



# Mobile Bay Audubon Society

A Chapter of the National Audubon Society Since 1971

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## Purple Martin Houses

The Mobile Bay Audubon Society recently made a donation of \$800 to the City of Fairhope to purchase eight of 14 metal Purple Martin houses that will be placed at the Fairhope pier. The houses were assembled by volunteer Hal Biering and associates of Fairhope and the Fairhope Public Works Department.

The new houses will be ready for the annual arrival of Purple Martins that nest along Mobile Bay. Pictured are Garland Sims who first thought of the Purple Martin Riviera Project in Fairhope and Jennifer Fidler, director of the Fairhope Public Works Department. For more information go to [www.mobilebayaudubon.org](http://www.mobilebayaudubon.org) and click on special projects.



## Second Thoughts about the Racetrack. . .

**Chester McConnell**  
(Press-Register Editorial Board, January  
31, 2010)

Often when we first hear about a new development proposal, it sounds good. The possibility of more jobs, new facilities, improved services, novel entertainment, etc., excites us. Initially, however, we never seem to get all the information we need to determine whether or not a development proposal is really what we expected.

After we learn more and mull things over, we may have second thoughts. Having second thoughts about anything of importance can be helpful. It can save our life or our hard-earned dollars.

It appears that the Saraland City Council and mayor are having second thoughts about their involvement with the proposed Alabama Motorsports Park. I view this as very prudent on their part.

Saraland's hastily called public meeting in December left much to be desired. After former Mobile Mayor Mike Dow's description of the proposed 2,700-acre racetrack project, few citizens in the audience seemed to understand the magnitude of the proposition.

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## Death of a Special Member

Wilhelmina "Minnie" Prent Nonkes, a native of the Netherlands and long-time resident of Fairhope died Friday, February 19, 2010 after a lengthy illness. She was preceded in death by her husband of many years, Albert Nonkes. Albert and Minnie lived in Natick, Massachusetts during their working years and retired to Fairhope in the 1980's. Minnie was a noted birder, a board member of the Mobile Bay Audubon Society and was active in several other nature organizations. She is sadly missed by all who knew her. She was a member of the Fairhope Unitarian Fellowship

# Forever Wild Facts

- ✓ Forever Wild was established by Constitutional Amendment in 1992 with 83% voter support.
- ✓ Forever Wild funding will sunset in 2012 unless reauthorized.
- ✓ Forever Wild funding comes from 10% of the annual earnings of the Alabama Trust Fund, not to exceed \$15 Million in any year - funding is estimated at \$8.5 Million in 2010.
- ✓ Forever Wild is authorized to secure public lands for Wildlife Management Areas, Recreation Areas, Nature Preserves, and State Parks
- ✓ Forever Wild can only purchase lands from willing sellers and has never paid more than appraised value for the lands it has purchased.
- ✓ Forever Wild helps ensure that the quality of our air and drinking water isn't compromised.
- ✓ Many of the Forever Wild tracts are extremely popular, attracting tens of thousands of visitors every year. These visitors, in turn, drive economic activity to hard hit areas in need of a boost during these hard times.
- ✓ Forever Wild expands the recreational opportunities available to the public. Hiking, biking, public hunting and fishing, birding, photography, camping, nature study, canoeing, and horseback riding are a few examples of the activities facilitated by Forever Wild lands.
- ✓ Forever Wild has protected more than 200,000 acres of land in all parts of the state. These purchases equate to approximately one-half of one percent of the land base in Alabama.
- ✓ To date, over 99% of the 200,000 acres purchased by Forever Wild are available to Alabama's citizens for public use and recreation and 89% of those lands provide public hunting opportunities.
- ✓ In 2007-2008 alone, approximately 50,000 acres of private lands were withdrawn from Alabama's Wildlife Management Area system resulting in significant loss of public hunting lands. Forever Wild has been the primary mechanism for securing lands to account for these losses.
- ✓ Alabama has the lowest percentage of public lands (4.4%) among southeastern states: FL (21.2%); VA (9.9%); NC (9%); TN (7.3%); SC (7.1%); GA (7%); KY (6.1%); MS (6%).
- ✓ The availability and proximity of public lands for outdoor recreation and tourism are quality of life and community elements that can have an impact on where some businesses and their employees choose to locate and establish their residency.
- ✓ Recent voter polling shows that support for continuing Forever Wild funding is as high, or higher, today than it was in 1992.
- ✓ A super-majority of voters across all major demographic lines support continuation of Forever Wild – Women and Men; African American and Caucasian; Democrat, Independent, and Republican; all age groups.
- ✓ Even during the current, tough economic conditions, voters still indicate at the 85% level that funding for Forever Wild should continue.
- ✓ Reauthorization of Forever Wild for another 20 years, at the same funding level, and with the same rate of land purchase, would increase public land ownership in Alabama by only one-half of one percent and Alabama would still have the lowest percentage of public land ownership of any southeastern state.
- ✓ Hunting, Fishing, and Wildlife Viewing in Alabama has an economic impact of \$2.2 Billion annually. Hunting, Fishing, and Wildlife Viewing are significant activities on Forever Wild lands that yield economic benefits to local communities and the state.
- ✓ The economic impact of outdoor recreation and tourism expenditures in local communities where Forever Wild lands exists is estimated to replace and exceed the loss of any ad valorem tax on the lands purchased by Forever Wild.
- ✓ Forever Wild land acquisitions are credited as assets of the Alabama Trust Fund and improve Alabama's bond rating.
- ✓ The work Forever Wild does today helps ensure that God's creations will still be around for our grandchildren and great grandchildren to learn from and enjoy.

# Calendar

## March

- 9 General Meeting “Colors” presented by John Borom, Five Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7:00 p.m. Bring A friend.
- 13 General Meeting “Alabama Gulf Coast Birds,” presented by John Borom. Five Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7:00 p.m. Bring a friend.
- 22-24 Those interested in a 4-day, 3-night trip to Wakulla, St Marks and Cedar Key, FL email me at Hindsite5@bellsouth.net or call Celeste (928-6526) and I will send you details, cost, etc. If interested, I need to hear from you by end of January in order to reserve accommodations and boat. This is a carpool or caravan trip. I estimate cost for shared room, boat fee, and transportation, etc. to be about \$350 plus food. Limited number for boat trip at Cedar Key.

## April

- 7 Fort Morgan for Bird Banding—Depart Unitarian parking lot at 7:00 Note early departure time. Many migrants take off by mid-morning. Take sack lunch and drink.
- 13 General Meeting, “ Alabama Gulf Coast Birds “ presented by John Borom, Five Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7:00 p.m. Bring a friend.
- 14 Splinter Hill Pitcher Plant Bog—Local plant guru Fred Nation will lead the group on this trip looking for birds and pitcher plants. Depart 7:30.
- 21 Weeks Bay Boat Trip—leader Gaye Lindsey—stay tuned for details.

## May

- 11 General Meeting, “ Dauphin Island—America’s Birdiest Coastal City and the Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuary, Inc.” presented by John Porter, Five Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7:00 p.m. Bring a friend
- 22 The annual Mobile Bay Audubon Society picnic will be held at the Arthur C. “Skipper” Tonsmeire Resource Center located at the Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve at 4:00 P.M. Fried chicken and drinks will be furnished by the Society. Bring a dish to share to add to the chicken. A cruise aboard The Weeks Bay Explorer will leave about 5:00 or when we have finished eating. After the cruise, those who wish may stay and visit or go to walk the Kurt G. Wintermeyer Boardwalk at the Weeks Bay Pitcher plant Bog. Bring a friend.

## Trap, Neuter and Release

On February 11, 2010 The Bird Conservation Alliance held a conference call to discuss the problems of bird mortality caused by free-roaming cats, and concerns about the management system known as trap, neuter, release. Seventy-five people joined in the call. A panel of three experts made excellent presentations, several of which are now available on the web with the links listed below.

Nico Dauphine, Zoological Society of London – The impacts of free-roaming cats on bird populations. Catherine Rich, J.D., M.A., The Urban Wildlands Group – Trap, Neuter, Release: a case study from Los Angeles. Tom Will, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – What can federal

agencies do: policy options to address impacts to birds and their habitats. Participants expressed a great deal of interest having materials to help educate decision-makers about TNR. ABC has already produced a nine-minute documentary Trap, Neuter, and Release: Bad for Cats, Disaster for Birds available on the web and DVD, and is now working to create a TNR brochure, similar to the Cats Indoors! brochure, factsheets, and other materials to help groups and individuals better address this issue in their communities. Interest was also expressed in incorporating information from wildlife rehabilitators regarding the high percentage of birds and other animals brought in due to cats.

Background Documents Longcore, T., C. Rich, and L.M. Sullivan. 2009. Critical assessment of claims regarding management of feral cats by trap-neuter-return. *Conservation Biology* 23:887–894. Lepczyk, C., et al. 2010. What conservation biologists can do to counter trap-neuter-return: response to Longcore et al. *Conservation Biology*, online early. Letter concerning feral cat management from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.

### Background

There are currently 88 million pet cats in the U.S. according to a pet trade association, and that number is grow-

# Field Trip Schedule

By Celeste Hinds

If in doubt about trips being delayed or cancelled due to weather, check your email or call Celeste Hinds at 928-6526 or Kris Lindquist at 209-1019.

Until late spring always take a coat – it's cooler near the water. Wear closed toe shoes. I have bug spray and sunscreen for all - take your own bottle of water.

March 10 – Mud flats, provided it isn't too muddy. Meet at the Fairhope Unitarian Fellowship at 8 am or connect at Site 25 about 8:30. Lunch at area restaurant about 11:30.

March 17 – Dauphin Island looking for early migrants. Meet same time and place as Mar 10. Take money for mid-morning coffee stop at the Bakery. Take sack lunch and beverage.

March 24 – Magnolia Landfill and Farragut's Landing. Leave parking lot at 8:00 am. Lunch at Big Daddy's Grill.

March 29 – Apr 2 – Florida birding trip to Wakulla, St. Mark's and Cedar Key is filled, taking back-ups.

April 7 – Ft. Morgan for bird banding. Note time change – Leave Unitarian parking lot at 7:00 am. Take sack lunch and beverage.

April 14 – Fred Nation will lead field trip to the Splinter Hill Bog. Leave Unitarian parking lot at 8:00.

April 21 – Gaye Lindsey's boating trip - Weeks' Bay. Leave parking lot at 8:00 or meet at the Tonsmeire Building at Weeks' Bay at 8:45

April 28 – Fred Nation will lead wildflower tour of 5-Rivers area as we look for birds in adjoining woods. Leave parking lot at 8:00 or meet at 5-Rivers at 8:45.

ing. In addition, it is estimated that there may be 60-100 million free-ranging feral cats in the U.S., and that these cats may collectively kill more than one million birds each day. Reducing this mortality even a small amount could potentially save millions of birds each year.

Studies by veterinarians indicate that only one-third of cat owners currently keep their cats indoors. To increase that percentage, American Bird Conservancy has been conducting a Cats Indoors! Education campaign utilizing our communications networks, downloadable materials on our website, and a printed Cats Indoors! Brochure. This is a popular item at veterinarian's offices that can be tailored with the logos of BCA members.

The feral cat problem is a growing challenge because a number of organized cat enthusiasts are successfully promoting trap, neuter and release

programs that usually perpetuate the existence of feral cat colonies. Under a trap, neuter and release program, feral cats are trapped, neutered and released to parks, neighborhoods, city streets, or even wild lands.

The unfortunate reality, however, is that these programs usually fail to eliminate feral cat colonies because not all of the cats can be captured and neutered, and because the cat colonies become dumping grounds for unwanted cats. In addition, the cats living at these colonies often suffer from disease, exposure, predation, and collisions with cars.

Cat enthusiasts are pushing to make trap, neuter and release programs standard practice in towns, counties and states across the country. When TNR is formally adopted by cities and counties, laws are usually changed to accommodate the practice, leaving public land managers and private property owners

without recourse to deal with problems associated with unowned cats.

Although often promoted as a way to reduce the numbers of stray and feral cats, many of the organizations lobbying most heavily for adoption of TNR programs have the clear objective of normalizing cats in the landscape, that is, redefining feral and stray cats as "community cats" or even "wildlife." This is part of a coordinated effort to achieve "no kill" in animal shelters, without making provisions for appropriate care of these cats. As a society we do not expect to solve dog overpopulation problems by simply turning unwanted dogs loose onto the streets; the same should be true for cats.

Additional information about TNR is available on American Bird Conservancy's website at <http://www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/cats/tnr.html> and for Cats Indoors! see <http://abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/cats>.

## Continued from p 1

As I understand it, Saraland officials propose to approve a special 3.5 cent sales tax to assist development to the racetrack. The tax would result in the creation of a capital improvement district around the racetrack property. This would allow officials to borrow money to help buy land and construct buildings or roads. Any loans would be repaid by the district. Saraland would keep 1.5 cents of the tax.

The Saraland tax would be in addition to a similar 5 cent sales tax that the Prichard City Council agreed to in August. While the two sales tax schemes are designed differently, both the Saraland and Prichard special taxes would be used to help pay for the Motorsports Park racetrack.

Now the part of the story that's hardest to swallow: The racetrack project will be totally privately owned.

Just last year, Dow was claiming that Gulf Coast Entertainment investors were on board to fund the entire \$648 million. Now he wants taxpayers to help foot the cost but own no part of the racetrack.

This is socialism in its purest form here in conservative, Republican south Alabama.

So what's in it for citizens Joe Blow and Suzie Q? Well, they can go to the races if they purchase a ticket. Any they may also visit the bars, restaurants, motels and "nationally branded stores and entertainment" if they want to shell out more money.

Possibly there'll even be bingo gambling the future, as has been suggested by Prichard officials. Then, assuming that Dow's dream for the racetrack comes true, there may be economic spin-off benefits for the surrounding area.

Sometimes dreams come true, but most times not. Could the racetrack be a nightmare instead? Second thoughts?

I recognize that I and many others are somewhat pessimistic about the racetrack, but we have cause.

For example, former Mayor Dow has made the following claim at recent meetings: "It's not just about racetracks. It's about nationally branded, top-of-the-line stores and nationally branded entertainment that we do not have in this region. We don't want the Targets and Best Buy type businesses. We want the nationally branded groups."

When asked who some of these nationally branded groups might be, Dow said that was private information.

Seems to me there may be a clash of cultures brewing. The crowds that I have observed at racetracks are mostly good, hard-working, fun-loving citizens who may enjoy a few beers. I don't envision these same people spending their hard-earned dollars for \$75 bottles of wine in "nationally branded entertainment and nationally branded store" venues.

I am concerned that many members of our Alabama Legislature are supporting the racetrack proposal with little knowledge of the total project or its various impacts.

I doubt that any one of them has made a serious study of the situation. I don't know how they could have. Conservation groups who regularly evaluate the environmental impacts of such projects were denied all but the scantiest bits of information. We obtained some project-related information only after the US Army Corps of Engineers and Alabama Department of Environmental Management issued a water quality permit for the project.

Perhaps legislators will remember the bitter lessons from Alabama's Prepaid Affordable College Tuition program and the Orange Beach toll

bridge and highway.

Combining private and government ventures is complex and difficult. If the projects fail, the taxpayers can have the burden of paying for the losses.

Other thoughts that Saraland and Prichard officials and our legislators should recall is that the city of Foley turned down the racetrack for its area. Why? And Dale Earnhardt Jr. and his family backed out of the deal. Why?

The Barber Motorsports Park in Birmingham captured the important Indy Grand Prix racecar type venue that Gulf Coast Entertainment had wanted.

Why were no plans made earlier for sewage at the Saraland track, where a predicted 70,000 people will attend races with some of those driving an estimated 5,000 RV's?

Who will be responsible for protecting the approximate 800 acres of wetlands and beautiful Chicksaw Creek?

Questions, questions and more questions. Any second thoughts?

# Forever Wild Continues to Preserve and Expand Alabama's Treasured Outdoors For the Public

At a press conference highlighting the broad support for the reauthorization of Forever Wild, Commissioner Barnett Lawley told guests and reporters, "Forever Wild's benefits extend to many sectors because it benefits such a large number of people from all over the

state, whether they're a business profiting from increased tourism to a Forever Wild area, or group of friends hunting together on one of Forever Wild's many public hunting lands. We want to remind people of the many opportunities provided to us every day by Forever Wild."

Lawley, along with several other speakers and attendees, was touting the support Forever Wild enjoys from the public, as well. More than 200,000 acres have been preserved under the Forever Wild program since its ratification by 83% in 1992. Today, almost twenty years later, that level of support has not wavered.

The constitutional referendum authorizes Forever Wild board members to purchase land from willing sellers for the sake of preserving that land for public use by protecting it from development and making it Forever Wild. Equally important is how the program pays for itself. Rather than levying any new taxes on Alabamians, the program takes funds from interest earned on state oil and gas leases.

The rewards reaped by Alabamians are countless. Protecting land and improving people's quality of life are two themes that run throughout the Forever Wild program. Aside from safeguarding the public lands contained within Forever Wild tracts themselves, many of the purchased lands also border state parks, thereby adding on to already preserved land and connecting previously separated parcels. Forever Wild also preserves myriad plant and wildlife crucial to Alabama's ecosystem and nurtures the growth of natural resources that are essential to our air quality and clean drinking water, as well.

Expanding public access also ranks high on Forever Wild's priority list. Many tracts, such as the renowned "Walls of Jericho," have breathtaking views and cater perfectly to activities such as hiking, biking, hunting, fishing, camping, birding, and photography, to name just a few. To ensure that visitors are able to enjoy nature with ease,

many sites have trails and other means of access. The "Walls of Jericho," for example, recently announced the opening of a 4.7 mile trail at Bear Den Loop along with improvements to another already-existing trail.

These efforts to expand access to the public have another, more tangible benefit to Alabamians in the form of tourism. Forever Wild lands exist all

over the state. As visitors are drawn to the beauty and various recreational opportunities these lands have to offer, local areas—many in need of revenue—stand to benefit from the economic impacts.

But perhaps the greatest gift Forever Wild goes not to us, but to the next generation of Alabamians. A Native American Proverb articulates the sentiment best: "We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children." With Forever Wild, we fulfill more than our obligations to protect God's earth. We fulfill our moral responsibility to protect these lands so that our children and grandchildren may enjoy them for years to come.



## Help the Gulf

Let President Obama and the Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force know that you [support a strong national ocean policy](#)! Right now, we have an unprecedented opportunity to improve the way that we manage our remarkable

marine resources, our coastal wetlands and the Gulf's waters.

Our oceans and coasts are beautiful ecosystems that support an astonishing diversity of life, and these environments are critical to our well-being.

Unfortunately, the Gulf of Mexico waters and our coast face massive wetlands loss, dead-zone causing pollution, unsustainable fishing, and global warming consequences like ocean acidification & sea level rise. Currently, our ocean and coasts are managed by 20 different federal agencies and 140 different laws and regulations, and this tangled web isn't effectively addressing these threats.

We need a national conservation-focused, ecosystem-based policy to help us protect and restore our extraordinary ocean and coastal resources for today and tomorrow--and now we have the chance!

[Send a message](#) urging the Obama administration to adopt a strong framework for effective coastal and ocean planning that will give us the tools to protect, maintain and restore the health of our coasts and ocean. The window for public comment closes tomorrow, so act now!

Visit this webpage to see a sample comment and link to the Council of Environmental Quality's website: [http://action.healthygulf.org/tellafriend.jsp?tell\\_a\\_friend\\_KEY=6424](http://action.healthygulf.org/tellafriend.jsp?tell_a_friend_KEY=6424)

Together we can show strong support for a national ocean policy that will protect and restore our marine resources and ecosystems for present and future generations.

United for a healthy Gulf,  
Aaron Viles  
Campaign Director

The Gulf Restoration Network is a diverse network of local, regional, and national groups and individuals dedicated to protecting and restoring the valuable natural resources of the Gulf of Mexico. Don't worry, GRN will never sell or share your information. To unsubscribe, visit this site: <http://action.healthygulf.org/unsubscribe.jsp>

# LSU Museum of Natural Science in Baton Rouge



Twenty members of the Mobile Bay Audubon Society had an extraordinary two hour tour of the Ornithology Section the LSU Museum of Natural Science conducted by Curator of Birds, Dr. James Van Remsen on Saturday, February 27. Highlights included a close up look at study skins of Ivory-billed Woodpeckers, hummingbirds, tanagers and many other birds. The museum contains the fourth largest collection of bird skins and the largest collection of bird DNA in the world. The tour included a very interesting discussion on bird relationships based on their DNA. It was extremely interesting to view the many colors of tropical birds, see new species, and discuss ecological relationships. After the tour, the group had lunch at Mike Anderson's restaurant and went birding at the Capital Lake. We thank Van Remsen, David Cagnolatti and Harriett Pooler for making this wonderful experience possible. Look for more information on this and other field trips on our web site [www.mobile-bayaudubon.org](http://www.mobile-bayaudubon.org).



## Black Bears

Tom Hodges

Black bears typically have two cubs; rarely, one or three. In 2007, in northern New Hampshire, a black bear gave birth to five healthy young. There were two or three reports of bears with as many as 4 cubs, but five was, and is, very extraordinary.

I learned of them shortly after they emerged from their den and set myself a goal of photographing all five cubs with their mom - no matter how much time and effort was involved.

I knew the trail they followed on a fairly regular basis, usually shortly before dark. After spending nearly four hours a day, seven days a week, for more than six weeks, I had that once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and photographed them.

I used the equivalent of a very fast film speed on my digital camera. The print is properly focused and well exposed, with all six bears posing as if they were in a studio for a family portrait. I stayed in touch with other people who saw the bears during the summer and into the fall hunting season.

All six bears continued to thrive.

As time for hibernation approached, I found still more folks who had seen them, and everything remained OK. I



stayed away from the bears as I was concerned that they might become habituated to me or to people in general, and treat them as approachable friends.' This could easily become dangerous for both man and animal.

After Halloween, I received no further reports and could only hope the bears survived until they hibernated.

This spring, just before the snow disappeared, all six bears came out of their den and wandered all over the same familiar territory they trekked in the spring of 2007.

I saw them before mid-April and dreamed nightly of taking another family portrait, a highly improbable second once-in-a-lifetime photograph. On 25 April 2008, I achieved my dream.

When something as magical as this happens between man and animal, Native Americans say, "We have walked together in the shadow of a rainbow."

And so, it is with humility and great pleasure that I share these exhilarating photos with you.

Do pass them on!



# 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

- 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!

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$20 - 1 year Introductory Rate   | <input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000 - Individual Life Membership |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$15 - 1 year Student/Senior Rate | <input type="checkbox"/> \$1,500 - Dual Life Membership       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$30 - 2 year Special Rate        |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My check is enclosed              | <input type="checkbox"/> Please bill me                       |

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Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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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

Listen to the voice of nature for it holds treasures for you.

Native American Proverb

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