

Skimmer



Summer 2012
July—September
Vol. XL No. 1

The Francis M. Weston Audubon Society

SUMMER IN THE PANHANDLE

Jere French

Summer is here—sailing in the bay, canoeing the rivers, diving and snorkeling, boating, fishing. The beach is beckoning to us, offering a treasure of nature’s pleasures, here in post BP Panhandle Florida. What’s not to like? Yet back in suburbia some folks who might be more usefully employed at the river or on the beach are finding a somewhat misguided purpose—in gardening. Gardening, you ask? I’ve got a problem with gardening?

Not as such, but the thing that drives me around the bend is neither the bugs nor the humidity, nor even the nauseous and deadly chemicals some ‘gardeners’ spray on everything that’s trying to make a living out there. No, what drives me inside and up the walls is the loud, brain jangling whine of gasoline lawn mowers, edger’s, trimmers, and leaf blowers. Especially the leaf blowers, because not only are they useless as gardening tools, they are actually harmful to the landscape with their fulmination of hot air blasting dirt and dust through the sky, de-leafing shrubbery and uprooting flower beds, as well as spewing vegetative debris throughout their neighbors’ yards. And that’s just for starters. Gasoline leaf blowers poison our suburban air with a smorgasbord of deadly chemicals—carbon and nitrogen oxides to begin with, about eighty pounds a year per machine, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. And the same goes for mowers and edgers.

But the saddest thing of all, at least regarding blowers, is the long term damage they cause by blasting away the vital mulching and composting properties found in all those leaves, from which the happy homeowner mindlessly purges his garden. In Gulf Breeze, Santa Rosa Island, and South Pensacola our soil is sandy and short of nutrients, which must therefore come to us naturally from leaf and flower litter, tree bark and other natural refuse. Yes, even grass clippings. It may look like litter, but it’s next year’s humus, and the following year’s topsoil. Do we really want to blow it all away? Some folks must think there’s just not much value in what’s delivered free to their doorstep, and outside of a little sweeping no serious

effort on their part required. You don’t even need to rake it up, it’s not doing any damage—unlike all those poisons folks rush down to Lowe’s to buy.

As for those paved surfaces, sure, patios and decks are useful outdoor places and we need them in the summertime for barbecues, parties, and all those outdoor games we play. I recommend a stiff broom, or under duress and only rarely, an electric blower. But for driveways? “I think that I shall never see a driveway fit for serving tea.” Let the leaves fall. Most driveways are improved in appearance by a little leaf litter. Think of the rising cost of gasoline, no problem there, it’s the number one topic of conversation in most homes—and political commercials. Stow those polluting, wasteful tools in the shed, and put that precious fuel in your tank for a drive to the park—or that birding holiday. Don’t hang up the binoculars just because the migrants have departed.

Get on your way—to the beach or the river, the bay, the many nature trails with which we are so blessed here in the Panhandle. Take your sunscreen and bottled water. Grab your rod and reel, your bathing suits, your picnic baskets, your beach towels. Strap your kayak on top your car and get out there. You might come back home with enough stories—or fish—to make for some good dinner table conversation. Maybe even a Bachman’s Sparrow.

Or just take your binoculars, a pitcher of iced tea and your tomato and cucumber sandwiches and a book, out to your deck or patio, and find yourself a comfortable chair. In the late afternoon the Blue Jays will come around to see if you’ve left them any crumbs or maybe half a pickle. Chickadees and Titmice will be at your feeder, Carolina Wrens are always around, and a Nuthatch might visit. A Brown Thrasher could be skulking around under the yaupon while Tree Swallows soar overhead. The resident Cardinal will look on, and then start singing, while a Red-bellied Woodpecker chortles, and gives your hickory a whack or two. I’ll bet you count ten species before you’ve finished the second sandwich.



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. Call Lucy Duncan at 932-4792 or email her at town_point@bellsouth.net if you have any questions.

□ **Saturday, July 28, Bay Cliff Nature Preserve Native Plants.** James Burkhalter will lead us on a walk to observe native plants and wildflowers along a nature trail in Gulf Breeze. The nature trail passes through swamp forest and upland oak forest before reaching Pensacola Bay. Expect easy walking. Meet at 7:30am at the north end of the Pensacola Bay Bridge at Wayside Park near the Pensacola Visitor Center. We plan to finish by noon.

□ **Saturday, August 25, Ed Ball Nature Trail Native Plants.** James Burkhalter will lead us on a walk to observe the native plants along the Ed Ball Nature Trail at UWF, including a visit to the Michael I. Cousins Herbarium. Expect easy walking. Meet at 7:30am in the parking lot in front of the Target Store near the intersection of University Parkway and Nine Mile Road. Finish by noon.

□ **Saturday, September 15, Ft. Pickens Birding.** Dana Timmons will lead us to look for early fall migrants along the Ft. Pickens portion of Santa Rosa Island in the Gulf Islands National Seashore. Expect moderate walking in sand. Meet at 7:30am in the shopping center parking lot across the highway from the entrance to Gulf Breeze Hospital. Finish by noon.

□ **Saturday, September 29, Turkey Creek Park Native Plants.** James Burkhalter will lead us along the Turkey Creek boardwalk nature trail in Niceville in search of native plants and fall wildflowers. Expect moderate but easy walking. Meet at 7:30am in the parking lot in front of the J. C. Penney Store on Davis Highway. We will finish around noon. There is a nice, large picnic shelter at the south end of the boardwalk for those who would like to bring a lunch.

Chapter Meetings

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

□ **August 23**
Andrew Jernigan of the Wildlife Management Division of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission will present a talk entitled "*Getting to Know Florida Black Bears.*" Andrew works at the Blackwater Wildlife Management Area.

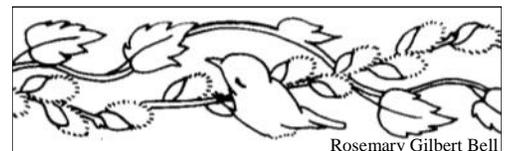
□ **September 27**
Jennifer Butera will present a program entitled "*The Role of the Naturalist at the Roy Hyatt Environmental Center in Cantonment, FL.*" Jennifer's primary role at the center is interacting with Escambia County elementary school students to increase their appreciation of the environment. Jennifer is just completing her fifth year as a Naturalist at the Center.

Board of Directors Meetings

Meetings are open to all members.

□ **July 21**
The board will hold its annual planning meeting at 9:00am at Lucy Michel's house.

□ **August 2 and September 6**
The Board meets at 7:00pm at Trinity Presbyterian Church, Bayou Blvd. Pensacola.



What will they think of next? For the last two years, tightening budgets and funding cuts have been the way of life for lawmakers in all segments of our government. Wildlife and the environment in general have been the losers.

In their last session, our state legislators introduced a bill to allow drillers to move into state owned lands, particularly the Blackwater River State Forest, for oil and gas exploration. The bill was altered after the Everglades contingency complained and, thankfully, it eventually died in committee.

Down state, legislators were introducing a bill to allow certain zoos to use state park land as a breeding ground for their animals. Like something dreamed up in a Carl Hiaasen novel, Giraffes, Wildebeests

and such would be released to roam through the parks we love, competing with native wildlife for sustenance. Thankfully again, our governor vetoed the bill, and we can hope to enjoy our precious and pristine parks—without worry of a zebra stampede.

But now the University of West Florida is considering selling off the property it owns on Pensacola Beach—for commercial development! A new high rise complex and even a golf course have been suggested. UWF faculty members are reported as generally opposed to such development. And all of this is the result of an apparently desperate search for monies to replace lost funding sources, and the need to raise capital for future campus projects.

Now is the time to take action. Contact your state representative and senator and let them know how important state parks are to you. Make the point that these lands are important for recreation, as well as to the support of our wonderful Florida wildlife. And why not take a moment to remind the University of West Florida of its own responsibility for the protection of our precious barrier island and the use for which it was given to them—education and recreation. It is time to speak up on behalf of the “Special Places” in Florida! You are the voice!



Audubon Adventures

Peggy Baker

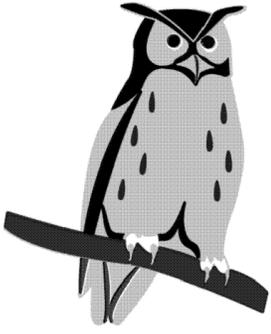


AUDUBON ADVENTURES is a fun way for children to learn about the natural world. The student newspapers present key concepts with vibrant photos and compelling writing. The educator's guides support and enrich the science and language arts curricula. With your help, FMWAS has provided classrooms and Hyatt Center attendees with National Audubon produced newsletters.

Last year's four newsletter publications helped the children learn the answers to the following questions.

1. Why is there a “dead zone” the size of Connecticut in the Gulf of Mexico?
“Flow of Water”
2. Why do 250 species of birds travel all the way to Alaska to raise their young?
“Wild Alaska”
3. How are the owners of city skyscrapers helping birds during migration?
“Caring for Our Planet”
4. Name 7 animals that help to pollinate plants.
“Zip! Hover! Zoom!”

We are asking for your support with our Audubon Adventures program for the 2012-13 school year. For \$50 you can provide a set of four issues to each child in a classroom or one issue for 128 students who visit the Hyatt Center. Donations of any amount help. Please send donations to Francis M. Weston Audubon Society, PO Box 17484, Pensacola, FL 32522 with a note including your name, address and amount. If you would like to sponsor a specific classroom, please include the name of the teacher and the school with its address. Also, please write Audubon Adventures on your check.



FIELD NOTES

Bob Duncan

What spring migration? That's what many birders were asking about the season we anticipated all winter. It was the best of times and the worst of times for birders scouring the woods in April. The best of it were the rainy days,

always great for grounding birds at migrant traps after they cross the Gulf. The worst of it was that for the most part, there were few birds to be found. Why?

The answer, of course, lies in the weather pattern. Yes, we can say there are fewer birds coming back each year as populations of many birds are in general decline. But this season was dismal! Lucy and I went to Dauphin Island April 21st for the Alabama Ornithological Society's spring meeting where birders are *never* disappointed! But for the first time ever in my long birding life, I did not see a *single* warbler!!

For most of late March and April, strong pressure gradients were absent in the Gulf region. The Bermuda High, or its extension, was not pumping strong SE winds across the Gulf, channeling birds to the Texas – Louisiana coasts. In a normal year, a few fronts punctuate this pattern causing fallouts somewhere along the northern Gulf Coast from Texas to here. Birds had fairly light and variable winds a good deal of the time, and birders from High Island, Texas to our area were out of luck. Apparently the birds flew right over the coast non-stop. There were reports of species already on breeding grounds in the interior that were not seen on the coast.

Our luck changed on 22 April when a low developed in the NE Gulf giving us rain on the 21st and our only really good birding day of the season (from the perspective of experienced birders). The low deepened and caught a large trans-Gulf movement in mid-Gulf and shifted it eastward with strong westerly winds. Birders from St. George Island (near Apalachicola) to Key West described “thousands” of warblers accumulating at migratory stop-overs! They got OUR birds! For days the email and listserv chatter from peninsula Florida was alive with ecstatic birders agog with fantastic numbers. So it goes.

NOTEWORTHY BIRDS – Rare visitor from the west, a **Calliope Hummingbird*** graced the Callaway and Catterton feeders in Cantonment in Mar and early Apr.

Rare **Lincoln's Sparrows*** were found 10 Mar (UWF grounds, Laura Catterton) and 11 Mar (Garcon Pt., Daniel Stangeland). Lucy and I ferreted out the very rare “**Nelson's**” **Gull**, a **Herring/Glaucous** hybrid at the Santa Rosa County Central Landfill on 13 Mar, a first area record. A **Groove-billed Ani** was a great find in spring at Ft. Pickens 24 Mar by the persistent Callaways. The species is usually found in fall. On the FMWAS field trip to the Ft. Walton Beach Sewerage Facility 24 Mar, I found an **Ash-throated Flycatcher***, a rare western vagrant that was enjoyed by all participants. Rarely seen in the area, a **Barn Owl** was spotted by Powers and Rosann McLeod in their east Pensacola yard on 28 Jan.

A surprise visitor to our neighborhood in Gulf Breeze was an **American Oystercatcher** on 2 May. Only the 8th report for the area, four **Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks** were spotted near the old chimney on Scenic Hwy by Becky McQueen on 15 May, and on 28 May Jerry Callaway found two more at the newly created International Paper Wetlands in Cantonment. The species is rapidly expanding its range from the west and south. The status of **Boat-tailed Grackles*** in our area has remained a mystery since Weston's time. They are fairly consistently found at the waterfront park in Floridatown in winter. There are usually 10 – 20 males present, never females, and breeding in the area is still unknown. Lucy and I observed 13 females on the US 90 Causeway 13 Mar after watching 13 males at the Floridatown location shortly before. What's going on? **Cliff Swallows*** were observed by Peggy Baker and Carol Tebay coming and going around a highway 90 bridge in Milton on 26 May. Nesting birds were confirmed on 2 Jun and were photographed by Larry Goodman, an outstanding find and confirmation of a first area breeding record and one of few for the entire state! Joe Williams' discovery of **Nutmeg Mannikins** nesting in his Purple Martin house in SW Pensacola does not bode well for the Martin population in the future! The species continues its expansion east and west from its core in E. Pensacola. A **Hairy Woodpecker*** was a surprise visitor in Jere French's yard on 5 Jun. A **Surf Scoter*,** brought to the Wildlife Sanctuary of Northwest Florida on 4 Jun was a first Jun record.

**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.*

It was Texas again. We spent the first week of May birding along the Louisiana marshes and the upper Texas coast. Since Dan has been infected by the digital camera bug, our rate of progress has bogged down to a crawl. For years our field technique has been to go to areas that have good birding possibilities, bird until we have covered the area, and then move on to the next place. Repeat as needed. Now when we get to a place the camera comes out and time passes. The first few trips we did like this caused me to dissolve into nervous fidgets and fractiousness. Since this last trip was Dan's birthday week, I promised that he could take all the time he needed and I would entertain myself...somehow.

Our first real birding stop was at Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuge. Dan went onto the boardwalk to take pictures of a Common Gallinule family. I walked out the front boardwalk and a Red-bellied Woodpecker landed on the banister right in front of me. There were lots of spider webs on the balusters and the woodpecker systematically robbed the trapped insects. I was only about six feet away and could almost hear the spiders complaining.



The next day we hit Texas. First we visited Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge where Wilson's Phalaropes were twirling and feeding. Two of them right next to one another were spinning in opposite directions, almost making me dizzy. I found that I could watch them happily for as long as Dan was picture taking. Our visit to the Smith Woods Rookery at High Island sealed my appreciation of the new slower birding plan.

Who wants to rush off and leave all that fantastic activity with Roseate Spoonbills, egrets, and cormorants all nest building, squawking, and fussing. On top of that I saw my first bull alligator roaring and vibrating the water. We then drove along the beach where sargassum was being pushed ashore by a south wind and by the ton. We call it seaweed but it is really a brown algae with branching and little round floats. It harbors all sorts of tiny creatures that the sandpipers love. The Ruddy Turnstones and Red Knots were wading out and pecking at the clumps still floating in the waves. The Sanderlings, always reluctant to get their feet wet, kept running back and forth until suddenly one ran out and jumped onto a clump and surfed it in on the next wave. Observing patiently is fun!

Summer reading with the kids:

***The Last Egret*, Harvey Oyer**

Here are Charlie Pierce's adventures in The Everglades during the turn of the century, including the devastating hunt for Egret feathers to adorn ladies' hats, and the eventual efforts to protect the birds of the Everglades, including the Egrets.



***For The Birds, The Life of Roger Tory Peterson*, Peggy Thomas**

This is the story of Peterson's childhood enthusiasm for birds, leading to his becoming an ornithologist—and America's renowned field guide illustrator, as well as a leading conservationist of American birds.

***The Watcher: Jane Goodall's Life With The Chimps*, Jeanette Winter**

For more than fifty years, and still going, Jane Goodall has lived among, studied, and led the efforts to protect the habitat of chimpanzees—and to understand them; how they live, socialize, organize, and survive.

WHAZAT? YOU'RE A BIRD WATCHER IF...

Recently, an older gentleman related to me his first bird watching experience. He told me that his job was to fill his wife's bird feeders in their yard, but that he never watched the birds. But following the sudden death of his wife, in his grief he could do nothing but sit on the patio and watch the birds. During that time, he became aware that there was a family of Blue Jays that frequented his feeders. He also became aware that these birds had common calls that they used to communicate. He began to recognize their calls for alarm, intruders or even new food at the feeder. After a year of observing these birds, he was able to recognize six different calls and their meaning as this family of Blue Jays talked to each other in his yard. As he finished his story, this gentleman quickly said to me, "But I'm not a bird watcher."



I said to him and I say to you, ***"IF you are aware of the birds around you, you ARE a birdwatcher!"***

Peggy Baker

FRANCIS M. WESTON CHAPTER AWARDS

The **2012 Award for Service to the Chapter** was presented to **Morris Clark** for his 26 years of service on the Board of Directors as President, Vice President, Director and Field Trip Chair; and for his many contributions to the Roy Hyatt Environmental Center.

The **2012 Media Award** was presented to **Carl Wernicke** in recognition of his career as editorial writer for the Pensacola News Journal, in particular his writings on behalf of the natural beauty of Northwest Florida and the Gulf Coast.

CHAPTER OFFICERS ELECTED

At the May 17, 2012 Annual Meeting of the Francis M. Weston Audubon Society the following officers and director at large were elected and will take office July 1, 2012:

- President—Dana Timmons
- Vice President—Matthew Drum
- Treasurer—Rebecca Grass
- Recording Secretary—Lucy Michel
- Corresponding Secretary—Ann Forster
- Director at Large (2012-2014)—Lucy Duncan

BIRDATHON 2012

This year's BIRDATHON was a great success. There were 9 birding teams involving 30 individuals. At least 121 different species of birds were seen. What is of greater importance is the amount of donations received – over \$4,000 and counting as pledges continue to come in. Recognition of those teams and individuals involved was given at the annual chapter banquet on May 17. I want to personally thank all who made this event successful. You did all the hard work. The teams were:



- Bluebirds – Jan Lloyd and Ann Forster
- Tallyn's Talons – Wes Tallyn and Samatha Tallyn
- Brady's Birders – Jim Brady, Betsy Tetlow, Matt Drum, and Hal Hinman
- Jaybirds – Jere French, Sue Timmons, Dana Timmons, Lucy Michel, and Mo Michel
- Bird Chasers – Bruce Furlow, Larry Goodman, and Les Kelly
- Brown Creepers – Dorothy Kaufmann, Cheryl Greene, Ann Forster, and Jan Lloyd
- Gourmet Birders – Roberta Bonwit, Billye Christopher, Carolyn Henning, Mary Jones, Dave Maitland, Jan Osborn, Bob Strader, and Sam Tagatz
- PeggySueNTexas – Peggy Baker and Sue Peters/Feree
- Duncan Team – Lucy Duncan and Bob Duncan

Les Kelly

Audubon Adventures — Answers to questions on page 3



1. The fertilizers and other pollutants that wash down the Mississippi River into the Gulf cause an algae bloom which uses up the oxygen in the water, killing the creatures that live in that area.
2. In Alaska there is an abundance of good nesting space in varied habitats. The explosion of plants and insects provides the source of food for baby birds on the long summer days.
3. The owners of the skyscrapers are turning off the lights in the buildings at night so that the migrating birds don't get confused and crash into the windows.
4. Seven animals that help pollinate plants are: hummingbirds (and other birds), bees, butterflies, bats, mosquitoes, moths, and beetles.

One hot summer afternoon while bicycling through our Gulf Breeze neighborhood I stopped to catch my breath in front of a weed-filled lot facing Pensacola Bay, where eight years ago a house once stood. It had been a pleasant single story brick and wood paneled structure, with a swimming pool and a couple of boats and a trailer in the side yard, but all of that eventually disappeared, first from the force of Hurricane Ivan and then under the final humiliation of the bulldozer. Even the pool is gone, no doubt considered a liability. So now there is only the lot—softened somewhat by years of nature’s handiwork.

On either side of where the driveway once intersected the street there stand two magnificently matched crape myrtles, sturdy, thickly branched, uncared for yet undaunted, unnoticed, steadfast, resilient—and bursting with a halo of white flowers. Matched sentinels offering an invitation to enter, ‘come, use your imagination,’ they seem to be saying, ‘picture your dream house in the bright summer sun, here against the sparkling bay.’

Just next door stands a darkly paneled neighbor’s house showing no lingering damage from the hurricane, its front garden beautifully manicured and maintained, with compact shrubbery, floral arrangements, a bright green lawn—and another pair of white flowering crape myrtles on either side of an inviting driveway. The two houses were likely built within the same year, some time during the 1980s, and the trees were probably planted about the same time—identical crape myrtles. But there is a dilemma in this otherwise logical expression of natural order. Here, in the well maintained front garden, the two crape myrtles are stunted, scrawny, and nearly without flowers at a time

of year when they should be in full bloom. What’s causing this difference, this seemingly contrary behavior of reasoned order? Why are the abandoned, yea forsaken crape myrtles next door so bursting with vigorous growth and abundant flowers, while their well-tended neighboring trees, just forty feet away and likewise bordering the driveway, struggling to survive?

Beyond the solitary trees the empty lot is a tangle of blackberry vines and brown, withered grasses tempting fate from a cast off cigarette, and still further beyond, coasting in a light breeze, a white sail glides across blue water. Bumblebees hover over the blackberry flowers where a lone mockingbird perches, marking, perhaps, the potential for future opportunities. Everywhere else is silence, but for the occasional gust that whisks the dust in whirls across my feet.

We are surely aware of other such relevancies in life: bright green pine seedlings emerging from the fire-blackened forest floor, new leaves sprouting from a singular branch of a fallen oak. We marvel at nature, at her determination, her indomitable courage, the seemingly irrational obstinacy of living things, carrying on without regard to logic or reason—as we trust her to form her myriad of shapes from so few genetic sources.

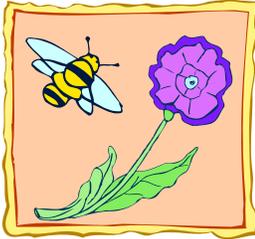
A battered *For Sale* sign swings tenuously from a weathered post between the two trees, making all the more poignant this apparition of contrasts—failure of one kind and success of another. Is our coastal climate so benign that even exotic species like crape myrtle might survive, even flourish, under such conditions of defection? Is it possible they may even *prefer* being forsaken? I couldn’t say. I just observe, and wonder, at the wonder of life.



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Chapter Meetings

August 23
September 27

Field Trips

July 28, August 25
September 15 and 29

Details on page 2



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Vice President	Matthew Drum321-7705
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Corresponding Secretary	Ann Forster456-4421
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Directors at Large	Lucy Duncan.....932-4792
	Larry Goodman433-5135
	Wes Tallyn390-5525
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Fundraising	Dana Timmons934-4521
Conservation	Position open
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Web Master	Debra Jones

Web Address: <http://www.fmwaudubon.org/>

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