

# THE Pelican Post

*A quarterly publication - Weeks Bay Foundation*



Summer 2007  
Vol. 22, No. 2



*Nature will bear the closest inspection.  
She invites us to lay our eye level with  
her smallest leaf, and take an insect  
view of its plain.  
- Henry David Thoreau*

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*The Weeks Bay Foundation is a non-profit organization whose members provide assistance and support to the Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve's goals and programs.*

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# From the Executive Director...



Our website, [www.weeksbay.org](http://www.weeksbay.org), has been redesigned by Webjed Design in Mobile. It is easier to navigate and contains a lot of interesting information about the Foundation, the Reserve, and coastal ecology. Please check it out, and let us know what you think about the new look.

The Foundation is looking forward to funding another summer program at the Reserve. The summer is a great time to enjoy the beautiful Alabama coast and to learn more about coastal ecology and stewardship.

Anyone who enjoys taking photographs is invited to enter the Weeks Bay Photography Contest. The winning photos will be displayed at the Eastern Shore Art Center during the month of July. Entries should be delivered to the Reserve by 4:30 p.m. on Saturday, June 16.

The Alabama Coastal BirdFest is scheduled for October 18-21. Remember that all proceeds help to preserve critical habitat for birds in coastal Alabama.

The Foundation continues to work for land conservation, and has scheduled noted conservation easement specialist **Stephen Small** for a workshop on November 2. Consider a land donation, life estate, charitable remainder trust, bargain sale or conservation easement. Remember that the Foundation can not do any of its work without the support of the membership.

Have a wonderful summer and enjoy this issue of *The Pelican Post*.

Working for Conservation,

*Walter*

**New Website for the Reserve!**  
 Visit Us Online at [www.weeksbay.org](http://www.weeksbay.org)

**Photo Contest**

This year's entry deadline is **Saturday, June 16, 2007** at 4:30 p.m. All entries must be delivered to the Reserve by this date. Entry forms and contest rules will be available on the Foundation website.

For more informaton, please call (251) 990-5004 or visit [www.weeksbay.org](http://www.weeksbay.org).

# Stewardship

AmeriCorps Team Contributes to Success

Baldwin County work crews, Reserve and Beckwith Camp staff, AmeriCorps personnel and volunteers all pitched in to help with a *Juncus romerianus* marsh restoration and experimentation project along the shores of the Beckwith Episcopal Camp and Conference Center. The restoration aspect of the project actually started many years ago when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service installed a wave attenuating brush fence parallel to the Beckwith shore. Installation of this fence helped native marsh plants regain a foothold along the heavily eroded shores. Unfortunately, the many storms of the past few years significantly damaged and reduced the effectiveness of the fence.



The Baldwin County Commission generously donated the labor and materials necessary to repair the majority of the dual-sided fence. An AmeriCorps team finished the last of the repairs to the fence using storm-strewn lumber recovered from the marshes of Weeks Bay. The team then spent days filling the fence with disposed Christmas trees and cleaning up concrete rubble and other debris along



the shore. The team's final contribution to the restoration effort was the acquisition and transplantation of approximately fifty, 25 cm<sup>2</sup> plugs of *Juncus romerianus* from donor areas around Weeks Bay. The plugs were laid out in a series of plots of varying densities within the intertidal zone. The plots will be monitored over time to help establish the minimal planting density required for successful marsh restoration. Additionally, **Dr. Just Cebrian** of the Dauphin Island Sea Lab will be conducting experiments to determine the rate and amount of nutrient uptake within the plots.

# Did You Know?

by John Borom

Boat-tailed Grackles (*Quiscalus major*) are permanent residents along the Gulf and Atlantic coasts of the United States, from mid-Texas to Virginia. These large, long-tailed blackbirds are common around the coastal marshes. The male appears to be all-black when seen from a distance, but at close range, in good sunlight, it turns out to be highly iridescent with intermingled purple, blue and dark green. The female is smaller with dark brown upperparts and a pale brown breast. Young males resemble females in color when first out of the nest, but within two months they molt to a uniform dull black. The following summer they attain their adult plumage.

The species gets its name from the long, keel-shaped tail that it usually keeps elevated at an angle when it walks along wet marshes and mudflats. It also has long legs and large gripping feet. It is interesting that male and female eye color is mostly brown in coastal Texas and Louisiana and birds from coastal Mississippi, Alabama and northwest Florida and on the Atlantic coast have a yellow iris. The reason is unknown.

Boat-tailed Grackles have an unusual mating system. Females locate their massive nests of grasses in a cluster or colony. Males compete for the right to defend and mate with all the females. This is known as harem defense polygyny, and this species is the



only known harem-defending bird in North America. The large bluish-green eggs are beautifully blotched with irregular black and purplish markings. Incubation ranges from 13 to 15 days and is carried out by the female. Fledglings that fall into the water can swim for short distances, using their wings as paddles.

For more information about Boat-tailed Grackles and other animals and plants that share the coast with us, go to the Foundation's website, [www.weeksbay.org](http://www.weeksbay.org), and click on photo album.

# BirdFest

by Fran Morley

Organizers of the fourth annual Alabama Coastal BirdFest are busy making plans for the October 18-21 event. Past events have drawn visitors from 16 different states and Canada.

“We know from past experience that many of our tours are very popular, so we will be repeating those this year, such as the trips to the Hummer/Bird Study Group banding station at Fort Morgan and the trips to Dauphin Island,” said **Jim Griggs**, Director of Alabama State Lands, one of the event sponsors.

“We are busy finalizing the full schedule, but I guarantee that there will be lots of great trips and good opportunities to see interesting local and migratory birds,” Griggs said. “We will have several new trips, including boat trips, which are always a big attraction.”

All of the trips for the 2007 Alabama Coastal BirdFest will be staged from the new Alabama State Lands facility, Five Rivers – Alabama’s Delta Resource Center, located on the causeway.

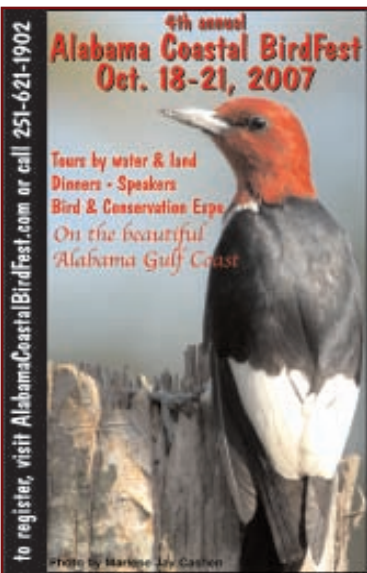


photo by Marlene Cashen

“The Thursday night reception will be held there as well,” said BirdFest coordinator **Fran Morley**. “Not only will guests see the wonderful birding photos of **Dave Cagnolatti**, our presenter that night, but they’ll also enjoy the beautiful views of the Delta from the boardwalks and porches at Five Rivers.”

The Friday night event, a BBQ and seafood dinner and Silent Auction, will take place at the James P. Nix Center in Fairhope. The speaker will be **Dr. Geoff Hill**, ornithologist and professor at Auburn University. Dr. Hill has been heading up the team searching for the Ivory-bill Woodpecker in the swamps of northwest Florida.

“We know that Dr. Hill and his team have heard the

birds’ distinctive calls and seen evidence of nests and feeding, and we hope they will have some conclusive proof by October, but in any event, he will have fascinating stories to tell about the search,” Morley said. “Who would have guessed that this elusive bird could be living so close to us here on the Gulf Coast?”

The full schedule of trips and evening events will be available soon. Registration will open and the 2007 brochures will be mailed mid-June.

# Discovery Day



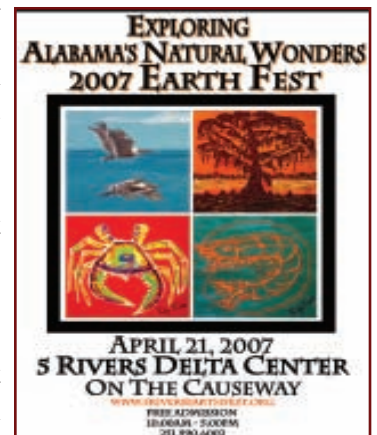
2007 Discovery Day

The Dauphin Island Sea Lab celebrated their annual Discovery Day and Open House on Saturday, April 14. The event was special this year because it focused on the 200th anniversary of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the dedication of the new Richard C. Shelby Center for Ecosystem-

Based Fisheries Management. The new building is the result of a partnership between the NOAA-National Marine Fisheries Service and the Sea Lab. The Reserve had an interpretive exhibit set up during Discovery Day. The Foundation congratulates NOAA and the Sea Lab.

# Earth Fest

Earth Fest was held at Five Rivers - Alabama’s Delta Resource Center on Saturday, April 21. The theme was Exploring Alabama’s Natural Wonders, and the event featured live entertainment, displays from local environmental organizations and a children’s art contest. The Reserve had an interpretive exhibit and the Foundation was one of the primary sponsors.



## Roger Clay Recognized

**Roger Clay** was recently recognized for his dedicated service as Chair of the Weeks Bay Advisory Committee. He served from December 2004 through December 2006. Roger is a non-game wildlife biologist at the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division of the Alabama Department of



Conservation and Natural Resources. He has a long history with the Reserve, assisting with various programs, volunteer tours, guest lectures and providing insight into a large variety of natural history questions. Roger is a local expert on ornithology, being able to respond to any and all concerns with birds. His experience and willingness to help the Reserve and his service to the Advisory Committee is greatly appreciated.

## Stephen Small Seminar

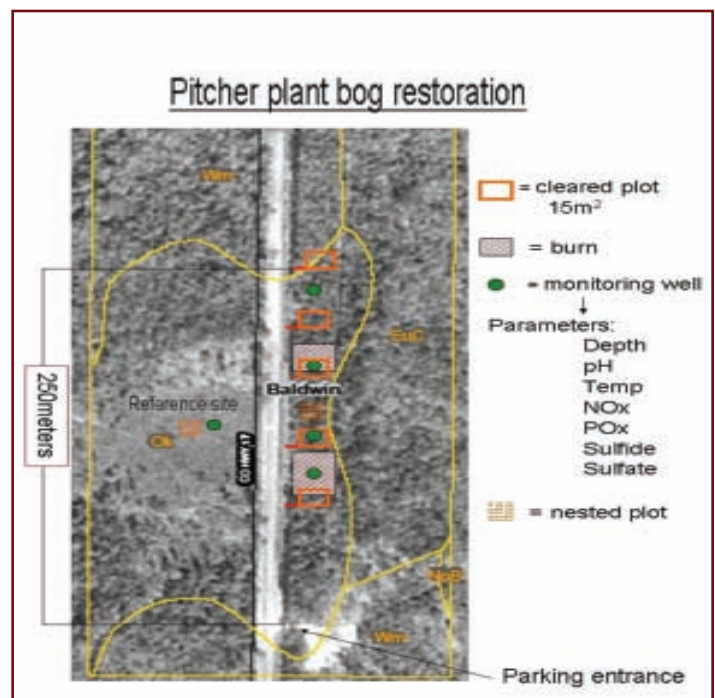
On November 2, 2007, the Coastal Training Program (CTP) and the Foundation will present a one-day seminar for accountants, appraisers, attorneys, foresters, planners, realtors and the land trust community. This seminar will feature nationally known attorney **Stephen Small**. As stated in Forbes Magazine, Mr. Small is “the nation’s top authority on saving land and money with conservation easements.” Small is the author of *The Federal Tax Law of Conservation Easements and Preserving Family Lands, Books I, II, III*. Mr. Small wrote the federal income tax regulations on conservation easements while he served as an attorney-advisor in the Office of Chief Counsel of the Internal Revenue Service in the early 1980s. The topic for the seminar will be financial strategies for landowners. This seminar will offer continuing education credits and will be conducted at the Five Rivers - Alabama’s Delta Resource Center. The Foundation will also host the Fall 2007 Gulf Coast Land Trust meeting. This meeting will take place the day before Mr. Small’s seminar. Look for more details on the Weeks Bay website and in the Fall edition of *The Pelican Post*.

## Bog Restoration

In 1993, the overstory was cleared from the Weeks Bay Pitcher Plant Bog. The clearing and prescribed burning of this parcel on the west side of County Road 17 has created conditions favorable for the growth of many unique, rare, and beautiful plants. This spring, Reserve staff and volunteers began investigating the feasibility of expanding the pitcher plant bog habitat to the east side of County Road 17.

To create a baseline dataset for monitoring purposes and to determine if conditions are correct for recreating bog conditions, a number of parameters will be measured and compared with the existing pitcher plant bog. **Fred Nation** will conduct flora presence/absence surveys within each tract. Ground water monitoring wells within both the comparison and restoration tracts will allow water samples to be collected and analyzed for nutrient content and pH. Dataloggers deployed in the wells will record variations in ground water depth and temperature.

Test plots and controlled burns within the restoration tract, combined with monitoring program data will be utilized to quantify restoration treatment efficacy. Within about one year, enough data will be collected to make a sound decision whether to proceed with a larger scale restoration attempt or not. These data will also be useful to restoration practitioners and researchers investigating other pitcher plant bogs.

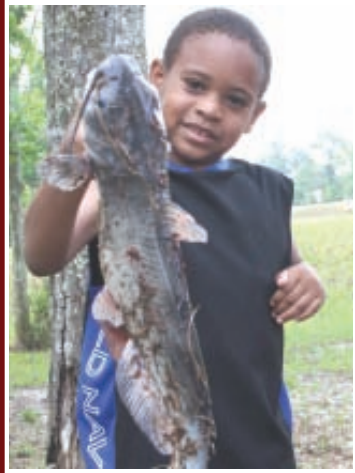


# 2007 Kid's Fishing Fun Day

Kid's Fishing Fun Day was held at the Safe Harbor pond on Saturday, May 5. The pond was stocked with 650 pounds of fat and hungry catfish. The annual event is a great way to let children and a parent or guardian enjoy fishing in a beautiful part of the Reserve, free of charge.

The event was sponsored by the Foundation, the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries and State Lands Division Coastal Section, the Baldwin County Commission, Danny's Fried Chicken, and Coca-Cola Bottling Consolidated. About 200 children registered, and all of the participants were treated to hot dogs and cokes or bottled water. The Weeks Bay Volunteers assisted with registration and food preparation. The Foundation thanks all of the sponsors and volunteers who have helped to make this event successful for eight years.





# Turkey Branch...

## Tracking Sources of Pathogens

Turkey Branch, a tributary of Fish River, has been monitored for pathogens for several years by Reserve staff, volunteers and the Foundation. Fecal coliform and *E. coli* have both been above the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) and US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) water quality limits at times during the testing period. Land use in the area is primarily residential, and the homes along the creek use onsite septic tanks to treat



Location of ten *E. coli* sampling sites along Turkey Branch.

wastewater. (The upper reaches of the Turkey Branch watershed remain agricultural, but domestic livestock is not widespread.) Onsite septic systems are potential sources for pathogens in the stream. If septic systems are a contributing source, a likely mode of entry in the creek of this untreated septic effluent is shallow groundwater. In cooperation with the Coastal Alabama Clean Water Partnership and the Foundation, **Mike Shelton**, Watershed Coordinator, has begun efforts to track sources of pathogen contamination on the waterway. *E. coli* sampling has been increased to 10 locations accessible by boat. The highest pathogen counts have occurred around sites 4, 5 and 6, a reach of the creek which has a number of homes close to the stream banks.

In support of the project, the Foundation rented a handheld thermal imager. Thermal imagery had been used to detect shallow groundwater sources in bacterial source tracking efforts in Escambia County, Florida. There, researchers at the University of West Florida used the technology as part of source tracking project on Escambia Bay where failing onsite systems were identified and remediated. The technology was successful on Turkey Branch, but only under low light conditions and areas of open shoreline.

Heavily vegetated banks impeded use of the imager.

The study will identify locations of high pathogen input. Land use around the input source and remediation possibilities will be investigated.

### Turkey Branch: *E. coli* Results

Site#	<i>E. coli</i> Results (col/100ml)		
	2/22	3/16	4/16
1	0	0	89
2	650	100	67
3	200	400	67
4	300	500	111
5	200	800	178
6	250	533	300
7	50	167	67
8	200	100	11
9	50	133	22
10	50	267	0

Results will be

reported to the Alabama Department of Public Health, ADEM and USEPA, if regulatory action is necessary. If the pilot study is successful, the study can be replicated throughout the Fish River watershed to address the pathogen impairment on the entire length of the waterway.

## Workshops

Invasive species can be harmful to coastal ecosystems. An Invasive Species Workshop was held in May. The purpose of the training was to provide the 35 participants with information on the identification, ecology and practical control of the most prevalent and damaging invasive plants on the northern Gulf Coast. **Gena Todia**, Wetland Resources Environmental Consulting, and **Fred Nation**, field botanist and environmental consultant, were instructors of the one-day program. Part of the training consisted of lectures on the ecology of invasive species and their modes of infestation. In addition, field exercises were held to examine herbicide use and safety.

A Wetland Regulations and Compliance Issue Workshop for land use professionals was conducted in May. It provided current and accurate information about wetland regulation, permitting, and compliance issues using actual case studies to promote wetlands protection and better development practices. Alabama Coastal Foundation, **Neil Johnston** of Hand Arendall and Riverwood, LLC were partners in the training held at the Fowl River Community Center in Mobile. In addition, the US Army Corps of Engineers and the Alabama Department of Environmental Management summarized the current state of wetland regulation. Following the lecture sessions, participants toured a subdivision where wetland violations had occurred.

# Nature's Calendar

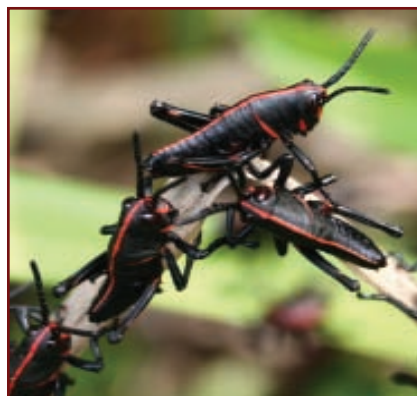
by John Borom

The eastern lubber (*Romalea microptera*) is a distinctive and interesting grasshopper. Adult males and females are usually two and three inches long, respectively. The body is thick while the legs remain relatively slender. The general color varies from dull yellow with black to nearly entirely black. The wings are too short for flight, and they are quite clumsy and slow in movement. They can only jump short distances and usually crawl feebly over the substrate. The preferred habitat is open pine woods, weedy vegetation along roadsides and common reed wetlands.

They have one generation per year, with eggs beginning to hatch in March. Like all grasshoppers, eastern lubbers grow through successive stages after molting referred to as nymphal instars. They pass through five instars before molting into the adult stage. The length of each instar averages 15 to 20 days. Adults are common in south Alabama in July and August.

After mating, females begin laying eggs into soft soil during the summer months. Each female will lay from one to three egg masses and deposit them at a depth of about two inches. These eggs will remain in the soil through late fall and winter and then begin hatching in March. The young nymphs crawl up out of the soil and congregate near a food source.

The photo of lubber nymphs was taken at Meaher State Park in mid-April. Their bright red color pattern is a warning to predators that lubbers contain toxic substances. Small mammals have been known to vomit violently after ingesting a lubber, and to remain ill for several hours. Other defensive characteristics include making hissing sounds and releasing a bubbly froth which contains irritating ketone compounds. Strangely enough, a similar ketone is available in a crystallized form to keep cats and dogs away from flowers.



Eastern Lubber  
(*Romalea microptera*)

# Jubilees!

On quiet summer nights, a cry is sometimes heard that rouses residents to the Eastern Shore of Mobile Bay in a flash. These residents are lucky to have the opportunity to witness a jubilee, a very interesting phenomenon involving the winds, tides, weather and estuarine creatures. Few people have had the opportunity to witness an elusive jubilee.



photo by Lee Yorkel

Blue crabs crowd the shore as they try to move away from oxygen-poor water

For a jubilee to take place, a very specific set of conditions must exist. Jubilees usually occur in the summer, in the early morning before sunrise. The previous day's weather conditions must include an overcast or cloudy day, a gentle wind from the northeast, and a calm or slick bay surface. Also, a rising tide is necessary; a change to a falling tide will stop the jubilee. It takes a combination of all these conditions to produce the phenomenon.

Jubilees are caused primarily by up-welling of oxygen-poor bottom waters forcing bottom dwelling fish (flounder, stingrays, eels) and crustaceans (crabs and shrimp) ashore. As this low-oxygen water mass moves shoreward, sea creatures in its path are driven in front of it unless they can swim over the top. Once the oxygen-poor water mass moves to the shoreline, the fish and shellfish swimming in front of it are trapped.

Fish and shellfish trapped by jubilee conditions behave very strangely in their attempt to get enough oxygen to survive. Due to the lack of oxygen, the affected creatures move very slowly and seem reluctant to swim even to escape capture. However, few actually die during the jubilees, except those caught by folks lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time to take part in the jubilee!

To learn more about jubilees stop by the Weeks Bay Reserve Interpretive Center and check out the display panel in the lobby. The information above was taken from "The Jubilee Phenomenon" brochure published by Auburn University Marine Extension and Research Center.

## Nesting Hummingbirds by Kay Roach

Spring is such a special season for bird lovers along the banks of lower Fish River. There's the usual hustle and bustle of nest construction by many species of birds including Brown Thrashers, Eastern Bluebirds,

Northern Mockingbirds, Northern Cardinals, wrens, Purple Martins, Wood Ducks, and the magnificent Great Blue Herons that nest in the tops of the mighty pine.

For me, the 2006 and 2007 spring nesting seasons have been especially unique. For the past two years, a female Ruby-throated Hummingbird has chosen to nest in the branches of a large Water Oak just off my riverside porch. Early to mid March has been the arrival time for the hummers to begin nest construction. While cleaning garden areas, I noticed a hummer putting the puffy portion of a cattail seed head in its beak and heading for the Water Oak. I began to search for the tiny nest, finding it only when the female hummer settled into it. Now that the nest construction is complete and in the same location as the 2006 nest, it is hard for me to imagine having the opportunity to observe another generation of hummer nesting activities.



Last year, I thought the nest had been abandoned until I noticed two tiny black heads peaking above the rim for their feedings. Each day I witnessed the mother's many feedings. As the babies grew, space in the tiny nest became scarce. The young birds began practicing by stretching and flapping their tiny wings at warp speed, as if ready to fly. One May morning, for their first true flight, the babies flew to stand on the branch that supported the nest. Once out of the nest, they never returned. The mother continued to feed them as they flew from branch to branch of the Water Oak. I truly look forward to observing the growth of the 2007 Ruby-throated Hummingbird family.

## Weeks Bay Reserve



Weeks Bay Reserve is a site-based facility for Research, Education, and Stewardship located south of Fairhope in Baldwin County on U.S. Highway 98.

The Weeks Bay Interpretive Center is open seven days a week at no charge: Monday-Saturday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and Sunday, 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. For more information, call (251) 928-9792.

The Center has exhibits on coastal issues, local history and Native Americans, as well as habitat models, collections of specimens found in coastal Alabama and live animals. Trails and boardwalks passing through swamps and pitcher plant bogs and overlooking the estuary are available to the public.

The Reserve is part of the Coastal Section, State Lands Division of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

Visit the Weeks Bay Foundation website at [www.weeksbay.org](http://www.weeksbay.org).

*Where Conservation, Research, & Education Come Together*

# Summer Calendar

## June

- 9 **Weeks Bay Area River Cleanup.** Meet at the Fish River Marina, 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon. For more information, call the Reserve at (251) 928-9792.
- 14 **Weeks Bay Advisory Committee.** Weeks Bay Auditorium, 2:00 p.m.
- 16 **Eighth Annual Weeks Bay Photo Contest.** Entry deadline, June 16, 4:30 p.m. All entries must be delivered to the Reserve by the deadline date and time. Entry forms and contest rules are available on the Foundation website. For more information, contact the Foundation office at (251) 990-5004 or visit [www.weeksbay.org](http://www.weeksbay.org).
- 19-20 **Alabama Water Watch Teacher Workshop.** Watershed Monitoring and Management Issues. Weeks Bay Auditorium. For information call, the Reserve at (251) 928-9792.
- 29 **Field trip to Gaillard Island** in Mobile Bay to observe nesting Brown Pelicans as well as gulls, terns, and Black Skimmers. Meet at Beachcomber Marine Supply at Dog River in Mobile County. Going south, take the first left at Dog River Bridge. There will be a \$15 per person fee. Limited to 20 people. 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. For reservations, call **John Borom** at (251) 990-0423.
- 30 **Volunteer Water Quality Monitor Training.** Weeks Bay Auditorium, 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. For more information, call the Reserve at (251) 928-9792.

## July

- 3 **Citizens Advisory Committee** for the Weeks Bay Watershed Project. Weeks Bay Auditorium, 6:00 p.m.
- 4 **Independence Day.** The Interpretive Center will be closed. All trails and boardwalks will remain open for your walking and sightseeing pleasure.
- 18 **No Adverse Impact Workshop.** Five Rivers - Alabama's Delta Resource Center, Education Building, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. For more information, call the Reserve at (251) 928-9792.
- 20-21 **Bedsole Foundation Workshop.** For selected students, Beckwith Episcopal Camp and Conference Center and Weeks Bay Interpretive Center.

## August

- 7 **Baldwin County Board of Education Character Training Workshop.** For teachers, Weeks Bay Auditorium, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
- 22-23 **Master Environmental Education Workshop.** Presented by County Extension Agent **Crystal Oates**. Weeks Bay Auditorium. For more information, contact the Baldwin County Extension Service at (251) 937-7176.
- 25 **Alabama Water Watch Trainers Refresher Course.** Weeks Bay Auditorium, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

## Honey Bees

Honey bees are somewhat taken for granted and are not often thought of except as a topping for biscuits or pancakes or to sweeten a hot cup of tea; but these little insects are incredible pollinators and have become linked to our fruit and vegetable food chain. Honey bees really do not get their just appreciation.



Recently, a hive moved *Mark Cooper removing eaves to expose massive bee hive* into the eaves of the Interpretive Center, became established, and grew to some 10,000 bees with fifteen frames worth of stored honey, pollen, and developing brood. It became a problem since it was above the area where school groups collect for orientation. **Mark Cooper**, Maintenance Supervisor at the Reserve, opened up the eaves to expose the massive hive and beekeeper **Ed Bornholt** volunteered his services to remove the bee hive from the premises. This was done in such a way to preserve the hive so it could continue the beneficial work of pollinating flowers and producing the sweet honey so widely enjoyed.

Honey bees have endured severe hardship over the last 10-15 years as various parasites, such as beetles and mites, have become a significant detriment to their survival. Maintaining bee hives is now more work than ever as beekeepers have to treat hives for parasitic invasion and, if necessary, destroy hives. Honey bees are special, so next time you see this little pollinator, appreciate the little insect for the wonderful service it provides.

# Thanks to Our Donors...

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## Become a part of the Weeks Bay Foundation!

Join us by returning the enclosed membership envelope or  
look for the link on our home page at [www.weeksbay.org](http://www.weeksbay.org).

### Annual Memberships

Student \$10    Individual \$30    Family \$50  
Business \$250    Lifetime \$1000

*...Your Support is Essential  
to Preserving Our  
Environment!*

## Weeks Bay Foundation

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Brown Pelican  
(*Pelecanus occidentalis*)

photo by Jared Peyton

*If future generations are to remember us with gratitude rather than contempt, we must leave them more than the miracles of technology. We must leave them a glimpse of the world as it was in the beginning, not just after we got through with it.*

- Lyndon B. Johnson