It all started with a phone call from my long time birding friend in Alabama, Greg Jackson. He wanted to try to beat the all-time Alabama Big Day record of 202 species set in 1983. That record was set by Dwight Cooley and Mark Brown. They started their Big Day in the Mobile Delta and ended with a spectacular fallout on Dauphin Island. Besides expertise, they had great luck with cooperative weather maximizing their results.

Greg wanted me to participate since I knew the weather that produced "fallouts" and had been predicting bird movements for some time. He asked me whether my birding friends Phil Tetlow and Bill Bremser, both top-notch, experienced birders, would like to participate. Both jumped at the idea. The date had to be an impromptu decision based on weather events. We decided on 23 April. A cold front was due with rain in the Gulf which could produce a "fallout" at migrant traps when weary birds would be approaching the coast and struggling against rain and headwinds.

Big Days are grueling events as birders usually start in the wee hours of the morning to get owls and goatsuckers, and then dash about the designated area in an attempt to maximize species in each type of habitat – fields, marshes, woodland and migrant traps. We could go anywhere in Alabama but the best chance to topple the record would be along the coast in Baldwin and Mobile counties, hitting the river swamps for hawks, owls, woodpeckers, the pine woods for specialties like Red-cockaded Woodpecker and Bachman's Sparrow, agricultural fields for sparrows and shorebirds like Upland Sandpiper, Mobile Bay mudflats and impoundments for shorebirds, migrant traps for incoming Neotropical migrants and the outer beach for birds like Sanderlings and Snowy Plovers. The previous all-time record involved that area. Needless to say, a Big Day requires an absolute efficient use of time and complete concentration.

Greg rented a condo at Ft. Morgan and a convertible which would allow us to save time since birds heard can be counted and we could stay in the car and listen. We left the condo around 3 a.m., our target a Black Rail at Lake Shelby. Greg sped down the two lane road. I looked at the speedometer which read 80 mph. It was going to be an interesting day. We dipped on (missed) the Black Rail that Lucy and I had there about a week before. We then drove through the farmland and sod farms around Foley, Greg shining a powerful spotlight over the fields for Barn Owls and anything else. Every time the light hit a farmhouse I cringed. Surely a sheriff's car would appear soon! No Barn Owl. We tried the Battleship Park, hoping for an owl. Once again the spotlight was shined all around the area. Surely a sheriff's car would appear soon! No Barn Owl. We tried the Battleship Park, hoping for an owl. Once again the spotlight was shined all around the area. Surely the law would investigate! Not so. As dawn approached we headed up SR 225 into the riparian habitat along the Tensaw River in the Mobile River Delta. We found expected birds like Chuck-wills Widow, Pileated Woodpecker, Red-eyed Vireo, Hooded Warbler and common resident birds like Tufted Titmouse.

Continued on page 4
President’s Message
Friends—Everybody at Francis M. Weston Audubon Society (FMWAS) is an unpaid volunteer, who donates their time, ingenuity and money to help the Society educate all about our birds, conserve avian habitats, invite new members to the Society and help plant native trees and plants for native and migratory birds creating new habitats.

Our essential avian programs don’t come without expenses and FMWAS clearly knows how to stretch a dollar and mobilize volunteers: on November 21-22, 2020, at Bruce Beach 99 volunteers planted 150 keystone trees and plants. This donated labor was valued by Gulf Power Foundation, Ascend Performance Materials and Audubon Florida, our corporate sponsors, to be more than $33,000...or more than 1,222 hours of hard and diligent volunteer work planning, coordinating and planting native trees and plants at Bruce Beach. We still have a lot of things to be done at Bruce Beach including another Sand Live Oak grove with understory. While the Bruce Beach project is a FMWAS flagship project, it is only one of the many FMWAS 2020-2021 projected tasks to be completed.

As we battle the deadly COVID-19 pandemic, we still need to reach out and educate all about our birds and how to protect their habitats. Education Chair Karen Stanmore’s innovation and applications of our new Zoom technology suite including Zoom Webinar (showcased on our first...now to be offered and delivered monthly....virtual membership meeting and annual members’ photo show) will be producing a Zoom Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts Bird Study Merit Badge study program; reprising with another course, our recent first-ever Zoom Beginning Birding Class slated in March 2021, and delivering four Spring Webinars including Bird Photography, Bird Migration, Introduction to eBird, and Tales of a Florida Big Year. Finally, we are going to start co-leading virtual field trips...first stop Costa Rica! No kidding!

Our continued focus on Bruce Beach and FMWAS-wide programs adapted to COVID-19 costs money and that’s why we send an annual fundraising letter. We also ask you to support Audubon Adventures, which delivers Florida Department of Education-approved natural science lessons to 3th-5th grade public and private classrooms including homeschooling across Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties upon request at no-charge.

Bottom-line, FMWAS needs your generosity...large or small, no matter the amount...to help FMWAS achieve our enabling FMWAS 2020-2021 funding campaign. So, today, I follow up on my mailed letter of December 1, 2020, which is also on the “Welcome Page” of our website FMWAudubon.org and ask you to please donate as much as you are able to Francis M. Weston Audubon Society. Happy New Year and thank you for your kind generosity.

Michael Brower
Tripping with Birds and Bulls
Ann Forster

My career was managing the Federal/State Milk Testing Labs in Georgia. The close association with dairies and dairy herds gave me an appreciation of cattle of all types. Birding often takes us to rural areas so I frequently spend time admiring the local cattle when the birding is slow.

One of my most amazing encounters was in Bolivia. We were staying at a ranch which had a colony of rare Blue-throated Macaws. We were waiting on the back of a truck that was to take us to the Macaw roost. I noticed a beautiful Brahma bull grazing near the main barn. A gaucho walked out carrying a saddle. I looked around for a horse but the man walked straight over to the bull, threw the saddle on, mounted up and rode off. "Did you see that??!!" I shrieked. The birders thought I had seen a good bird.

The absolute best bull ever was in Kenya. A group of Masai herdsmen had brought their herd to a water hole where we were birding. Note: Water holes in a desert country are a gift to birders. The relationship of the Masai and their cattle is more like our friendship with our dogs. They control the herd with voice commands ... no whips or prods. The cattle lined up two-by-two to drink. In the last two-some was a huge bull in prime condition. He had been tattooed all over and had those enormous horns typical of that breed. Dan asked our guide to ask the owner if a photograph was possible. He was flattered but superstition precluded an OK. He finally came to our guide and said that Dan could take his picture so we could tell our friends that he was the owner of the most magnificent bull ever.

Virtual Field Trip to Costa Rica
Friday, February 5, 2021, 8:00-9:00 a.m. CST

Space is limited to 30 attendees
First Come, First Served

We invite you to join Francis M. Weston Audubon Society members in partnership with Mowgli Expeditions for a unique remote bird watching trip to Costa Rica as we explore one of the country’s most amazing places for bird watching. Experience real-time virtual birding with a guide in a distant remote forest in Costa Rica. In an instant, you will be transported to the rainforest, exploring and looking for birds.

Registration is $17 per person; $12 from each registration goes directly to the local guide. The event will take place via Zoom Web Conferencing. Registrants will receive an email with meeting credentials the day prior to the event.


The link to register can also be found on the FMWAudubon.org homepage.

Bird Walk—Saturday, February 6, 2021, 9:00-11:00 a.m., Fort Pickens, Perry Doggrell, Leader.
Meet at 9:00 a.m. in the Pensacola Beach Park West parking lot, just past the pink condos at 1390 Ft. Pickens Rd and before you enter the National Seashore area. Perry Doggrell will lead the bird walk at Fort Pickens. We will follow Perry to the parking lot where he wants to start the walk. There is a limit of 10 participants and masks are required to attend the bird walk. Please email marcymcgahan@gmail.com to reserve your spot with your name and phone number. Perry will lead us on a walk through a marsh, woods, and along the shoreline in search of birds. Please bring a pair of binoculars. There is an entrance fee. Bring your pass if you have one.

Field Trips—Field trips will be scheduled once Covid-19 is under control. Meanwhile, enjoy wintering birds at favorite sites in our area – Maritime Park, Bruce Beach, UWF, Quietwater Beach, Ft. Pickens, Shoreline Park and Navarre County Park. Check the Aug-Sep-Oct Skimmer for trails, and watch our website for future scheduling. Feeder cameras are also fun, so check https://www.allaboutbirds.org/cams/
Big Day - 23 April 1991
Bob Duncan—continued from page 1.

Greg had stakeout Prairie and Swainson's Warblers in the pine woods north of Blakeley Historic Park and we headed there. Heavy rain had fallen a few days before and the clay roads were slick. Greg barreled down the roads at a good clip with the car fishtailing until Phil finally blurted out "they're gonna read in Birding Magazine about 4 birders killed when their car overturned doing a Big Day." Greg slowed...a little. We came to a flooded creek crossing with a rickety bridge, only the bridge wasn't there. Submerged or gone? Bill put on boots and waded in to be sure it was there. We then drove over it, but not before water got into the convertible well over the floorboards. We got the targets on the other side without getting out of the car.

The day was chosen because of a frontal passage which would cause fallout. Rain was forecast to clear the coast by morning. It didn't. A light drizzle and low overcast lingered and prevented hawks like Swallow-tailed and Mississippi Kites from soaring. We next headed for the Blakeley Island Mud Lakes impoundments where we expected good shorebirding, herons, egrets, bitterns and maybe a buteo missed along the river. We did well and our species list was growing by the hour.

Next, the coast, which would make or break our efforts. Was there a fallout? When we arrived at the Shell Mound at Dauphin Island, we heard an unfamiliar clamor coming from a tree. A tree full of Dickcissels! Fallout! Frantic birding! As hours and dark closed in on us, we worked on our tally. We had found 28 species of warblers and 26 species of shorebirds. It was a wild day, one to remember, with a grand total of 181 species and a bill for $200 to clean up the rental car.

Note: To grasp the idea of a Big Day, watch the hilarious movie The Big Year (2011) starring Steve Martin, Jack Black and Owen Wilson.

The Best Week of Our Year—2020
Tom and Karen Stanmore

As relatively new birders we still get excited over the species that visit our backyard with each change of season. Most would agree 2020 provided more opportunities to spend time at home enjoying birds at our feeders and submitting eBird reports. The morning of December 15 was an especially good day for us. While watching a flock of Red-winged Blackbirds enjoy the buffet we provided, one bird in particular immediately caught our attention. Tom quickly grabbed his camera and fired off a few shots. After consulting several guidebooks, Karen was semi-convinced we had a Black-headed Grosbeak. But how could that be?! Naturally, we sent a photo to Bob and Lucy Duncan, who have been our mentors and i.d. consultants over the last five years. With fingers crossed we eagerly awaited their reply. Yes, we had confirmation! Lucy alerted a young couple, biologists Gundy and Natasza who were working on a Florida Big Year. They came to the house the following day and positively identified the Black-headed Grosbeak, which made species #383 on their Big Year list.

Afterwards, we received calls and visits from bird chasers all over the state. We had the pleasure of meeting many interesting people and enjoyed every minute of our Fifteen Minutes of Fame. It truly was a time of joy and excitement in an otherwise bleak pandemic year. Sadly, our friend left us after only one week, but what a ride it was while he was here!

Are you ready for some birding excitement?


Count birds anywhere for at least 15 minutes, make your best estimates by species and record them on online.

2020 results: 27,270,156 total birds of 6,942 species were identified in 194 countries by 268,674 estimated participants.
Bruce Beach Update—January 3, 2021

Over the weekend of November 21st and 22nd 2020, members of FMWAS, and many willing volunteers gathered at Bruce Beach to plant 150 native plants in the area on the east side of the property, and around Washerwoman Creek. The plants were delivered early on Saturday morning by Lloyd Dobson of 7 Pines Native Plant Nursery, DeFuniak Springs.

Before this, Michael Brower, Steve Coster, and John and Helen Caffrey had prepared the site. They inserted color-coded pegs to identify the various positions for the many species to be planted. Weeds and grasses, notably hundreds of sandspurs, were knocked to the ground to improve planting conditions.

The bulk of the planting was concluded on Saturday afternoon, when the Mayor of Pensacola, the Right Honorable Grover Robinson inserted the last 2 trees, a Sourwood (donated by 7 Pines Nursery) and a Live Oak into their holes. City Councilors accompanied him and there was PNJ and TV coverage. On Sunday, a smaller team turned out to apply water to the newly planted trees. We used a water bowser kindly supplied by the City.

A follow-up watering took place on December 12th, after there had been some dry days. However, the rains have been extremely kind to the project. Since that watering, it has not been necessary to water at all, with substantial rain falling every few days. We do get information as to the rain experienced, mainly by kind favor of Barbara Albrecht who lives about 2 miles away.

We will watch carefully how things progress. As long as we get periodic rain during the next few cold months, hopefully it will not be necessary to water. But, we do have access to the City water bowser whenever we request it, so with a team of 8-10 volunteers we can easily do a watering in about 2 hours.

Once the weather starts to warm up, to keep moisture levels in the soil up to an adequate level, we will have to be more vigilant with regular inspection visits. Weeding, too, will become important once the spring and summer arrive, to ensure our plants have the best chance to establish and grow.

Don’t miss any chapter activities or news.
Sign up for E-Letter today!
fmwaudubon.org/publications/e-letter/
Irruption year! Music to a birder's ears. It began with Red-breasted Nuthatches entering the area in October. Reports were frequent for a while but slowly tapered off.

This was not so unusual for this species to make a "grand entrance" then vanish. Some years they stay, but not this year. Next came Purple Finches and Pine Siskins. eBird reports of these species came in regularly and continue to this time (mid Jan.). Goldfinches, normally associated with irruptive years, made appearances but in much smaller numbers. Western hummingbirds brightened feeders in above normal numbers, with Rufous leading the charge. Our best friends – birds (no insult to dogs intended) – made a very troublesome time a little more tolerable. And then there were the following noteworthy birds that excited many a birder who chose to get out and look.

A very rare Warbling Vireo* made an appearance in the Duncan yard in Gulf Breeze on 15 Oct (Lucy Duncan). Invader from the Caribbean, a Shiny Cowbird* was on Garcon Pt. 17 Oct (Les Kelly). A Wood Stork was in Milton 17 Oct (Marilou Lehmann). Another was in n. Santa Rosa County 5 Nov (Trudy Young). Normally a spring migrant, a Blackpoll Warbler* was in Cantonment 2 Nov (Brenda & Jerry Callaway). A late departing Baltimore Oriole* was in the Duncan yard 2 Nov. Absent prior to 1966, a White-faced Ibis* was at the International Paper Wetlands (IPW) 2 Nov (Brenda & Jerry Callaway). Wren Duncan, age 8, identified correctly Pine Siskins flying over the Duncan yard on 31 Oct.

A startling, stunning and complete surprise was a Black Rail* that ran across Lucy's path in the Duncan yard on 20 Nov. This extremely secretive "mouse-like" bird is normally found (usually not found) in marshes. It disappeared into thick undergrowth, much to Bob's dismay. A consolation prize was a Franklin's Gull* seen in Gulf Breeze by Bob on 23 Nov. Sixteen American Avocets at Pensacola Beach 24 Nov established an all-time late day by 3 days (Scot Duncan). A Great Shearwater* was there 25 Nov (Scot Duncan) along with 18 Black Scoters.* Very rare in Dec, a Yellow Warbler* was in the Duncan yard 3 Dec. Rare visitor from the west, an Ash-throated Flycatcher* was in Gulf Breeze 3 to 11 Dec (Bob, Lucy, Will and Wren Duncan, Caralyn Zehnder). Another stayed at Ft. Pickens and thrilled many birders from 18 Dec to 6 Jan (Brenda & Jerry Callaway, many observers).

Rare but regular, a Lesser Black-backed Gull* was in Gulf Breeze 4 Nov (Daniel Horton) and 13 Jan (Duncans). Establishing a first local Dec record, Les Kelly found a Blue-winged Warbler* in Pace on 6 Dec. Absent in winter in Weston's time (prior to 1965) Summer Tanagers are now reported regularly. Three were in the area between 6 Dec and 14 Jan (Steve Coster, Powers McLeod, Michael Brower). Black-headed Grosbeak,* a rare visitor from the western states, graced the feeders of Tom & Karen Stanmore in Innerarity Pt. from 15 to 21 Dec, to the delight of many birders. Constituting the first ever Dec record, an Orchard Oriole* was at IPW 13 Dec - 6 Jan (Brenda & Jerry Callaway).

A Chuck-will's Widow* at Ft. Pickens 15 Dec was also rare for the season (Daniel Horton). Very cooperative and easy to find Ash-throated* and Vermilion Flycatchers were at Ft. Pickens 6 Dec – 10 Jan (Brenda & Jerry Callaway, many observers). A Dickcissel* in downtown Pensacola 20 Dec was a good find (Douglas Richards). A Pacific Loon* on the Pensacola CBC lingered along the downtown waterfront through 29 Dec (Bob & Lucy Duncan, et al.). Another was at Ft. Pickens 26 Dec (Daniel Horton). Rare in the area, a Barn Owl was in Walnut Hill 23 Dec (John Yuhasz). A productive visit to n. Escambia Co. 28 Dec by Daniel Horton yielded a Dickcissel*, Shiny Cowbird* and only the 3rd local record of Horned Lark.* A Western Kingbird* 5 Jan at Ft. Pickens was chased off the island by a Mockingbird (Bob & Lucy Duncan). Very rare in winter, a Least Bittern* was at IPW 6 Jan (Brenda & Jerry Callaway). Michael and Cathy Brower had a Rose-breasted Grosbeak* in their yard on 11 Jan with their continuing Summer Tanager.

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

* Species with asterisks require documentation so that they may become part of the ornithological record.
Among the species missed this year were Blue- and Green-winged Teal, Virginia Rail, Wilson's Snipe, American Woodcock, Black Skimmer, Eastern Meadowlark and Common Grackle. Of the expected species, only two were found this year that were missed last year - Black-crowned Night-Heron and Sedge Wren. Five "write-ins" reported were Pacific Loon, Summer Tanager, Hairy Woodpecker, Purple Finch, and Semipalmated Plover.

The 122nd CBC will be tentatively held on December 18, 2021, hopefully with fewer contractions from the Covid-19 virus. With any luck, more wintering birds will be down in the coastal South for the next count. Thanks to all the participants for getting out there and committing time and effort toward this census. Until then, keep your eyes open and your binoculars close at hand!
Virtual Beginning Birding Class—March, 2021

New to birding or need a refresher course? Please join us for three evenings this March in the comfort of your own home. Experienced local birders from the FMWAS Chapter will instruct the sessions with time after each presentation for questions and answers.

Classes will be held online via Zoom from 6:00-7:30 p.m. Field Trips are to be determined, pending COVID restrictions*.

**Thursday, March 11—Birding Basics** - Covering topics such as binoculars, field guides, and birding ethics

**Saturday, March 13—*Field Trip**

**Tuesday, March 16—Shorebirds** - Learning to identify birds of the shoreline such as Plovers and Sandpipers

**Thursday, March 18—Raptors** - Covering how to identify the many birds of prey found in our local area

**Saturday, March 20—*Field Trip**

Class size is limited. To register, email Karen Stanmore, FMWAS Education Chair—karen.stanmore@gmail.com, or call (850) 748-4222. All 3 sessions for a $35.00 donation per person—for nonmembers this includes a one year membership in the Audubon Society after completion.