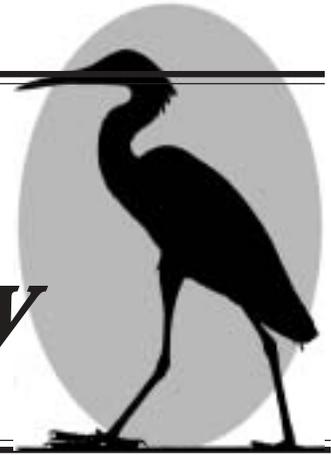


# Mobile Bay Audubon Society

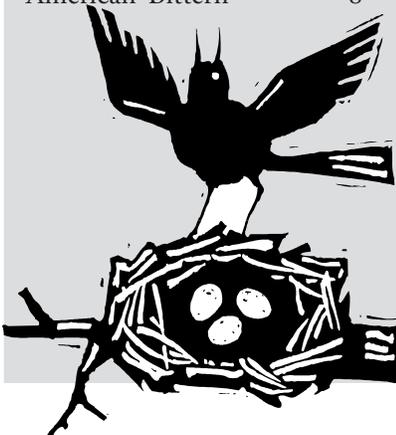
A CHAPTER OF THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY SINCE 1971



VOLUME XXII NO. 6



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## U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Releases "Birding in the United States" Reports

Washington, D.C., October 11, 2003—A new federal economic report found that 46 million birdwatchers across America spent \$32 billion in 2001 pursuing one of the Nation's most popular outdoor activities according to a report from the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The report, *Birding in the United States: A Demographic and Economic Analysis*, is the first of its kind analyzing data from the 2001 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife Associated Recreation.

"Nearly one in five Americans is a bird watcher," said Service Director Steve Williams. "This report recognizes what we always thought to be true. Birdwatching is very popular and contributes greatly to our economy, so it is important that we continue to work with our partners to restore and protect habitat to ensure healthy bird populations." Montana, Vermont, and Wisconsin led the Nation in birding

participation rates as a percent of total state population. California, New York, and Pennsylvania had the most birders. Birders spent \$32 billion on gear such as binoculars, travel, food and big ticket items such as canoes, cabins and off-road vehicles. This spending generated \$85 billion in overall economic output and \$13 billion in federal and state income taxes, and supported

*Continued on page 2*



# Board of Directors

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Continued from page 1

more than 863,000 jobs. To be considered a birdwatcher, an individual must take a trip a mile or more from home for the primary purpose of observing birds or most closely observe or try to identify birds around the home. Those who notice birds while mowing the lawn or picnicking at the beach were not counted as birders. Trips to zoos and observing

captive birds also did not count as birdwatching. Watching birds around the home is the most common form of birdwatching. Taking trips away from home counted for 40 percent (18 million) of birders. The full report—and a second report, the 2001 National and State Economic Impacts of Wildlife Watching Addendum is available on line at <http://federalaid.fws.gov>.



## Bird Groups Praise Chicago Sky-scraper Owners for “Lights Out”

### Chicago Is First U.S. City With Bird-Friendly Skyline

Chicago Illinois, October 3, 2003 — National Audubon Society, Partners in Flight, Mayor Richard Daley, and the Building Owners and Managers Association of Chicago today recognized downtown building owners and managers for making Chicago the first U.S. city to dim tall building lights to save birds' lives. Through the “Lights Out” program, Chicago’s tall buildings have begun to turn off the decorative lights during spring and fall bird migration, putting them at the forefront of American

cities taking action to help birds. “Chicago is once again leading the way as a green city. In a great display of civic concern and responsibility, all our buildings cooperate with the program by dimming their decorative lights for almost five months of the year making ‘Lights out’ a real success”, said Stephen Packard, director of Audubon for the Chicago region. For the full story, visit [www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org) <<http://www.audubon.org>>

# Canary in the Coal Mine

For millennia, birds have served as one of man's most important early warning systems. Birds have helped predict the change of seasons, the coming of storms, the presence of land at sea, and the rise of toxic levels of pollution in the food chain. Now birds are telling us that something is terribly wrong in the environment.

More than 50 percent of Neotropical migrant species monitored in the eastern U.S. and prairie states have been in decline for the last 30 years. Scientists now think the decline of these Neotropical songbirds is due, in large part, to habitat destruction caused by rapid rates of population growth both overseas and in the U.S.

Many of "our" songbirds spend six months a year in Latin America and the Caribbean. The tropical forests many of these birds are dependent upon are being cut to the ground at record rates in order to cope with burgeoning rates of population growth. In Central America, for example, where population doubling times range from 25-30 years, over 80% of the original forest canopy is gone. The result: fewer and fewer Cerulean, Kentucky and Prothonotary Warblers are returning to the U.S. every year.

Population-driven forest destruction in the U.S. has had an equally devastating impact. The population of the U.S. has risen from 78 million in 1900 to over 280 million today. As cities have

grown, suburban sprawl has taken its toll. Fairfax, Virginia, for example, a suburb of Washington, D.C., saw 69 percent of its forest converted to homes and businesses between 1980 and 1995. Since 1980, the U.S. has converted more than 10 million acres of forest to suburb—an area twice as large as Yellowstone, Everglades, Shenandoah, and Yosemite National Parks combined.



## Woodcocks in Lower Alabama

By Celeste Hinds

Year before last when birds were scarce I asked my farmer friend Gwen Snyder if any birds were congregating in their fields. She said she thought Snipe or something similar might be sleeping in their fallow pea rows. Not much more than Blue-gray Gnatcatchers *Poliophtila caerulea* were visible in daylight hours.

Minnie and I took the birding class for a tour of the fields and a good look at the Gnatcatchers. Then I went back at dusk and staked out near the collard patch. Sure enough, right at dusk something lit in the field. After discounting Snipe (legs were too long) and several other species it

hit me. This just might be an American Woodcock *Scolopax minor*.

Only a few days later George and I saw a lone Woodcock in the edge of a culvert at the Magnolia Landfill - in broad daylight, no less. It stayed right at the dark opening where we watched it with a scope for several minutes.

Woodcocks are small and chunky with large eyes and a long bill. Its complex patterned plumage conceals it from predators. With its mixture of blacks and browns, tans and whites and its barred crown, it blends with the low shrubby vegetation it prefers. Earthworms make up three-fourths of its diet, though it will consume a variety of other soil invertebrates.

David Allen Sibley in *Sibley - Guide to Birds* says its wings produce a high twittering on takeoff and when making sharp turns in flight. Never having seen a Woodcock in flight, I cannot attest to this so will take Sibley's word.

An old issue of *Birders World* describes the courtship flight in detail, a sight to behold. The mating flight is complicated, taking off in a winding flight, ascending ever so gracefully in a widening spiral, the bird's outer three primaries, or flight feathers, spread to allow wind to flow through them, creating a twittering sound. Then he starts a liquid chirping call and rapidly descends, in a falling leaf pattern, to the ground. This ritual continues for several minutes.

But here in Lower Alabama I feel fortunate to have spotted Woodcocks on two occasions, albeit on the ground and in near darkness.

# New Members

Welcome to the Mobile Bay Audubon Society, the local chapter of the National Audubon Society. We thank you for your support. A few facts about our chapter: Monthly meetings are held on the 2nd Tuesday from September thru May at 7:30 PM alternately in Fairhope and Mobile (See calendar for details of programs and locations.) Programs of interest are planned for each meeting and field trips are scheduled regularly. We are a non-profit organization—all donations are tax deductible. A list of officers is listed in the newsletter; feel free to call any of them for information. Join us as often as you can—we want to get to know you.

*Ottilie Halstead, Membership Chairman*

## *Bay Minette*

Olean Phillips

## *Daphne*

Joe Emanuele

William Young

Faye Eubanks

Ruth Skaggs

## *Dauphin Island*

Dr. John Porter

Dr. Jerry Scott

## *Elberta*

Linde Lynn

Jeff Lynn

## *Fairhope*

Elaine Bruenn

Karen Rogers

## *Foley*

Sharon H Friday

Runae Boyette

Patsy Johnson

## *Grand Bay*

P Sherman

Floee Lynch

## *Gulf Shores*

Richard Pounds

Steve Neitzel

## *Irvington*

Julia Patch

## *Loxley*

Gary Byrd

## *Mobile*

Debbit Balthrop

Jewel H Adams

Cheryl Welch

D Jackbsen

Fred Houseman

Mrs. R H Weaver

Janet Lyons

H Pharr, Jr.

Linda Shumaker

Aubrey Taylor

Eugene D Boyd

## *Orange Beach*

Catherine Curlee

Jerry Hood

## *Robertsdale*

Betty Craft

## *Semmes*

R O Blackwell

## *Silverhill*

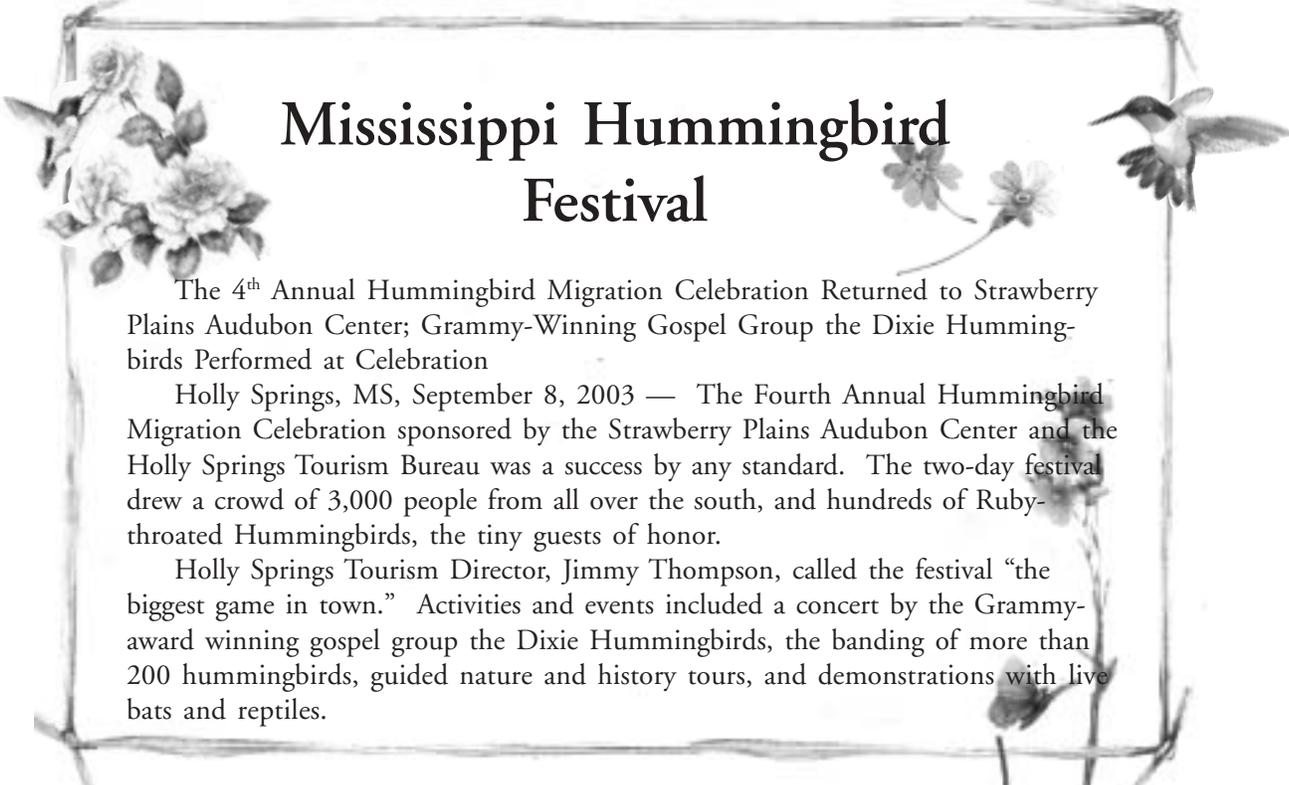
Dr. Stephen Lyrene

## *Spanish Fort*

Denise Tappe

## *Wilmer*

Doris Harwell



## Mississippi Hummingbird Festival

The 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Hummingbird Migration Celebration Returned to Strawberry Plains Audubon Center; Grammy-Winning Gospel Group the Dixie Hummingbirds Performed at Celebration

Holly Springs, MS, September 8, 2003 — The Fourth Annual Hummingbird Migration Celebration sponsored by the Strawberry Plains Audubon Center and the Holly Springs Tourism Bureau was a success by any standard. The two-day festival drew a crowd of 3,000 people from all over the south, and hundreds of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, the tiny guests of honor.

Holly Springs Tourism Director, Jimmy Thompson, called the festival “the biggest game in town.” Activities and events included a concert by the Grammy-award winning gospel group the Dixie Hummingbirds, the banding of more than 200 hummingbirds, guided nature and history tours, and demonstrations with live bats and reptiles.

Visit our website at <http://www.mobilebayaudubon.org>

# President Jimmy Carter Honored

by John Borom

The Board of Directors of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, along with Ted Turner honored President Jimmy Carter for his legacy in environmental conservation at a special Chairman's Award Luncheon on October 14, 2003, at The Carter Center in Atlanta. An avid birder, his life list includes 1,020 species. He has been an avid conservationist, hunter and fisherman since his boyhood days in Plains, Georgia. As Georgia's 76<sup>th</sup> Governor, he led the recovery of healthy populations of the wild turkey to the forests of the state. His love of the outdoors and his keen awareness that one of our most important responsibilities is the stewardship of God's natural creation led him to tread in the footsteps of another great conservationist, Theodore Roosevelt, when he was elected the 39<sup>th</sup> President of the United States in 1976.

As President, he created the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement to oversee strip coal mining and restoration of environmental damage caused by mining. He designated the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness Area in Idaho—which at 2.4 million acres is the second largest unit of Wilderness in the lower 48 states. He declared the American, Eel, Klamath, Smith and Trinity Rivers as National Wild and Scenic Rivers.

But most impressive is his work in Alaska. By settling decades of claims and battles in the 49<sup>th</sup>

state, and negotiating and enacting the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, President Carter:

§Conserved an area larger than the State of California;

§Doubled the size of the

National Park System—adding over 41 million acres and creating ten new Alaskan parks, including the largest National Park—Wrangell-St. Elias National Park;

§Doubled the size of the National Wildlife Refuge System, adding over 45 million acres and creating our largest wildlife refuges in the country;

§Established over 25 Wild and Scenic Rivers—tripling our nation's wilderness system;

§Added over 2.5 million acres to the Chugach and Tongass National Forests.

President Carter pronounces his impact in Alaska as “one of my most gratifying achievements in public life. I knew for centuries to come, visitors to Alaska would be thrilled by some of the most beautiful scenery on earth, undisturbed by the ugly scars of an advancing industrial civilization.”



## Great Alabama BirdFest October 2004

Plans are underway for the Mobile Bay Audubon Society to put together a birdfest in October of 2004. The profit from the birdfest will go to purchase bird habitat in the area. John Borom is already hard at work doing the preliminary ground work. He has some help but it will take a lot of people doing a lot of different things. Volunteers needed! Let John know how you will be able to help.

# Calendar

## NOVEMBER

- 22 Field Trip to the Mobile Tensaw River Delta to observe waterfowl, wildlife, and bottomland hardwood wetlands aboard the Delta Explorer. Meet at the dock at Blakeley State Park at 8:30 am. There will be a \$1.50 per person fee to enter the park and a \$17.00 per person fee for the boat. After the tour there will be a bring-your-own picnic lunch at the park and a tour of the Gatra L. Wehle Nature Center. For reservations call John Borom and send your check to the Mobile Bay Audubon Society, P O Box 483, Fairhope, AL 36532.

## DECEMBER

- 9 General Meeting. "Travels from Alaska to Japan and the Russian Far East" presented by **John and Beverly Winn**. Government Street Baptist Church in Mobile, 7:00 p.m. Bring a friend and a plate of your special holiday goodies (finger food only) to share around the Wassail Bowl.

## JANUARY

- 13 Board Meeting 6:30 p.m.  
General Meeting. "The Challenges of Bird Migration" presented by **Eric Soehren**, terrestrial zoologist, Natural Heritage Section, State Lands Division, ADCNR. 7:30 p.m. Faulkner State Community College Fairhope Campus, Centennial Hall. Bring a friend.
- 24 Field trip to the Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge. Meet under the live oaks at the Pine Beach trail head which is located on the south side of the Fort Morgan Road (Hwy 180) at the 11-mile marker. 8:30 a.m.-noon. Bring a friend.
- 27 Free Natural History Film. "In Search of the Albino" presented by wildlife photographer/narrator **Tom Sterling**. 7:30 p.m. Faulkner State Community College Fairhope Campus, Centennial Hall. Bring a friend.

## FEBRUARY

- 10 Board Meeting 6:30 p.m.  
General Meeting "Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve in Southeast Jackson County Mississippi" presented by **Dave Ruple**, Reserve Manager, Mississippi Department of Marine Resources. 7:30 p.m. Government Street Baptist Church in Mobile. Bring a friend.
- 21 Field trip to the 18,400-acre Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. If you are coming from Baldwin County, meet at the ADCNR Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries office parking lot on the causeway at 8:00 a.m. If you are coming from Mobile County, meet at the Chevron Station at Exit 4 off I-10 at 8:30 a.m. Bring a friend.

## Christmas Bird Count

Prior to the turn of the century, people engaged in a holiday tradition known as the Christmas "Side Hunt". They would choose sides and go afield with their guns; whoever brought in the biggest pile of feathered (and furred) quarry won. Conservation was in its beginning stages around the turn of the 20th century, and many observers and scientists were becoming concerned about declining bird populations. Beginning on Christmas Day 1900, ornithologist Frank Chapman, an early officer in the then budding Audubon Society, proposed a new holiday tradition--a "Christmas Bird Census"--that would count birds in the holidays rather than hunt them. So began the Christmas Bird Count which has now grown to have more than 50,000 participants.

If you would like to participate this year, call the leader of one of the groups listed below:



Sat Dec 13	Mobile Delta	Roger Clay	626-5153
Sat Dec 20	Dauphin Island	John Porter	861-2120
Sat Dec 27	Fort Morgan	Sara Whitfield	344-8158
Sat Jan 3	Gulf Shores	Grey Jackson	987-2855



# September 20th Field Trip

## Forever Wild Grand Bay Savanna Tract

by Eleanor Livaudais

Imagine pulling into the parking lot at ADCNR Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries on the Causeway at 8 a.m. on a Saturday morning and coming face to face with rows and rows of parked vehicles. Hundreds of people, mostly men, young and middle-aged, and a few women milling about obviously waiting for an Audubon Field Trip. It was so exciting. I couldn't wait to get going. We are going to need an escort with this many people, I thought. As I scanned the crowd, I could see the familiar faces of John Borom and Otilie Halstead coming towards me. They were just as excited as I was; only, their excitement was because I was the only other person from Audubon. It turned out that the hundreds of other people were there for a mandatory class in firearms in order to get their Hunting Licenses for the season. Wouldn't it have been great if even half of them had been going with us?

As all of this was taking place, our guide, Eric Soehren, who is a terrestrial zoologist with ADCNR, State Lands Division and Dr. Bill Summeraur drove up. Yes, once again, the same scenario played out. Eric and Bill were very surprised to see so many people. Eric said later that he was wondering how he was going to manage a group that big. After discussing the situation, we loaded up and took off. We drove west on I-10 exiting at Grand Bay. There Keith Carter and Mary Nash joined us.

The Grand Bay Savanna Tract is a wonderful example of what Jim Griggs, Dir. State Lands

Division ADCNR, was describing in his presentation to the MBAS at our first meeting. As Mr. Griggs said, this land was purchased and is being managed with revenue from Alabama's Natural Gas Industry. It is located in the coastal, southwestern part of the state and is bounded by Portersville Bay, Bayou la Batre, and Grand Bay. It consists of coastal marsh, maritime forest and pine lowlands. Purchased by the State in 1996, the almost 3,000 acres now belongs to Forever Wild. State Lands Division of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources manages the land, and is responsible for the preservation and restoration of species found specifically in this Coastal Lowland environment. Eric played a major role in this endeavor by planning and directing burns to restore native plants. He was a very effective guide for this trip because of his personal and professional involvement at this site. At our first stop we saw many different types of wildflowers and carnivorous plants. We saw *Sarracenia leucophylla*, the white-topped pitcher plant and *Sarracenia purpurea*, also known as Frog's britches. There were tiny sundews everywhere. We spotted a well camouflaged leopard frog as he was watching us.

The next stop was in an area with old growth oak and other hardwoods. Here we saw a greater variety of birds, Ruby-throated Hummingbirds being the most numerous. The last stop in the Savanna was at the edge of

Portersville Bay and the site of the original Marine Laboratory. Here we saw herons and egrets in the coastal marshes. Pelicans and gulls were fishing in Portersville Bay with the coast of Dauphin Island in the background.

No one was quite ready to call it a day, so by a unanimous decision we went to the Bayou la Batre spoil area, which is #50 on the Coastal Birding Trail. We climbed the steep levee to see the ponds below. For our efforts we were rewarded with two Ospreys, many Yellow-legs and Black-necked Stilts, and a squadron of Blue-winged Teal. A beautiful ending to a perfect day.



## Newsletter Deadline

Any member is welcomed and encouraged to submit articles for the newsletter. I would be happy to include anything you think would be of interest to the membership.

Please send your articles for the January/February issue to Delane Small by November 26.

Address:

1 Fiesta Drive

Spanish Fort, AL 36527

Email: dhs9700@bellsouth.net

# American Bittern

By John Borom

The American Bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*) is a medium-size, cryptically-colored heron most often seen when flushed from marshes. It is most easily identified by its size – up to 34 inches tall and with a 50-inch wingspan and its streaked brown plumage. At rest, its black moustache-like check markings are diagnostic. This secretive bird may be best known for its habit of standing upright with its bill pointing

upward. At times it even sways from side to side, moving like the tall grasses and reeds surrounding it. In this pose the bird blends in

with its surroundings and easily goes unnoticed.

American Bitterns require wetland habitats such as freshwater and saltwater marshes.

Other herons readily perch in trees; bitterns rarely do so. However, on our field trip to Dauphin Island on October 18, this photo was taken of an individual in the top of a tree at Shell Mound Park.

It was a beautiful trip, and you are invited to come along on the next one. Look on the calendar in this newsletter for the next fieldtrip.



*George T. Angell*

“I am sometimes asked “Why do you spend so much of your time and money talking about kindness to animals when there is so much cruelty to men? I answer: “I am working at the roots.”

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