



# Mobile Bay Audubon Society

A Chapter of the National Audubon Society Since 1971

Volume XXX No. 3

## What Birds Teach Us: Don't Take Them—or the Future—for Granted

By David Yarnold, President and CEO of National Audubon Society

The bird you heard singing or saw overhead today? It's pretty easy to take it for granted, but in fact, it might have traveled thousands of miles to get to your house. It might have been to places where you'd need a passport and vaccinations to visit. Those ducks that show up every winter in your local park? It's likely they were hatched in the Arctic tundra. When you stop to think about it, birds are the last connection to the wild for many of us. And the arrival and departure of birds -- particularly during their heroic migrations -- is a link to nature's rhythms. But that bond can be broken. We are seeing fewer and fewer migratory birds, even many so-called common species. That's because they depend on a chain of food and rest stops, whether they travel up the Mississippi River or along the Atlantic or Pacific coasts. Break enough links in the chain, and birds die -- or are never born.

The Eastern Meadowlark's four-note call (it sounds like we'ee SEE you) is a classic spring birdsong. Like a

super-hero's costume, the meadowlark has a brilliant yellow breast emblazoned with a black V. But the meadowlark is no super-hero. In fact, it is in mortal danger. Four decades ago, there were an estimated 24 million Eastern Meadowlarks in the wild. Today that number has fallen to fewer than 7 million. The meadowlark is an indirect victim of American dependence on foreign oil. As oil prices have skyrocketed, farmers have switched over their fields to grow corn for ethanol. Cornfields make poor meadowlark habitats. The chain is broken.

On the West Coast, the Rufous Hummingbird faces similar threats. The Rufous is a tiny, almost all cinnamon-colored bird (males have a red throat), found wherever flowers are near, from dense forests to sunny gardens in southern Alaska to northern California. Tiny and mighty, Rufous Hummingbirds migrate thousands of miles down the West Coast, to spend the winter in Mexico. The Rufous Hummingbird breeds in Alaska and in the Pacific

Northwest, where logging and urban sprawl have degraded its habitat. Current estimates suggest its numbers are crashing: having fallen by nearly 60 percent over the past four decades.

In all, my colleagues at National Audubon Society have identified more than 20 birds, once common, whose numbers have plummeted since the mid-1960s. They are victims of a growing list of threats, including disruption in our climate, conversion of pastures and meadows to farmland, urban sprawl, pollution, logging, and other human causes. Why should you care about that bird pecking in your front yard or about the Rufous or the meadowlark? Because thriving birds = thriving ecosystems. And thriving ecosystems = clean air, clean water, abundant food and great habitat. And those are places where people thrive, too. This isn't just about doing what's best for birds; it's about doing what's best for our kids and the generations to follow.

*This article was posted on the National Audubon Website on June 23, 2011*

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# Audubon Volunteer Opportunities Abound in Alabama

The fallout from the BP Gulf Oil Disaster has affected us all in many ways. While we all have individual methods of coping, one way that helps some people is to get involved with Audubon's volunteer based programs throughout the state. We are actively looking for participants, so please contact us should you find the Citizen Science program that's a good fit for you!

The Coastal Bird Survey is an opportunity to take part in one of the largest shorebird data gathering projects in Audubon history. Teams patrol a one mile stretch along the Alabama Coast and document various aspects of the birds found. The data is entered and processed through our eBird website. This ongoing study will be vital to the long term recovery of wildlife affected by the spill.

Waterbird Watch Refuge Program is a joint effort with U.S. Fish and Wildlife to launch a refuge monitoring program to help document the condition of the birds and their habitats as they pass through the Wheeler and Bon Secour Refuges. The findings will be posted on the E-Bird site and will provide scientists a better opportunity to analyze this valuable data.

Dauphin Island Habitat Restoration is a program with a TogetherGreen Innovation Grant, working with the Weeks Bay Foundation and Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries (DIBS) to remove several aggressively inva-

sive species that are threatening the bird population.

If you wish to get involved, please contact Kelsey Blum at [kblum@audubon.org](mailto:kblum@audubon.org), or visit [www.audubonaction.org](http://www.audubonaction.org).

## The Right Approach to Birding By John Borom

I knew an old man who often spoke fondly about the birds he saw around Mobile Bay. He didn't know all of their proper names, and sometimes he told folks "facts" that were incorrect. I'm sure that an experienced bird-watcher would have discounted much of his wisdom.

But, how he enjoyed birds! I remember watching his wrinkled face as his eyes filled with delight, as he watched Laughing Gulls and Royal Terns follow shrimp boats or as he watched Cedar Waxwings and American Robins look for berries in holly and camphor trees. He became so totally absorbed in their clamoring cries and feeding behaviors that it took him a few moments to come back to himself. Because of his absorption in the birds and joy, I've

# Mobile Bay Audubon Society Fall 2011 Calendar

## September 13 - General Meeting

“Peru: Quest for the Marvelous Spatuletail”, presented by Bill Summerour, Five Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7:00 p.m. Bring a friend.

## October 6-8 - 8th Annual Alabama Coastal BirdFest

## October 11 – General Meeting

“Exploring Wetlands in Botswana, Africa,” presented by Chester and Dorothy McConnell, Five Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7:00 p.m. Bring a friend.

## November 8 – General Meeting

“Exploring Sanibel Island, Florida,” presented by John Borom, Five Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7:00 p.m. Bring a friend.

December 13 – Christmas Party and General Meeting

# Eastern Shore Birding Fall 2011 Calendar

The “Eastern Shore Birders” is an arm of MBAS that participates in informal birding field trips. Trips are open to all MBAS members and friends. Most trips are on Wednesday mornings, leaving from the Unitarian Fellowship in Fairhope around 8:00 am. All trips are announced by email a few days before the trip. Changes to the schedule for any reason are also announced by email only. To add your name to the email distribution list, please send an email to Gaye Lindsey at ([gplindsey@bellsouth.net](mailto:gplindsey@bellsouth.net)). Following is a tentative schedule of the fall trips. Details will be provided in the regular emails.

September 14 – Fairhope Airport, Camp Beckwith

September 28 – Claude Petet Mariculture Center, Gulf Shores Water Treatment Plant

October 12 – Bird Banding at Ft. Morgan

October 26 – Dauphin Island

November 9 – Daphne Bayfront, Maecher Park

November 16 – Fairhope Falls

November 30 – Arlington Park

December 14 – Blakeley Mud Flats

always felt he knew the right approach and had gained more from his bird observations than had many more scientific observers.

When you go for a walk along a beach or in the woods avoid categorizing the creatures you see. Instead, focus on feeling a kinship with everything you see. Look at everything as though you are seeing it for the first time, with the eyes of a child, fresh and full of wonder.

“One’s happiness depends less on what he knows than on what he feels.” *Liberty Hyde Bailey*



# Rare and Unusual Bird Sightings

## Fall 2010 – Spring 2011

By Bill Summerour

Below are 2010-2011 fall and winter records of interest. All are from Baldwin County and all sightings are by Bill Summerour unless otherwise noted. For further information, please contact Bill at [billsummerour@gulftel.com](mailto:billsummerour@gulftel.com).

**Ross's Goose**, 6 Dec until 7 Jan, farm ponds on CR 13, CR 49. Observed with Snow Geese and Canada Geese.

**Cackling Goose**, 21 Dec, one, small pond off CR 49 in south Baldwin, David Plumb.

**Mute Swan**, 7 – 12 Dec, one immature bird, origin unknown, in pond near Foley.

**White-winged Scoter**, 8 Dec, flock of 16, Bon Secour Bay, David Plumb.

**American Bittern**, 10 Nov, 14 Dec, various locations around Magnolia Springs. David Plumb.

**Crested Caracara**, 10 Feb – 14 Mar, South of Magnolia Springs.

**Yellow Rail**, 15 Mar, Grand Bay Savannah Forever Wild Tract, Grand Bay, Eric Soehren, Mobile County.

**Black Rail**, 15 Mar, one, same location, Eric Soehren, Mobile County.

**Sandhill Crane**, 6 Dec and subsequent, flock of up to 23 birds, CR 19, south Baldwin, David Plumb.

**Mountain Plover**, 19 Jan – 15 Mar, South of Magnolia Springs. Only second state record and 38 years since first was discovered in 1973.



**White-rumped Sandpiper**, One, 10 – 14 Dec, Magnolia Landfill pond, Greg Jackson and Bill Summerour. This was a very late migrant, out of season.

**Curlew Sandpiper**, 25 May, pond # 2, Blakeley Island Mudlakes, only the third state record and 31 years since the last sighting.

**Franklin's Gull**, 19 - 20 Nov, Magnolia Landfill.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull**, 20 Nov, CBA Mobile County, 17 Dec, 10 Jan, Magnolia Landfill.

**Ash-throated Flycatcher**, 4 Dec, Woerner Turf, rare in winter, observed along a weedy fence line near Foley.

**Sprague's Pipit**, 1 Nov, 6 Jan,

Woerner Turf fields around Foley. Probably occurs locally in small numbers most winters but difficult to find because of a lack of habitat.

**MacGillivray's Warbler**, 10 Oct, netted and banded by the Sargents, Fort Morgan. Only the second state record if accepted by the Alabama Bird Records Committee.

**Rusty Blackbird**, 19 Dec, one, Foley near CR 32. This species is becoming hard to find in recent years, their population has declined dramatically in the last decade

**Brewer's Blackbird**, 8 Dec, flock of 20 - 30, in freshly plowed fields south of Magnolia landfill. Scattered flocks seen in the general area for about a week.



MacGillivray's Warbler

## Birdfest Silent Auction

### Please Help!

Can you help Birdfest by donating a Bay House, Beach House, Condo or Hotel stay? We are also looking for donations of Golf and Spa packages or any services that people look for, like Pet Boarding and Grooming or just about anything. Contact John Borom at 990-0423 or Eleanor Livaudais at 928-8967.

# April 2011 Trip to St. Francisville

Eleanor Livaudais

Twenty one members of MBAS had a great trip to St. Francisville, LA. We saw beautiful plantation homes, ate the most incredible food and saw many birds. Our Hotel was on the edge of a lake where G. B. Herons and Egrets hung out and fished all day.

Saturday morning we were up early to go birding at the Butler/Greenwood Plantation. There we met the owner Murrell Butler, whose ancestors were the original owners of the Butler/Greenwood Plantation. He told us the history of his land and after we had walked for a couple of hours and seen many birds, he took us on a tour of his home, a rustic two story log cabin that he built. He had a glass case with bird specimens that originally belonged to J.J. Audubon.

Later, we took a tour of The Myrtles, one of the 13 most haunted places in

America. Movies have been made about the place and my daughter's in-laws were the decorators. They had told me about the ghostly sounds and sightings that had been reported by some of the guests. I don't think anybody saw or felt anything "ghostly", but it was fun.

On Sunday we went to Rosedown Plantation, a beautiful two story house with columns and an upstairs gallery where you could look out on the beautiful Oak Allee. This plantation was so large that it had its own doctor's office, three summer houses with lakes and fountains, and a rock garden which was very unusual for Louisiana because Louisiana doesn't have any rocks so these had to be imported. In the parlor there was a framed needle point screen that was a gift to the owner and had been made by Martha Washington.

Oakley was the last stop on our trip. John J. Audubon spent over three months there and painted 32 of his BIRDS OF AMERICA during that time. The house was built in the West Indies style with louvers on the porches to catch the breezes. We saw J.J. Audubon's room and walked trails where he must have walked. It was a very inspiring experience.



Scene from St. Francisville, LA

# Mobile Bay Audubon Wants You!

Every membership supports Audubon's vital efforts to protect birds, wildlife and natural habitats.

As a member, you'll become an important part of our dynamic chapter and receive a host of benefits including:

- A 1-year subscription (3 issues, one per quarter, excluding summer) of our chapter newsletter.
- Automatic membership in National Audubon Society, and a 1-year subscription (4 issues, one per quarter) of Audubon, its award-winning magazine.
- Admission to Audubon Centers across the country.
- A 10% discount on products at select Audubon Nature Stores and more!

Yes! I want to join Mobile Bay Audubon and National Audubon Society!

- |  |   |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> \$20 - 1 year Introductory Rate   | <input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000 - Individual Life Membership |
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Make check payable to National Audubon Society and mail to: National Audubon Society, Membership Data Center, P O Box 422250, Palm Coast, FL 32142-2250

Chapter Code: C9ZA010Z

Next Meeting: September  
13, Five Rivers Delta Re-  
source Center, 7:00 pm

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