

Skimmer



Spring 2013
April-June
Vol. XL No. 4

The Francis M. Weston Audubon Society

Blackwater River State Forest Bird Survey

Peggy Baker

Blackwater River State Forest has been designated by the National Audubon as an Important Bird Area with a global priority (the highest). This designation means this area in Northwest Florida is vital to birds and other biodiversity. It provides essential habitat for the survival of one or more species. In 2009, FMWAS undertook the task of surveying the birds in BRS Forest by conducting weekly surveys.

During our three-year bird survey of the 240,000 acres of the BRS Forest, the FMWAS team identified 181 bird species. Of these, 33 species were spring and fall migrants, 35 were summer visitors only, 60 were winter only, and 53 species were seen year round. And most importantly, 86 of these species nest and raise young in BRS Forest.

Under the Migratory Bird Program, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service established a list of Birds of Conservation Concern-2008. Twenty of these bird species have been surveyed in the forest.

Important conclusions drawn from the survey include:

The acquisition of the Yellow River Ravine has created a wildlife corridor connecting Eglin AFB, Conecuh National Forest and Blackwater River State Forest. This provides migratory birds a safe and supportive habitat on their journey across the Gulf of Mexico to and from their breeding grounds.

During spring and fall migration, 23 species of warblers were identified in small numbers. These warblers depend on insects and worms found in a variety of trees in the forest to help them recover from and prepare for their long migratory flights. Other migrants, particularly Wood and Swainson's Thrushes, were found eating the buds of bay trees during fall migration.

The food plots planted for game wildlife also attracted great numbers of wintering Chipping and Vesper Sparrows, as well as Palm, Pine and Yellow-rumped Warblers.

Dead snags left standing throughout the forest have attracted large numbers of woodpeckers. Along with the Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, the forest is home to good numbers of nesting Pileated, Red-bellied, Red-headed, and Downy Woodpeckers, as well as, Northern Flicker. There are a good number of Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers and a few Hairy Woodpeckers during the winter season.

Eastern Bluebirds have returned to nest in the natural cavities of the dead snags. Brown-headed Nuthatches are also plentiful in the forest and use the dead snags for nesting.

Bachman's Sparrows, an endangered species, were heard or seen in 11 of the 13 survey areas during the spring breeding season.

Southeastern American Kestrels were seen feeding young in a clear-cut area in early spring. Nesting boxes were erected by FWC in 2011 and two pairs have been documented nesting in the last two years. They have had an overall decline of 82% in the last 70 years.

Wood Ducks were seen in 10 of the 13 survey areas during the nesting season. Other migratory ducks had low numbers during the winter season in the lakes.

Birds that need larger, natural cavities in older oaks are almost non-existent in the forest. There were no Barn Owls seen or heard. Only a few Screech Owls were heard.



Continued on page 3.

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.

□ **Sat., Apr. 13, Ft. Morgan.** We will look for spring migrants at one of the best birding spots on the northern Gulf Coast. Expect moderate walking. A visit to the HBSG banding station is included. If you want to sit and watch the banding operation, bring a chair. The Ft. Morgan preregistered group admission fee is \$4 per person. Bring a picnic lunch and drinks for the day. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the parking lot in front of Food World at 4051 Barrancas, just east of Navy Blvd. Insect repellent, sunscreen and a hat are recommended. We expect to return to Pensacola by midafternoon. Leaders: Lucy and Bob Duncan.

□ **Tues., Apr. 23, Dauphin Island Birding.** Bob and Lucy Duncan will lead us on a full day birding trip to Dauphin Island, a premier birding location on the northern Gulf Coast, and at the peak of spring migration. Expect moderate walking. Bring a picnic lunch, insect repellent and sunscreen, hat and drinks for the day. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the Publix parking lot on the corner of Nine Mile Road and Pine Forest Road. We plan to return by late afternoon unless birding conditions are lousy, in which case, we'll slink home earlier.

□ **Sat., Apr. 27, Big Lagoon State Park.** James Burkhalter will explore with us the park's flora, including *Baccharis angustifolia* the shrub with small, fuzzy white blossoms that migrant butterflies love in the fall. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the Big Lots parking lot on the east side of Navy Blvd. south of U.S. Highway 98. There is a \$5 per vehicle park admission fee. Expect easy walking in sand and on boardwalks through varied habitats of this park. Bring a picnic lunch if you wish. We will finish by noon.

□ **Sat., May 4, Pascagoula River Audubon Center and the Pascagoula River Basin** boat trip led by Jan Lloyd and Ann Forster. Join us for a trip to PRAC in Moss Point, Mississippi. There we will hear a program about Prothonotary Warbler conservation followed by a boat trip with Capt. Benny McCoy through the Pascagoula River basin. The PRAC is less than 2 hours from Pensacola and has a wealth of natural history to share. Reservations and payment (\$35 per person) must be received by APRIL 19. More information and a registration blank are on page 7, or contact Lucy Duncan at 932-4792.

□ **Sat., May 25, Tarkiln Bayou Preserve State Park.** James Burkhalter will lead us to see native plants in habitats from pine flatwoods to pitcher plant bogs. The preserve is home to four species of endangered pitcher plants including the Florida rarity, white-topped pitcher plant (*Sarracenia leucophylla*). 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. Highway 98. Bring a picnic lunch if you wish. We will finish by noon. There is a small entrance fee to the park.

Chapter Meetings

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

□ **April 25, 2013.** Ms. Carol Furman of Fairhope, AL will present a talk entitled "Natural Perspectives." Carol is a biologist, artist, and amateur photographer and has kayaked and led tours of the Mobile-Tensaw Delta areas for several years. She loves the outdoors and will be sharing her knowledge and stories of the flora and fauna of the Mobile Bay area.

□ **May 16, 2013, 5:30pm.** Our **Annual Meeting and Banquet** will be held in the Azalea Trace Auditorium, 10100 Hillview Road, Pensacola. The evening will include a silent auction, raffle, cash bar, dinner, fellowship, election of next year's officers and a guest speaker. Dinner entrees, cost, and guest speaker information will be mailed to all FMWAS members. To make a donation to the silent auction or raffle, please contact Lucy Michel at 433-3151, Vickie Parker at 484-0663, or Sue Timmons at 934-4521.

Board of Directors

□ **April 4, May 2, and June 6**—The Board meets at 7:00pm at Trinity Presbyterian Church, Bayou Blvd. Pensacola. Meetings are open to all members.

Other Activities

□ **Sat., Apr. 6, Bird Walk, 9:00-11:00 am**—Peggy Baker will lead a walk for spring migrants at Ft. Pickens. Meet at the trail kiosk by the fort parking lot. For details, call 564-1482

□ **Apr. 6-17, Spring Banding Session,** Fort Morgan, Hummer/Bird Study Group

□ **Sat., Apr. 20 is Earth Day,** in Bayview Park in Pensacola. As usual Francis M. Weston Audubon Society will have a booth with displays, brochures and birding tips. We hope to see you there. Powers McLeod will be our host.

The Ides of March is behind us and the anticipations of spring are just around the corner. Already Purple Martins are arriving and today four Swallow-tailed Kites gracefully soared over our house. The greatest show on earth has begun and it only gets better from here. Barn Swallows, Northern Parula, Yellow-throated Warbler, White-eyed Vireo and all the regular warblers will be appearing in their best plumage to win a mate. March through May, millions of birds soar to their nesting grounds in North America and we “birders” get to watch the show.

In April, you can play an important role for our chapter, by watching birds during our Birdathon which raises money for our work at the Roy Hyatt Environmental Center. The rules are simple; first select a team of friends to go bird watching with during any 24 hour period during the month of April. Then ask your friends to sponsor your efforts with their pledge per

Birdathon 2013

Bird any day in April

**Raise money to help us continue
our educational program
support at the
Roy Hyatt Environmental Center**

species of birds you see during that 24 hour period. Dollars, quarters, dimes and nickels will all make a difference. Lastly, pick a day and go birding.... In fact, you can go anywhere in the world and count birds for 24 hours. We raise money and we can watch the greatest show on earth all at the same time. How can you not love it!

Last year we had one group go to High Island, Texas to count birds and a couple of years before that a group

birded in the tropics for our Birdathon. It is all about the work continuing at the Roy Hyatt Environmental Center where we continue to educate children about nature and environmental concerns. All proceeds from the Birdathon directly support our work.

The forms and details of the Birdathon can be found at our website www.fmvaudubon.org. This includes the team form, a pledge form and a letter to share with your friends. Finally, if you “need a team” then fill out the form or send an email to (timmons.dana@gmail.com) and I’ll see that you are paired with a good birder. Also, if you prefer to just make a contribution, send a check and note Birdathon on the bottom line.

It is fun and we do recognize participants and give awards to teams at our annual banquet in May. This spring have fun, watch the greatest show on earth and help fund programs at the Hyatt Center.

Blackwater River State Forest Bird Survey Continued from page 1

Red-headed Woodpeckers, a bird on the national watch list, are present in good numbers in the summer. They are less abundant in the winter due to a limited supply of their major food source, acorns. It appears that there are not enough oaks in the forest to provide sufficient food for these birds in the winter.

Kentucky, Hooded and Swainson’s Warblers were heard and seen in low numbers in the nesting season in the thicket areas along the waterways.

The ponds at the FWC Fresh Water Fish Hatchery which is located in Blackwater attract migratory shorebirds and wading water birds. Bald Eagles sit in surrounding trees looking for feeding opportunities.

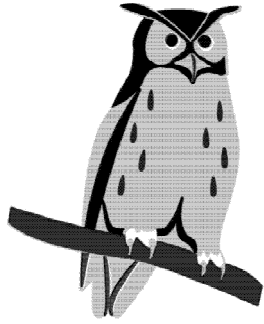
Wintering Hermit Thrush and Blue-headed Vireo have been found in surprisingly large numbers in the pine plantations and in areas of thick undergrowth.

Areas in the forest that should attract wintering Henslow’s and Le Conte’s Sparrow to the forest have not been located. One sighting of each bird was seen in the food plots.

Clearcuts and regrowth areas attract birds that prefer tall grasses or short bushes and short trees as a nesting site. These birds usually relocate once the new pines reach head high. Yellow-breasted Chats, Prairie Warblers, Blue Grosbeaks and Indigo Buntings were found nesting in planted, regrowth pine areas until the trees are about six feet tall.

In areas where the Sand Pines have been thinned, the numbers and species of birds increase immediately as they find a food source that was not previously accessible.

It is our hope that our findings will impact the management and conservation of this Important Bird Area so that future generations will love this special place as we do.



FIELD NOTES

Bob Duncan

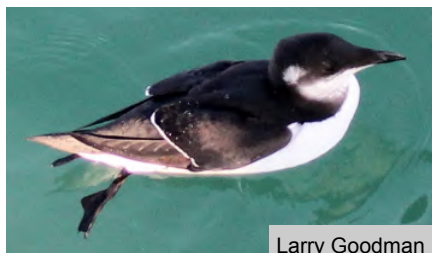
Exciting birding continued from fall migration into winter. Hummingbirds arrived and buzzed area feeders with many banded by Fred Bassett. Winter finches - **Pine Siskins, American Goldfinches** and some **Purple**

Finches - arrived late, but the real excitement was the invasion of the Three "R's."

Red-breasted Nuthatches which arrived in late fall came to stay, at least until spring. As of this writing (early March) they continue at area feeding stations as well as being seen and heard in coastal woods. **Redheads** were reported widely in unprecedented numbers in area waters, as did reports from Alabama to areas downstate. The Duncans received numerous phone calls about these ducks in front of waterfront homes where ducks were scarce before. What caused these unusual numbers is anyone's guess.

The **Razorbill** is an alcid that rarely winters any farther south than North Carolina. As of 1992, there were about 8 records in Florida's ornithological history, and these were mostly specimens found on east coast beaches. In early December, listserv reports of Razorbills flying south off the Florida east coast began to come in and by the end of the month it became a torrent, with large numbers reported inshore as well as offshore. When the Duncans received email reports of Razorbills reported in the Tampa Bay area, we decided to try to discover the northernmost record for the Gulf of Mexico from the Pensacola Beach fishing pier. Unlikely, but certainly worth a try. On 18 Dec, within a short period of time on the pier, Lucy spotted one which later conveniently decided to feed right by the pier. Before the day was done, we spotted 7 birds and were joined by Linda Bogiages and Larry Goodman. Lucy and Larry documented it with photos for the northernmost record for the Gulf. Alabama and Louisiana got their first records later in the winter. Birds were still being seen as of 7 Feb and were lifers for many area birders. The story of their invasion even made the front page of the Pensacola News-Journal!

The Pensacola Christmas Bird Count 15 Dec yielded 3 outstanding western flycatchers found by Bill & Greta Bremser, a **Western Kingbird**, **Vermilion Flycatcher** and **Cassin's Kingbird***, the latter only the 2nd



Larry Goodman

area record! Another great bird for the count was Lucy's **Bronzed Cowbird***. Other rare winter records were a **Red-throated Loon*** and **Black Tern*** at Pensacola Beach 20 Dec (Lucy & Bob Duncan), and a **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** in Pensacola 20 Dec (Powers McLeod). Other great birds that magic day were a **Sooty Shearwater*** and 2 **Cory's Shearwaters*** seen at Pensacola Beach during squally weather by the Duncans. On 23 Dec, during a Razorbill vigil on the fishing pier, Scot Duncan spotted the area's 3rd **Manx Shearwater***, a bird from the other side of the Atlantic. It was enjoyed by Jerry Callaway and the rest of the Duncan clan.

A **Parasitic Jaeger*** at Pensacola Beach 31 Dec (Ann Forster, Jan Lloyd) was a rare find. A **Mississippi Kite*** soaring over Cantonment 15 Jan (Brenda Callaway) provided our only Jan record. A male **Painted Bunting** at Ft. Pickens 28 Jan - 1 Mar (Andrew Carr, Todd Amacker, Larry Tilley, Bernice Gilley) was unusual in winter. Thirty **Black Scoters*** at Pensacola Beach 30 Jan (Lucy & Bob Duncan) was an all-time high count. A rare visitor from the west and a first Feb record, a **Lesser Nighthawk*** was found and identified by Alex Harper on 1 Feb. It lingered to 7 Feb (Patrick James, Daniel Stangeland). Maximum ever for the area, 24 **Bald Eagles** were counted at International Paper Wetlands on 30 Dec (Jerry Callaway). Very rare in winter, a **Yellow Warbler** was spotted by Lucy Duncan and members of the F. M. Weston Audubon field trip at the Ft. Walton Spray Fields on 9 Feb. A striking male **Black-headed Grosbeak*** graced the feeders of Lin & Omega Marvil in Cantonment 16 - 18 Feb (photo Brenda Callaway). **Clay-colored Sparrows*** lingered into winter at Ft. Pickens (Daniel Stangeland, Jerry Callaway et al.) with 11 **White-crowned Sparrows**. A **Dickcissel*** was a rare find at Peggy Baker's feeder in Milton 28 Feb.

Very rare in our area and found only near Floridatown, 28 male and 11 female **Boat-tailed Grackles*** were counted by the Duncans on 21 Feb. **Wilson's Warblers*** were present in Gulf Breeze and Ft. Pickens 1 Jan - 20 Feb (Lucy & Bob Duncan, Larry Tilley, Bernice Gilley).

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 Lucy or Bob Duncan at 932-4792.

Our gang of six flew into Villahermosa, Mexico in early January to start a loop trip of some of the most spectacular and interesting Mayan archaeological and birding sites. This time we included a side trip into Guatemala to experience the majestic temple complexes of Tikal. We drove south from Villahermosa through the vast marshes of the Usumacinta River, the border between the two countries. These marshes host thousands of birds: egrets, herons, Neotropic cormorants, kingfishers (four species), and uncountable flocks of waterfowl. One of the purposes of our trip was to visit the largest Mayan site in Mexico, Calakmul. Two other attempted trips there were stymied by driving rain. This time it was cool and sunny and birdy. We hiked from one temple complex to the next adding great birds to our lists. We walked up to one of the more remote structures and observed a Bat Falcon perched on a parapet. Almost every Mayan temple has a resident pair of Bat Falcons because almost every niche has a colony of bats. As we listened to our guide describe the history, the Bat Falcon screeched and flew up and away. Immediately a huge shadow passed over and a spectacular Ornate Hawk-



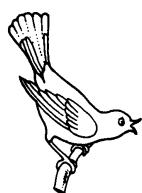
eagle landed on top of a small tree growing out of the temple stones. So much for the history of Jaguar Paw.

After we had covered the Calakmul/Rio Bec sites, we set out for Tikal. Tikal is almost due south of Calakmul and the two city/states were at war for the better part of a century starting around 500 AD. Tikal is the biggest and most spectacular Mayan site of all. There are many quadrangles, a plaza surrounded by four temples, several of which are more than 200 feet tall. Our target bird was the Orange-breasted Falcon which is vanishingly rare. They had abandoned Tikal for several years but the rumor had it that they were back. We climbed the stairs up Temple Four and heard the shriek of a falcon at the same time it poured rain. The female bird landed on a dead snag and we got the telescope on her. She delicately preened each wing and tail feather wringing out the rain water. Everyone, including a gaggle of interested Guatemalans, got perfect life looks.

We had excellent accommodations in both places. Despite the inflamed press reports, most of Mexico is safer for travel than parts of our own city. Many of the roads we used were in poor repair but the birding was worth every bump.

2012 Pensacola CBC Reports

Bill Bremser



This year's Pensacola Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on Saturday Dec. 15 was done under excellent weather, i.e. no rain, cool and light wind, and partly cloudy conditions. Our CBC area was divided into 12 sectors with a total of 47 participants. Our 12 team leaders were:

1-Ann Forster, 2-Dana Timmons, 3-Bill Bremser, 4-Alan Knothe, 5-Bob Duncan, 6-Thomas Barbig, 7- Merilu Rose, 8-Peggy Baker, 9-James Pfeiffer, 10- owers McLeod, 11-Jan Lloyd, and 12-Patrick James. The teams found a record 141 species for this CBC with a total of 20,089 individuals.

There were some outstanding rarities for our area. There was a flycatcher bonanza of a 1st ever Cassin's Kingbird, a Western Kingbird and a Vermilion Flycatcher. Other "firsts" include a Blue Grosbeak, a Red-eyed Vireo, and a Bronzed Cowbird. Other rarities for our CBC count include a 2nd White-breasted Nuthatch, a Yellow Warbler, a Winter Wren, and a Red Knot. There was also an eruption in our area of Red-breasted Nuthatches that were seen by many of the teams. Also seen during Count Week, probably as a result of Hurricane Sandy, was a first ever Razorbill at the

Pensacola Beach Fishing Pier. The Razorbill is an oceanic bird normally not seen south of North Carolina in the winter and never seen in the Gulf of Mexico. In order to get to the northern Gulf, the bird has to travel around the southern tip of Florida and then up the Gulf coastline northward. There is another northern oceanic bird, the Gannet that makes this same journey every winter. However, the Gannet is an accomplished flyer capable of long distances while the Razorbill is much smaller and requires considerably greater effort. By the way, within several weeks after the CBC there have been as many 7 Razorbills seen in the area.

Other interesting species seen include; Black Scoter, Tricolored Heron, Black Tern, Ruby-throated and Rufous Hummingbirds. There were many exotic Nutmeg Mannikins seen again this year and they seem to be spreading.

Starting with the 2012 CBC, National Audubon will no longer charge each participant \$5. Instead of printing the results in the CBC issue of American Birds, the results will be available online. To obtain the online digital edition of the CBC, you **must sign up online** at www.audubon.org/citizenscience by entering your email address.

Great Backyard Bird Count

The Great Backyard Bird Count of 2013 smashed all records of birds reported during the count period of Feb. 15 to 18. This bird count, which is sponsored by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, received checklists from all over the world. Birdwatchers from 103 countries contributed bird counts seeing 3,201 species. In the U.S, 106,902 checklists were submitted.



Bird watchers in Florida did their part by submitting 4,842 checklists of the birds they saw on those days. They identified and reported 300 different species seen in our state.

Congratulations go to the participants in Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties who did their share for this 16th annual bird count. Escambia County birders reported 130 species. Birders reported 117 species in Santa Rosa County. Common Loons and American Coots were seen in large numbers in Escambia. In Santa Rosa County, Red-winged Blackbirds and Redhead duck received the high count designation.

FMWAS is very appreciative to Ann and Dan Forster for inviting us to come to their wonderful yard for a Sunday morning GBBC. Brenda Callaway arranged for the Pensacola News Journal to cover this event. Kevin Robinson and Ben Twiingley produced a wonderful spread for the PNJ that helped to make this event a huge success. Many thanks to this great team for their hard work!

Book Review by Carole Tebay

Attracting Native Pollinators: Protecting North America's Bees and Butterflies by The Xerces Society

A challenge led me to bird watching. Identify 100 different native species, and their Latin name, found in your yard. I started with birds. Once begun, the list inspired my curiosity about plants, ladybugs (most are exotic), spiders, cicadas (there are 19 in Florida, each with a unique song), dragonflies, snails (I identified a species new to Florida) butterflies and caterpillars.

Bees, wasps, and flies are intriguing residents in my yard, but, even with the internet, I've had difficulty identifying and learning about them, until The Xerces Society's guide, *Attracting Native Pollinators Protecting North America's Bees and Butterflies*. This treasure has not made it to my book shelf, it has a permanent home next to my computer. With it I've been able to identify a predatory maggot I watch through my jeweler's glass as it consumes the aphids on my milkweed. I have also put a name to the little black bee, with bright yellow pollen dust on its bottom, that tries to stuff leaves into the weather stripping on my door. That tiny, metallic-green bee is one of a group of cuckoos.

It's a fascinating book with lots of helpful photographs. I learned about the alarming decline of native pollinators, how our lives depend on them, and how we can help. Now I'm gardening with the pollinators in mind by creating habitat with more flowering native plants that bloom across the seasons, avoiding pesticides, leaving some ground bare for nesting and, as you should for the birds, waiting until spring to clean up my garden. How many native species can you find in your yard?

Don't forget the Latin name!

58th Annual West Panhandle Regional Science & Engineering Fair Results

On Jan. 28, 2013, Ann Forster and Jan Lloyd represented FMW Audubon as judges at the West Panhandle Regional Science and Engineering Fair held at the University of West Florida Conference Center. The award from FMWAS each year includes a certificate and letter of commendation, a classic environmental book and a one year membership in the National Audubon Society, Audubon Florida and FMWAS. Projects chosen for the awards showed a knowledge and interest in environmental issues.

This year two students in the Environmental Category were chosen for awards, one from the Senior and one from the Junior division.

Andrew Gainey, Senior division winner, presented a project about increasing the productivity of dams through a change in their structural design after studying the transfer of energy during cellular respiration in biology class. His model greatly increased the output over the conventional dam construction.

Madison Mougey, Junior division winner, studied the impact of the antibiotic Azithromycin on the oral, *Caulastrea furcatis*, in controlled experiments. The effects were dramatic.

Congratulations to both students and we hope to see them again next year at the 59th annual competition.

Owl Boxes

Thanks to Dan Forster and Les Kelly for constructing the owl boxes to be placed in the Wildlife Sanctuary at Taminco/Air Products in Pace, Fl. We are hoping that the offspring of the pair of Barn Owls found nesting in Floridatown might be attracted to this wild area. Did you know a pair of these owls with three offspring can consume as many as 1,000 rats during a three month period before the young become independent?



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I am not an animal behaviorist, but I enjoy watching animals behave, especially when their behavior conflicts with accepted patterns, as established by renowned animal behaviorists. For instance, on a recent visit to the Chiricahua National Monument in Arizona I observed the following from my cabin window: a striped skunk shuffling out of the surrounding oak grove, and almost immediately being set upon by a cougar. But here's the interesting part. The cougar's approach was more playful than lethal. It just sprang in front of the sauntering skunk, which immediately turned tail (yes, they have beautiful tails) and raced back into the cover of the trees. I'd never seen a playful cougar, never seen a skunk run so fast, and oddest of all, I've never known of a skunk not spraying when in obvious peril. I was only twenty feet away, the window was open, I was braced for an agonizing olfactory experience. But nothing.

On that same visit, while hiking a little used trail one evening, I came suddenly upon a black bear munching juniper berries by the side of the trail, no more than twenty feet away from me. I stood there frozen, holding my breath, not moving. The bear just didn't see me, not for many long minutes. I was puzzled by both occurrences. Aren't wild animals supposed to notice us first? Are cougars really playful in the wild? Do skunks withhold their most convincing defense, even when under dire threat?

Long ago when I studied biology I learned that field research was a relatively innovative approach to animal behavior, that most studies, up to the early 20th century, were largely undertaken in zoos. What strange and basically useless results such endeavors must have produced; and thus, through so many changes in the way we've gone

about research, along with the advancements in method and equipment, how much we've improved our endeavors—and our understanding of animal behavior.

I continue this observation in my own way, in my own time—on my own little plot of ground: from the anole and the praying mantis circling one another like wrestlers looking for an opening, from the coot blithely going about its stalking with a cat on its back, from the possum on my front step eyeing me plaintively—seemingly intent on selling me a magazine subscription, from the various times wrens have flown through my open door to sing loudly in the branches of my *Ficus benjamina*, and strangest of all, from the squirrels who invaded my attic and opened a box of carefully wrapped crystal stemware—eight glasses in all, of which none was broken and one remained unwrapped. It put me in mind of the adage which identifies insanity as doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. Well, squirrels are admittedly dim-witted creatures, surviving more on physical skill than on mental acuity, but in this instance



I have a smidgeon of evidence that suggests that even squirrels can eventually draw a logical conclusion—at least after seven unrewarding efforts. Curiosity? Mark Twain once watched a Blue Jay drop acorns down a chimney until he had all but filled a small cabin. Why? Do wild animals enjoy play as much as our pooch seemed to? And was the cougar just trying a game on the skunk? Biologists tell us that all animal behavior, no matter how seemingly without benefit, has some purpose which involves survival. I think the jury is still wrestling with that conclusion.

And yes, it was the bear that blinked first—and departed.

Saturday, May 4, Pascagoula River Audubon Center and the Pascagoula River Basin Boat Trip—RESERVATIONS

Join leaders, Jan Lloyd and Ann Forster, for a trip to PRAC in Moss Point, Mississippi. The PRAC is less than 2 hours from Pensacola and has a wealth of natural history to share. The Prothonotary Warbler Conservation program will report results of efforts to enhance nesting success in the area. Following a presentation, the 2 hour boat trip travels through old growth swamps and tidal marshes of the river. The Pascagoula River is one of the last free flowing rivers in the upper 48 states and the biodiversity of the basin is impressive. Capt. Benny shares his knowledge about migratory birds, shore and water birds, alligators and other animals that call the river basin home, as well as historical and interesting botanical information. The tour boat is fully certified by the US Coast Guard. Life jackets are available and mandatory for children under the age of 12. Reservations and payment must be received by APRIL 19. Contact Lucy Duncan for more information at 932-4792.

RESERVATIONS ARE REQUIRED (\$35 PER PERSON) AND A MAXIMUM OF 20 SEATS ARE AVAILABLE ON THE BOAT. Make checks payable to FMWAS and mail to FMWAS, PO Box 17484, Pensacola, FL 32522 with the following information:

PASCAGOULA RIVER AUDUBON CENTER PROGRAM AND RIVER BOAT TRIP MAY 4, 9 AM

NAME(S) _____ CELL PHONE _____

NUMBER OF RESERVATIONS _____ X \$35 = TOTAL \$ _____

Francis M. Weston Audubon Society
 P. O. Box 17484
 Pensacola, Florida 32522

NONPROFIT
 ORGANIZATION
 U. S. POSTAGE
PAID
 PENSACOLA, FL
 PERMIT NO. 821

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



**Chapter Meeting
 April 25**

**Annual Dinner Meeting
 May 16**

**Field Trips
 April 13, 23, 27; May 4, 25**

Details on page 2

Ft. Pickens—
 Todd Amacker



about 25% postconsumer waste

Corporate Supporters

Armstrong World Industries, Ascend Performance Materials and Pfizer

Chapter Contacts

President	Dana Timmons.....	934-4521
Vice President	Position open	
Recording Secretary	Lucy Michel.....	433-3151
Corresponding Secretary	Ann Forster	456-4421
Treasurer	Becky Grass.....	455-9666
Directors at Large	Lucy Duncan.....	932-4792
	Larry Goodman	433-5135
Membership	Jan Lloyd	453-1660
Field Trips	Lucy Duncan.....	932-4792
Programs	Larry Goodman	433-5135
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