

The Pelican Post

Weeks Bay Reserve Foundation Newsletter
Fall 1998

1998 National Coastal Cleanup

Coastal Cleanup '98 was another success with a record breaking number of volunteers participating in the Weeks Bay Zone this year. Sixty-two people, from children to seniors, cleaned up 1,777 pounds of debris. The most common items were again the plastic soda bottles and cigarette butts, along with several abandoned crab traps, styro-foam, plastic bags, lawn furniture, fast food packaging, and even a few appliances including a television and a clothes dryer.



Fifteen scouts and leaders from **Boy Scout Troop 406** in Montgomery gave their strength and service for the fourth straight year. About 20 employees from **Shell Chemical** in Saraland collected the most trash, bringing 644 pounds to the dumpster at Baywatch Marina., **Weeks Bay Reserve volunteers** made sure all 62 participants had plenty to eat at the lunch served back at the Reserve.

A huge *thank you* to all those who gave their time and effort to make this year's cleanup a big success. We look forward to your participation again during the next Coastal Cleanup set for Sept. 18, 1999.

Weeks Bay Reserve Volunteers Native Plant Sale



Even Hurricane Georges could not dampen the enthusiasm of the Weeks Bay volunteers, who re-grouped after the storm and completed another successful native plant sale.

The annual event, which is the first area plant sale of the fall season, began on Friday, Sept. 25 and was cancelled "midstream" as Hurricane Georges approached. The sale resumed Saturday and Sunday, Oct. 3-4.

"We want to offer a special thank you to all the volunteers who helped with organizing the plant sale and all the area media who helped us get the word out about the second weekend," says **Maureen Nation**, volunteer coordinator at the Reserve. The sale is the volunteer's primary fundraiser and proceeds support educational displays and other programs at the Reserve.



Governor Fob James awarded \$100,000 to the Weeks Bay Reserve Foundation for the purchase of the Baywatch Marina properties. On hand for the check presentation were (left to right) **Martha McInnis**, Chief of the Science, Technology and Energy Division of the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA); **Ed Gardner**, Director of ADECA; and Weeks Bay Reserve Foundation Board Members **Skipper Tonsmeire**, **Hattie Smith** and **John Borom**.

A Summary of My Experiences Raising Wood Ducks with Partners for Wildlife

by Matthew Perkins

Sitting on a pier at five in the evening, I suddenly hear screeching and the whistling of wings. As usual, the wood ducks are on time for supper. Seeing me, they quickly retreat into the canal on the opposite side of the inlet off Fish River. Hearing the sound of more ducks flying overhead, I walk back to the house to give these shy birds more privacy. During the evening and morning hours, about two dozen wood ducks are in this quiet retreat at a time.

I have been housing wood ducks for four years now. Starting with three of my own boxes, I now have seven boxes granted from Partners for Wildlife. Each year, two broods are raised per nest box. The first eggs are laid in January, and the last ones in May, with an incubation period of about four to five weeks. By July the boxes are empty. The typical clutch is 20 eggs with about 12 to 15 hatched. These houses have produced well over 300 ducks through the years. It is quite a sight when they all start congregating at the end of the nesting season.

The boxes are monitored once a week for progress and problems. I usually check the boxes in the late afternoon when the mothers have left to feed, so as not to scare them. If the hen becomes spooked she will usually soil the nest, which can lead to infection and a rotten egg. The base of the house is checked to make sure it is secure and to make sure no animals have been harassing the house. The eggs are then checked and counted to make sure no predators (such as rat snakes) have invaded the nest or any eggs have rotted. I will then leave the down nest uncovered on one side of the nest to make sure that the mother is still setting (if she is, she will cover the corner of the nest again).

Just as important as the nesting habitat is the brooding territory. Immediately after a clutch is hatched, the mother leads them to an area where there is food and protection. There they eat invertebrates and plants while they hide in the vegetation to avoid predators such as raccoons, turtles, and other birds (I have even seen one sucked underwater by a large bass). They will emerge when they are several weeks old to feed on the cracked corn with the other ducks. The brooding territory is very sensitive and is a site that I monitor for Alabama Water Watch.

Wood ducks are very beautiful birds that are in need of assistance. If you live on or near or know of a serene site where you could erect a duck house, with patience, you might attract some wood ducks. It is amazing to see the young ducks grow and change their plumage from scruffy juveniles to majestic males. The most fun comes in late winter to observe the cycle starting over with their mating rituals and just plain antics.

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The medical profession is interested in an adhesive of such strength because it may someday prove a boon to dentists in making tooth repairs and orthopedic surgeons in mending broken bones.

Remote Sensing Workshop

A one-day wetlands mapping workshop was held at the Reserve recently. The course, Wetland Education Through Maps and Aerial Photography (WETMAAP) was taught by **Larry Handley** from the US Geological Survey's National Wetlands Research Center in Lafayette, Louisiana. Workshop participants included teachers and wetland specialists from Baldwin and Mobile Counties as well as Reserve staff.

WETMAAP, available through the Internet (website is casts01.usl.edu/wetmaap), provides accessible data and methods for interpretation of wetland loss, restoration, maintenance, and preservation. WETMAAP uses a geographic and ecosystem approach, combining satellite imagery, aerial photography, topographic maps, wetland inventory maps, and Geographic Information System (GIS) for wetland and habitat assessment.

WETMAAP provides student-ready applications of GIS in a classroom setting which assist the user in developing skills and understanding of human impacts and natural processes. The project offers additional applications in environmental science, geography, earth science, and biology.

Educators Workshop

The 1998 Educators Workshop on Nonpoint Source Pollution in Watersheds was a success! About 20 participants from all over the State of Alabama gathered June 23-25 to learn more about polluted runoff and watersheds. Workshop attendees were from as close as Wolf Bay and as far away as Birmingham. Several participants were interested citizens learning how to make a difference in their community. Teachers from Baldwin and Mobile County gathered resources to help them incorporate water quality curricula into their classrooms. After the two and a half day workshop, an optional Alabama Water Watch Basic Training Workshop was offered to certify those interested as volunteer water quality monitors. Representatives from ADEM and Troy State University taught chemical and biological monitoring techniques used by Alabama Water Watch at Cowpen Creek. Also, a recertification class for those who are already monitoring was offered at the Reserve. For a list of upcoming Alabama Water Watch workshops, please contact **Eve Brantley** or **Margaret Holcombe** at the Reserve, 928-9792.



Weeks Bay Staff

(Left to right) **Sandra Milham, Betty Schulte, Brenda Spivey, Mark Cooper, Bob McCormack, Eve Brantley, Maureen Nation, L.G. Adams, and Margaret Holcombe.**

National Water Quality Monitoring Program

The Reserve participates in the National System-Wide Monitoring Program (SWMP) conducted at all 22 Reserves in the country. One of the main goals of this monitoring effort is to identify and track long-term changes in the status, health, integrity, and biological diversity of estuaries. This will simultaneously provide critically needed information on estuarine environmental trends while allowing flexible assessment of coastal management issues of regional or local concern. This monitoring program is designed to enhance the value of the National Estuarine Research Reserves as a model system of national reference sites.

The Reserve has completed three years of continuous monitoring of the waters of Weeks Bay and its tributaries. Three underwater instruments measure water temperature, depth, salinity, turbidity, specific conductivity, dissolved oxygen, oxygen saturation, and pH. These parameters are measured every 30 minutes, 24 hours per day. These data are uploaded from the instruments into computers every two weeks, analyzed, then electronically sent to the NERRS Central Data Management Office (CDMO) in South Carolina where all the Reserve's data is formatted to be displayed on the Internet. National Graduate Research Fellowship recipient **Scott Phipps** from Mississippi State University assists the Reserve in this monitoring effort. The monitoring data and information for each reserve area are available from the CDMO via the Internet at <http://inlet.geol/sc.edu/cdmohome.html>.

The Reserve installed a weather station at Baywatch Marina as part of the national monitoring effort. This was done in conjunction with the **National Weather Service's** protocols so as to be uniform with the data collection throughout the system. The weather station records rainfall, air pressure, temperature, wind direction and speed, and solar radiation.

Alabama Rankings

Alabama is the 29th largest of the United States, but ranks fourth in animal and plant species per square mile. Approximately 77,000 miles of river and stream channels are carved in Alabama's landscape. Alabama ranks first in the nation in navigable channels, with 1,438 miles of waterways which include 21 hydroelectric production facilities and more than 20 public water supply impoundments scattered throughout the state.

The Mobile Basin drains an area of 43,683 square miles of Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi and Tennessee. It contains eight major river systems, the Mobile Tensaw Delta and small freshwater tributaries that empty directly into Mobile Bay. In Alabama, the Tallapoosa, Coosa, Cahaba, Alabama, Locust Fork, Sipsey, Black Warrior and Tombigbee Rivers combine to drain approximately 32,207 square miles, or 62 percent of the state's land area.

Alabama's diverse waterways hold half of all species of freshwater turtles in North America, and one of the richest and most diverse assemblages of freshwater mussels in the world with about 180 species. Approximately two thirds of North American mussel species have been reported from Alabama. Alabama freshwater fish fauna includes 306 native species and 13 non-native species. In addition, 85 marine and estuarine species live in the Mobile Tensaw Delta and the freshwater tributaries of Mobile Bay. Alabama's freshwater snail populations are considered the most diverse assemblage in the world with 120 species. The damming of the Coosa River cobble shoals resulted in the loss of 27 species of snails. Natural historians consider this the single greatest extinction in American History.

The Mobile Tensaw Delta begins where the Mobile River splits into four distributaries. The Mobile, Middle, Tensaw and Blakeley Rivers contribute an average of more than 44 billion gallons of fresh water to Mobile Bay each day. The Mobile Tensaw Delta is 40 miles long, from five to ten miles wide and comprised of 260,000 acres of wetland habitats. The mature swamp habitat prevalent in the northern portion changes to an emergent type of wetland near the head of Mobile Bay. Wildlife is plentiful, and the **National Park Service** has designated it as a National Natural Landmark. Chemical industries and paper companies have made significant negative impacts on portions of the delta.

Almost 50 percent of all documented United States species extinction's since European settlement have occurred during this century in the Mobile Basin according to a recent report by the **US Fish and Wildlife Service**. Alabama has the unfortunate distinction of being the most extinction-prone state in the continental United States, with 98 species extinct. Among its remaining 3,800 species of plants and animals, more than 25 percent are considered to be at risk according to **The Nature Conservancy's** 1997 Species Report Card. Although extinction is a natural process, the current extinction rates are on the order of 1,000 times more than normal rates.

The challenge of keeping our natural areas and species intact for future generations is enormous and requires an ongoing base of support. That is why the Weeks Bay Reserve Foundation's members are so important. Every membership and contribution helps protect more plants and animals and their coastal habitats to preserve our natural heritage for years to come.



Ottlie Halstead on the Salmon River in Idaho. Ottlie and John Borom accompanied the Tonsmeires on a five day rafting trip in Idaho. All participants worked hard to keep up with Ottlie.

Carnivorous Plants

Of the 47 known species of carnivorous plants that occur in the United States, at least 28 species occur within Alabama, and at least 23 of these occur in Baldwin County.

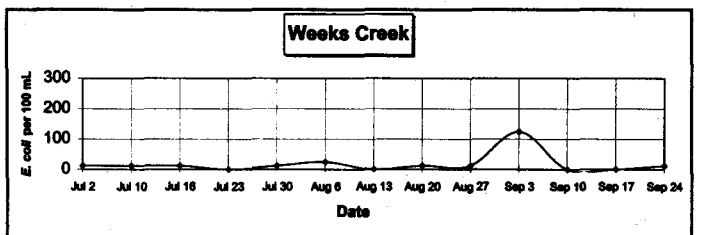
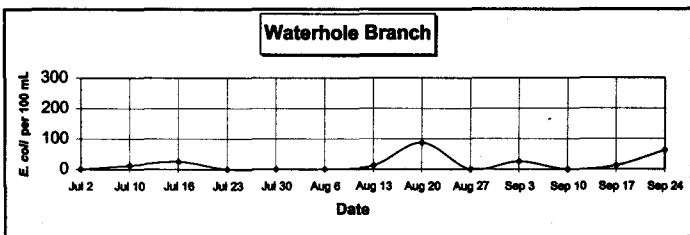
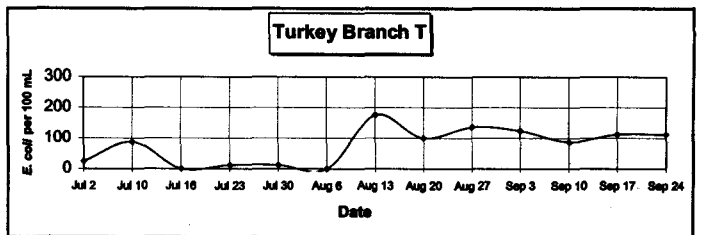
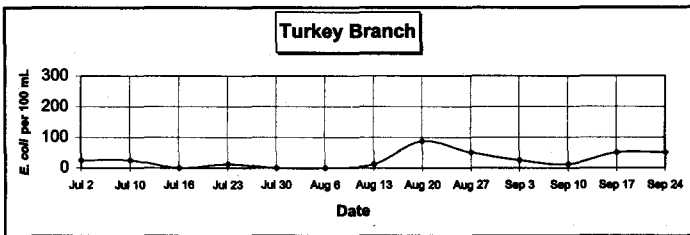
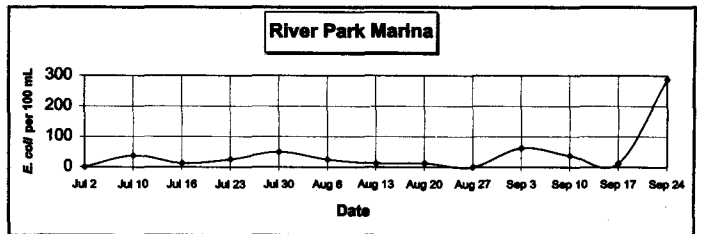
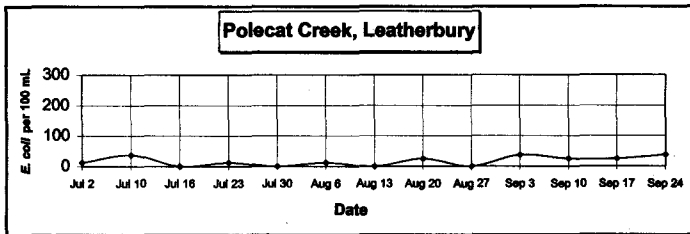
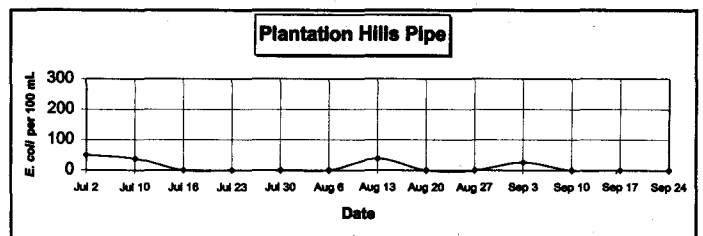
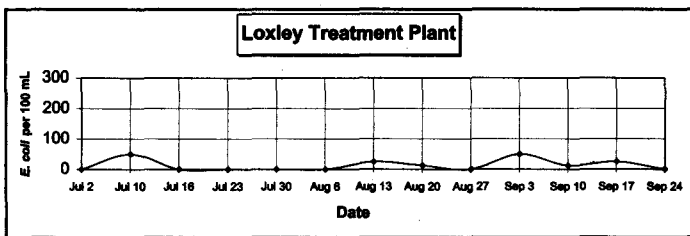
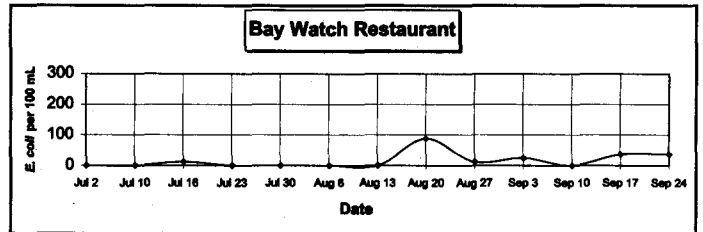
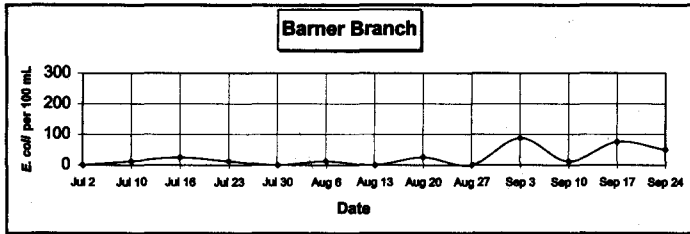
According to **The Nature Conservancy**, 97 percent of the Gulf Coast's seepage bogs and savannas have been destroyed as a result of the activity of man, mostly from farming and development. The remaining three percent of suitable habitat for carnivorous plants is fragmented along the Gulf Coast. Unlike the bog at the **Kurt G. Wintermeyer Nature Trail** at the Weeks Bay Reserve, these remaining fragmented areas are under considerable stress and will not survive unless they are protected and properly managed.

Pitcher plant bogs in Alabama are one of the single most unique and rare ecosystems in the entire world. A relatively high percentage of Alabama's biotic diversity can be found only in these areas. In addition to carnivorous plants, more than 100 other plant species may occur in a given seepage bog, including many rare and unusual plants such as lilies, orchids and several varieties of yellow-eyed grass.



Weeks Bay Watershed *E. coli* Counts

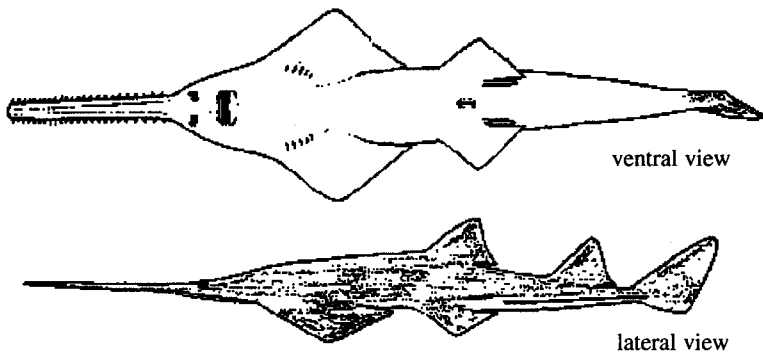
The Weeks Bay Reserve Foundation monitors *E. coli* counts weekly at 18 sites in the Weeks Bay Watershed. Some of the results of this additional water quality monitoring program are summarized in the following graphs. The counts were generally within limits except for the September 24th reading of the River Park Marina. Additional follow up tests are being conducted at that site and authorities notified.



EPA *E. coli* limit is 295 colonies per 100 mL for moderately used swimming areas.

Species at Risk

The smalltooth sawfish (*Pristis pectinata*) is a sharklike ray named for its long, toothed rostral process (saw) which is used to disturb the bottom animals and to slash through schools of fish. It attains a length of more than 18 feet and a weight of more than 700 pounds. The body color is brown above, lighter below.



Smalltooth Sawfish
Pristis pectinata

The species is circumglobal, and is distributed in the tropical and temperate Atlantic from Brazil northward, throughout the Caribbean and West Indies, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Atlantic coast of the United States as far north as New York. It is a lethargic inshore species in waters less than 30 feet deep over sand and mud bottoms, with estuarine and freshwater records common.

Gestation has been suggested to be as long as one year, with minimum nourishment provided by the female. Birth occurs in summer and fall. The young are about two feet long at birth, with about 15-20 in each litter. Little is known of their maturation, but it is presumed to be slow.

Historical fishing records indicate that the smalltooth sawfish was a major predator in the southeastern US waters prior to 1900. In the late 1700's, sawfish were so common that one fisherman reportedly took 300 sawfishes from a Florida river system in a single season. Early authors use the terms "seasonal", "common", "abundant", "plentiful", "frequently taken", and "not rare". In more recent years these imprecise terms have been replaced by references such as "not common", "only one authentic record of it in the last ten years", and "now apparently a footnote in outdoor history". A 1981 survey of the Indian River Lagoon System in Florida found no sawfishes and now scientists have concluded that the smalltooth sawfish no longer occurs along the East Coast of the US. There are now few recent records of this species in the Gulf of Mexico. The species has been in severe decline for the past 35 years in the waters of Nicaragua, Panama and Guatemala.

Factors that have contributed to their decline include commercial and sports fishing (both directed and as bycatch), reductions in populations of prey species, pollution of their nearshore pupping grounds and their biological vulnerability. Entanglement in commercial shrimp trawls, often causing extensive net damage is common in early literature. It was reported as a hazard when brought on board. Therefore, this species was treated as a nuisance component of bycatch by fisherman and many or most specimens were killed outright or released only after removal of their saw, (a favorite curio in seaside novelty shops) which would eventually result in mortality.

Given it's limited production of offspring and slow growth to maturity, recovery approaching historic levels will require many decades, even under ideal circumstances that ignore the effects of increasing fishing pressures, water quality degradation and pollution. An emergency plan is needed for the smalltooth sawfish in the Gulf of Mexico. Future taking of specimens should be prohibited. International conservation and management agreements are needed to save this species. The identification and protection of nursery areas are of extreme importance.

THE WEEKS BAY RESERVE FOUNDATION THANKS OUR NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS

July - September 1998

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Richard Coram
Lindsay Deas
Mr. & Mrs. John G. Fay
Grady Hartzog
Mike & Harriet Horton
Dick & Jane Jeffers
Dr. Tony Lowery

Charles & Elvy Lutze
Larry & Ann McDuff
Dr. John McMillan
Jim & Lynn Meador
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Mobile Gas Service Corporation
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Lisa Myers
Charles & Lucia Partin
Robert C. Patton

Kenneth Reeves
David S. Robberson, Jr.
Dr. Tom Roush
Annie L. Sheldon
Jack & Rachel Thomas
Skipper Tonsmeire
Joe Tonsmeire
Sylvia Walding
Peter & Martha Wiese

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Board of Directors

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Buddy Russell

David Ryan

Hattie Smith

Skipper Tonsmeire

Newsletter Committee

L.G. Adams

John L. Borom

Skipper Tonsmeire

Suggestions and comments from readers on future topics of interest are welcome. If you know of others who would be interested in receiving this newsletter, call the Foundation at 990-5004. *The Pelican Post* is produced quarterly by PRADCOM, Inc. of Fairhope, AL, Karen McGuire Moore, President. Funds for publication are provided by members of the Weeks Bay Reserve Foundation.

JOIN US!

Weeks Bay Reserve Foundation

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

As a member, you will be joining a group of people with similar interests and concerns for natural resources. You can become directly involved with the Reserve's research and educational programs by volunteering to help with field trips, seminars, cultural events, newsletters, and special projects.

You will be regularly informed of Reserve activities through newsletters, special mailings, and meetings. The opportunities for involvement are unlimited. Whatever your talents or interests, the Reserve can use your support. You, the environment, and your community will benefit as a result of your membership. If you are not a member and would like to join, please mail this form, along with your tax-deductible donation to:

Weeks Bay Reserve Foundation

P.O. Box 731

Fairhope, AL 36533

(334) 990-5004

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____

AFFILIATION _____

Additional Donation - Amount \$ _____

Memberships

___ Student \$5/YR

___ Individual \$25/YR

___ Family \$35/YR

___ Commercial \$100/YR

___ Corporate \$250/YR

WEEKS BAY RESERVE FOUNDATION

P. O. Box 731

Fairhope, AL 36533

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U.S. Postage
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Fairhope, AL 36532

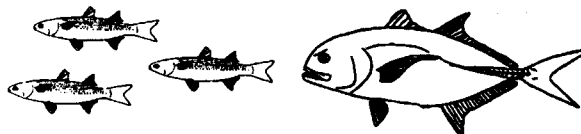
"Nothing is more beautiful than the loveliness of the woods before sunrise."

-George Washington Carver

Estuarine Predator

Yellowish green eating machine
A prowling wolf that moves with a flash
Biting into flesh with lightning speed
A killer of menhaden and mullet with a splash.

Attacking schools of forage fishes and
Bringing stark terror to their primitive brains
Frightened prey swim faster and jump
Striking from nowhere, no fish knows when.



This estuarine predator
Seeking a main dish
Is a crevalle jack
A most impressive fish.