

Mobile Bay Audubon Society

Spring 2014 Newsletter

Gulf Sea Turtles at Risk

What: Sea turtle advocates will expose the latest threats and need to protect sea turtles in the Gulf of Mexico and tell the story of the endangered Kemp's ridleys with the short film, *The Heartbreak Turtle Today*. A Q & A and discussion to follow.

When and Where: Mobile Bay Audubon Society meeting, 7 p.m., Tuesday, April 8, 2014, Five Rivers Delta Resource Center, 30945 Five Rivers Blvd, Spanish Fort, AL 36527. Free and open to the public. Doors open 6:30 pm.

Who: Sea turtle advocates Teri Shore and Joanie Steinhaus from marine conservation group Turtle Island Restoration Network (SeaTurtles.org) are on Gulf Turtles at Risk Roadshow from Texas to Alabama from April 3 to 10. They are investigating and exposing the latest threats to sea turtle in coastal waters and nesting beaches. After the Gulf Turtles at Risk Roadshow, they are presenting their findings at the International Sea Turtle Symposium in New Orleans, April 10 to 18.

Why: Four years after the BP Oil spill, no new protections have been put in place to protect Gulf sea turtles from oil and gas, shrimp or other fishing, and coastal activities including beach cleaning, marine debris, and even rocket launching pads proposed on nesting beaches. And to date no BP oil spill funding is going toward sea turtle protection or restoration of nesting beaches or marine habitat. Even worse, this year federal funding was cut for the bi-national program to protect Kemp's ridleys in Mexico and Texas.

Yet the risks to Gulf turtles remain. In 2013, a total of 4,500 sea turtles washed up dead on Gulf and

East Coast beaches, a new high. Since 2010, critically endangered Kemp's ridley sea turtle nest numbers have dropped for the first time in decades. Critical habitat designation for loggerhead sea turtles is stalled.

An estimated 50,000 sea turtles die each year as a result of accidental capture and drowning in the U.S. shrimp fishery due to low compliance and enforcement of laws requiring use of Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs). When properly used, TEDs allow shrimping to continue while also saving sea turtles from harm. Yet the state of Louisiana still prohibits the enforcement of TEDs laws in state waters.

Gulf sea turtles are now more at risk than ever before of losing protections and conservation efforts that reversed their slide toward extinction. Only sea turtle champions can ensure the future of this endangered species.



Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle, credit National Park Service

Mobile Bay Audubon Society

Officers:

Dr. John L. Borom, President
jborom@faulknerstate.edu
990-0423 (w) 928-5219 (h)

Chester McConnell, Vice President
WMICMC@bellsouth.net
626-7804

Eleanor Livaudais, Secretary
elivaday@bellsouth.net
928-8967

Diana Gardiner, Treasurer
mrsdgl@mchsi.com
210-4482

Gaye Lindsey, Newsletter Editor,
Membership, Field Trips
gplindsey@bellsouth.net
929-2837

Edwina Mullins, Publicity
344-1175

At Large:

Roger Clay
Cookie Darawich
John Dindo, Ph.D.
Elizabeth French, Ph.D.
Celeste Hinds
Judy Lovell
John Porter, Ph.D.
Bob Ridgeway
Delane Small

Ex-Officio:

Larry Borg
Otilie Halstead, Treasurer Emeritus
Nancy Hora
Garland Sims

Eastern Shore Birding Field Trips Spring 2014 Calendar

About a week before each field trip, anyone who has signed up for email distribution will receive an email giving details of each trip. This includes meeting time and place, lunch plans, etc. If you are not currently receiving the emails and wish to, please email Gaye Lindsey at gplindsey@bellsouth.net or call 929-2837.

Apr 9 - Ft. Morgan Bird Banding, Migration

Apr 16 - Dauphin Island, Migration

Apr 23 - Dauphin Island, Migration
(extra, if warranted)

May 7 - Live Oak Landing, North Baldwin

MBAS SPRING 2014 CALENDAR

April

8 General Meeting, Five Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7:00pm. "Gulf Sea Turtles at Risk" presented by Teri Shore and Joanie Steinhaus from marine conservation group Turtle Island Restoration Network (SeaTurtles.org). This program will expose the latest threats and need to protect sea turtles in the Gulf of Mexico and tell the story of the endangered Kemp's ridleys turtle with a short film, "The Heartbreak Turtle Today". Four years after the BP Oil spill, no new protections or oil spill funding have been put in place to protect Gulf sea turtles from oil and gas, shrimp or other fishing. Open to public. Bring a friend.

May

13 General Meeting, Five Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7:00pm. "Whooping Cranes Conservation Efforts" presented by Chester McConnell, Friends of the Wild Whoopers. This program will be a summary of ongoing and new conservation programs to restore whooping crane flocks to a sustainable level. There are currently about 304 of these endangered birds in the original wild flock and approximately 130 in experimental programs. Open to public. Bring a friend.

MBAS PICNIC

At press time, the details of the annual picnic had not been worked out. For those of you who receive the newsletter electronically, a notice will be sent as soon as it is available. For those without email, you will receive a post card.

Electronic Delivery of Newsletters

The MBAS newsletter only delivered by email, unless a printed copy is specifically requested by people without access to email.

To sign up for electronic delivery, go to the MBAS Website (www.mobilebayaudubon.org) and click on **Newsletter** (on the left side of the home page, in yellow). Then follow the directions. **To receive a mailed copy**, send a letter to MBAS, PO Box 483, Fairhope, AL 36533.

Bluebird Blues

By Celeste Hinds

Right now in Lower Alabama male bluebirds *Sialia sialis* are in their vivid blue breeding plumage. Females wear more drab colors for camouflage. Once the nest is completed, females are seldom seen for they spend much of the day incubating their clutch of four or five pale blue eggs. After about fourteen days the eggs begin to hatch. It is okay to quickly lift the side door of the box and take a brief look to count the eggs and watch the progress of the new family.

If birds nest while the weather is still cold they often line the nest with a layer of green moss that gives off a bit of heat as the moss decomposes.

For some unknown reason, bluebirds are nesting earlier than usual this year. One theory is that nature has programmed the birds to reproduce as many times as possible to make up for loss of babies due to weather conditions. Ordinarily they raise two broods, however last year several homeowners reported three broods.

It is a mystery to me how four of the five eggs will often hatch and the fifth egg remain intact,

Lights Out

The Washington Post recently published an article about Lights Out, an organization studying the effect of lights on bird migration. Members collect birds, dead or stunned, that have collided with windows of buildings in major cities. The birds are taken to the Smithsonian, where researchers study migration habits, damage from city lights and other issues. The article is eye opening and worth reading. However, space does not allow reprinting of the article, so below is a link to it.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/lights-out-seeks-to-stem-bird-carnage-caused-by-city-skylines/2014/03/13/75d6f5c4-933a-11e3-b46a-5a3d0d2130da_story.html

even after four fledglings trample on them. If you watch closely the parent birds remove the feces, keeping the nest relatively clean. The feces are in a sack (membrane) that allows the parent to take it away from the nest site.

In the past few years the Eastern Shore Bluebird Housing Authority has constructed and installed nearly a hundred nest boxes at no cost to the homeowner. If you would like a nest box for the 2015 nesting season send me an email and I will pass your request on to Ralph Stemp, the Authority's design and construction engineer. Hurry, the supply is limited to ten. After ten you go on the "wait" list.

To clean out the box or not clean out the box is a frequent question. My plan is to clean it only if nesting materials are crammed in really tight or if you see mites under the nest. I'm no authority. But this is what works for me.

National Audubon Society
Mobile Bay Audubon Society
P O Box 483
Fairhope, AL 36533

www.mobilebayaudubon.org

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Mobile Bay Audubon Wants You! Join Today!

MBAS is a chapter of the National Audubon Society. Every membership supports Audubon's vital efforts to protect birds, wildlife and natural habitats. When you join NAS, you will become a member of the nearest local chapter.

To join, go to the NAS webpage www.audubon.org and click on Member Center. Follow that to the page to join. If you do not have access to the web, you can send your membership information to National Audubon Society, Membership Data Center, PO Box 422247, Palm Coast, FL 32142-6716. A one year membership costs \$20.