of this writing. Twenty White Pelicans over Gulf Breeze 17 Dec (Tom King) were probably headed to wintering grounds in South Florida. A Purple Gallinule at Taminco Eastman Sanctuary in Pace on 22 Dec also should have been in warmer climes (Les Kelly, Bruce Furlow, Larry Goodman) as well as a Barn Swallow at Pensacola Beach 23 Dec (Scot & Bob Duncan). Sue Yates’ Long-tailed Duck on Perdido Bay 10 – 15 Dec was a good find. This species has been very rare in recent years. A count of 550 Common Loons on Pensacola Bay 29 Dec was very high (Bob Duncan) but by mid-Jan inexplicably only a few could be found.

January’s noteworthy birds began when Will, Bob & Lucy Duncan counted 210 Black Scoters* flying west off Panama City Beach on 2 Jan and with a first Jan record Lesser Nighthawk* at Ft. Pickens 1 Jan (Perry Doggrel). Seven White Pelicans were over Pensacola 6 Jan (Cheryl Bunch). Three Long-tailed Ducks at Pensacola Beach 31 Dec – 1 Jan (Carl Wernicke) were a rare.

The rarest bird of the season was a Long-eared Owl* found dead in northern Okaloosa County by Danny Arnette and deposited with the Florida State Museum in Gainesville. It was the second best preserved specimen from Florida. The species rarely is seen in the state.

Six Cattle Egrets in north Pensacola 8 Jan were very rare in winter (Sam Tagatz). An Ash-throated Flycatcher*, a bird of the west, was seen at Taminco Eastman Sanctuary 19 Jan – 2 Feb (Les Kelly, Larry Goodman, Bruce Furlow). The species is now rare but regular locally. Jere French’s Black & White Warbler in Gulf Breeze 21 Jan was a good winter find. A Lark Sparrow* was at Ft. Pickens 24 Jan – 28 Feb (Jerry Callaway, Daniel Stangeland). Rare Arctic visitor, a Glaucous Gull* was in Pensacola 24 Jan (Andrew Holzinger). Steve & Cindy Coster’s female Summer Tanager* in Beulah 26 Jan – 13 Feb should have been in the tropics. The species is becoming rare but regular in winter in recent years. Global warming?

An early harbinger of spring migration, a Parula Warbler* was heard singing by Powers McLeod at the Tiger Point Golf Club on 8 Feb, an all-time early date by one day. A Cave Swallow* over Gulf Breeze on 2 Mar (Bob Duncan) was a surprising find. Swallow-tailed Kites made appearances over Pensacola when 23 were counted 5 Mar (Jim Brady, Betsy Tetlow). The F. M. Weston Audubon’s 22 members who went on the 14 Mar field trip to Grassy Point were awed by the passage of 42 of these beautiful hawks as they migrated east. An early Mississippi Kite was over Pensacola on 10 Mar (Vickie Parker). Buff-bellied Hummingbirds* graced the feeders of Vaughan Hedrick in Pensacola 7 Mar and in Pace 8 Mar (Bridget DeArman). Cindy & Steve Coster spotted 3 White-winged Scoters* at Naval Live Oaks 1 Mar. A trip to the catfish farms in northern Escambia Co. yielded the Duncans 10 Lesser Black-backed Gulls* (record number) and a Ross’s Goose* on 4 Mar. Peggy Baker and Pam Beasley found a Lesser Black-backed Gull* there on 9 Mar.

The Skimmer welcomes reports of noteworthy birds. If you have something to report, please call Lucy or Bob Duncan at 932-4792. Species with asterisks require documentation so that they can become part of the ornithological record.
The two scientific disciplines that enjoy significant contributions from amateurs are astronomy and ornithology. Those dedicated astronomy buffs spend freezing clear starry nights often studying one area of the sky looking for anomalies. In fact, more comets are probably discovered by amateurs than by professionals. The equipment can be expensive and some patient souls even build their own.

Ornithology has more projects for our participation and the data gathering is performed over a wider range of time, place, and weather. Members of our own chapter spend hundreds of volunteer hours gathering data to add to the largest biological database in existence. The one that goes farthest back, over one hundred years, is the Audubon Christmas Bird Count. Because the date, time, and place are fixed, the conditions can vary wildly. Each count is done in the same 15 mile diameter circle year after year. One count is not science but 50 years strung together is. We can see population changes and even some seasonal variability by analyzing the results. The 2014 Pensacola count was rainy, windy, foggy, and generally miserable. Next year’s may be warm and sunny.

The Breeding Bird Surveys managed by the Department of the Interior’s Fish and Wildlife Service are another important censusing project. These twenty-five mile routes are run every nesting season. They start 30 minutes before sunrise. The team stops every half mile and counts for three minutes. The variables are noted such as weather conditions and road noise. These surveys require a little more dedication and can be hard work.

Some information gathering can be downright fun. Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology initiated the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) several years ago. Because they had massive computer capacity, they had volunteered to crunch the numbers on all the above counts for Audubon and for Fish and Wildlife. It has been wonderful to have the information available in a timely manner for researchers and students. The GBBC was a brilliant way to get the citizen ornithologists to become comfortable entering data by computer. Up until then we wrote all the information on forms and mailed them in where some long-suffering clerk tried to read and record them. I am not sure that Cornell realized how wildly popular the GBBC would be. Backyard birders had not been given the credit they deserve and suddenly were recognized. Those birders know their birds and when something different comes along they are aware of it and often call with excellent sightings.

We and the birds owe a debt of gratitude to our hard-working Ornithology Citizen Scientists.

The Wind Birds


With the author’s recent death, birders and naturalists have lost a most poetic spirit. We invite members to revisit this beautifully descriptive account of the sandpipers, stilts, and plovers that fly each spring, from the tropics to the shores of the Arctic. “The wind birds are strong, marvelous fliers, averaging greater distances in their migrations than any other bird family.” This is not a field guide, there are but a few drawings, nor is it all inclusive, but rather a tribute to flight, and the resilience of nature.

Available Amazon Books, used. JF
Birdathon 2015

During the month of April, we go birding with a purpose—to enjoy a day of birding AND to raise money for our work at the Roy Hyatt Environmental Center. More information, team forms and pledge forms are on the FMWAS website. Form a Birdathon team with friends or join us at Ft. Pickens for a half day Birdathon birdwalk. For additional information contact the Birdathon Chairperson, Les Kelley (les4plan@gmail.com) or 850-994-6597.

Birdathon Information:
1. The Birdathon area for 2015 includes Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties, Florida and Baldwin and Mobile Counties, Alabama.
2. The time allowed is a 24 hours period during the month of April.
3. Two members of the team must identify each bird.
4. Lists must be returned to the FMWAS mail box by May 13 to qualify for awards.
5. Team award categories this year: most species, most donations, Ft Pickens group with most species, team or group with the “best” bird.

1. **Form a team and solicit pledges from friends and neighbors** (form is on the website to print and give to donors). Pledge forms and checks/cash must be turned in or mailed to the treasurer by due date.

—OR—

2. **Join a Birdathon Birdwalk Group at Ft. Pickens**—Birders do not have to form their own group, but can join us on 1 or more of these short trips. A leader will meet each group near the fort and bird from 8 am until noon. Sign up with a leader. Each trip is limited to 10 participants. A birdathon donation is requested from each participant.

***April 4 (Sat.)- Peggy Baker, 850-983-1482, c-850-291-5426, pbakerbirds@gmail.com
***April 14 (Tues.)- Les Kelly, 850-994-6597, Prefers contact by email—les4plan@gmail.com
***April 18 (Sat.)- Daniel Stangeland, 850-686-3502, dpstang71@yahoo.com
***April 29 (Wed.)-Lucy Duncan, h 850-932-4792, town_point@bellsouth.net

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**2015 Regional Science and Engineering Fair**
**University of West Florida**
**January 26, 2015**

Ann Forster and Jan Lloyd were Special Awards Judges representing the Francis M. Weston Audubon Society this year at the Regional Science and Engineering Fair. The criteria for the FMWAS award are general enough to allow a wide range of projects to be considered. This year’s Senior Division winner **Kelly Wu** presented **Water Purification by Solar Energy**. This project focused on making a small device to heat water using solar energy. Research using different containers and collection methods resulted in a successful apparatus that is portable. At the awards ceremony on January 29, she received a certificate, an appropriate book, a copy of the most recent Skimmer and a year’s membership in the National Audubon Society, Audubon Florida and the Francis M. Weston Audubon Society.

**Great Backyard Bird Count Results**

FMWAS would like to thank all of the local citizen scientists who contributed bird counts to the 18th annual Great Backyard Bird Count. Cornell Lab and National Audubon sponsor this international count that tracks the health of the world’s bird population. This year 147,265 bird checklists were contributed from over 100 countries. These lists reported 5,090 species which represents nearly half of the world’s species. All of these counts were entered into the eBird database. See results at http://gbbc.birdcount.org/

The Northern Cardinal appeared on the most checklists and Snow Geese were reported as the highest individual birds counted (over 1 and a half million).

The state of California turned in the most checklists (5,453) and the most species (376). The state of Florida came in 4th in the number of checklists submitted.

Escambia County reported 116 species and Santa Rosa reported 115 species.

Many thanks for your participation!

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**Master Gardener of the Year 2014**—Our own **Vickie Parker** was awarded Master Gardener of the Year (2014) by the Escambia County Extension Service. Being a Master Gardener is not a bed of roses. It requires many accurately logged volunteer hours as well as continuing education hours. Congratulations Vickie!
THE DALMATIAN PELICAN: A lonely struggle to survive

Jere French

The Alaska ad in Audubon featuring a moose in sunglasses took me back to a 1979 conference at Lake Mirka in the mountainous north country of Greece, near the Albanian border. The subject under discussion was the frightening decline of the Dalmatian Pelican, and I was meeting there, in the very center of its breeding range, with a small gathering of concerned Greek scientists, to discuss and agonize over the plight of the threatened bird. Largest of all pelicans, with a wingspan of twelve feet and a weight of some thirty pounds, the mighty silver feathered bird was losing ground to the diminishing of the ozone layer. Fishermen were shooting them as well, and other predation was never far away, but the loss of the ozone layer, due to overuse of CFCs (remember them?) and the increase of ultraviolet light waves, which were blinding the pelicans and causing them to fly into fences, was seemingly their death knell.

The drive from Thessaloniki took two days over narrow winding roads, through a hard, stony landscape and infrequent villages that would lie isolated under deep snow through the long winter months. Eventually the lake came into view and a very different landscape emerged, gently rolling, with a pungent odor of marshes. We sat gathered together on the ground, in a shallow pitch under a few scrubby trees, and after introductions quickly got down to business.

“They are suggesting” said one of the delegates, “that we should tie bright red flags on the fences or, and this is true, right from the bureaucrats in Athens, we should put sunglasses on the pelicans. This is being serious about protecting wildlife? From our government big shots?”

That was 36 years ago, and since then we have managed, thanks to the Montreal Protocol, to have CFC usage mostly ended, and thus have avoided the daunting task of fitting sunglasses to pelicans. But now we face another challenge, somewhat the opposite side of the drachma. With Climate Change we are increasing the thickness of the ozone layer—to the point where it will begin to impact unfavorably on nature, all of us—including the Dalmatian Pelican (‘Some scientists are now concerned that global warming will lead to much higher levels of ozone that could block out the sun’ Susan Hunt). Just another conundrum to face, and even if sunglasses won’t be needed, a host of other conditions continue to endanger us—and this beautiful bird in a faraway lake, where its population shrinks yearly.

I think back to that long ago visit where, despite human indifference, a magnificent bird hangs on, dependent upon a scientific balancing act, a seesaw of too much or too little sunshine—another canary in the coal mine of our uncertain destiny.

2014 Pensacola Christmas Bird Count Results

The Pensacola CBC this year was held on Saturday Dec. 20. The weather was very uncooperative with continuous rain and cold winds, okay for New England but not for sunny Florida. In spite of the weather our twelve teams braved the conditions and recorded 129 species with a total of 16,015 individuals, down from last year’s 138.

There were a few rare finds. Thomas Barbig found an American Black Duck, a bird common up north in winter but extremely rare on the Gulf Coast. Other good finds were a Tri-colored Heron, a Reddish Egret, a White Ibis, and a Wilson’s Warbler which bathed at the Duncan’s bird bath. Our most common birds continue to be Laughing Gull, Mourning Dove, Starling, and Yellow-rumped Warbler with well over 1,000 each species.

**CBC Teams:**

Chapter Program Meeting
Apr 23
Chapter Annual Meeting and Banquet
May 21
Field Trips
Apr 11, 18, 25; May 1-3, 30; Jun 27
Details on page 2

Birdathon Birdwalks
April 4, 14, 18, 29—Details on page 6

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Web Master Debra Jones

Introductory Membership
National Audubon Society
(includes Audubon Florida and our local chapter)

Individual/Family: One-year —$20
(Make checks payable to the National Audubon Society.)

Student Membership—local chapter only
One year—$7.00
(Include a copy of your student ID with a check payable to FMW Audubon Society.)

Mail to the Francis M. Weston Audubon Society,
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The National Audubon Society occasionally makes its membership list available to carefully selected organizations whose mailings you might find of interest. To have your name omitted from this list, please check here. ___