

THE PELICAN POST

20th Anniversary
Issue



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A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF
THE WEEKS BAY RESERVE FOUNDATION

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The 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.

Memberships
Students \$10 /year
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Weeks Bay Reserve
Foundation
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From the Executive Director

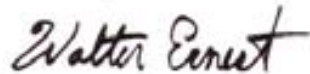
Spring 2006

It is hard to believe that the Reserve is celebrating 20 years in 2006. Environmental stewardship actually dates back to 1986 when a group of volunteers, The Nature Conservancy, the U.S. Congress, and the State of Alabama worked together. This group first established the Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge and then established the Reserve. They recognized a need for environmental education, research and land protection.

Many things have changed in the landscape since 1986. The population of Baldwin County has doubled and it is now the second fastest growing county in Alabama. The county has huge unzoned areas, and there is a continuous need for planning in the watershed. A Wal-Mart Super Center is being proposed, a 30-story hotel on Bon Secour Bay, and a seaplane base on Fish River are all recent developments.

The Foundation cannot accomplish its work without your financial and volunteer support. It has been able to provide technical assistance to the Reserve for all of its land transactions, and has been able to acquire over 1,000 acres since 1994. The Foundation is also in the process of launching a capital campaign to raise one million dollars for land acquisition in the Weeks Bay Watershed. Enjoy reading the 20th anniversary edition of *The Pelican Post*.

Working for Conservation,



Walter C. Ernest IV



Kid's Fishing Day

May 6th

8 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

Safe Harbor pond

A project of the Foundation and the
Alabama Dept. of Conservation and
Natural Resources. For information, call

Walter Ernest at 990-5004.



Photo by Sarah Dantz

7TH ANNUAL PHOTOGRAPHY

CONTEST

SUBMISSION DEADLINE JUNE 23RD

GO TO WWW.WEEKSBAY.ORG

FOR AN ENTRY FORM

SMELLING THE ROSES TOGETHER

By John Borom

Before we want to protect something, we must first get to know it. Inaction is often due to ignorance rather than negligence. The circle of life clearly tells us that young people today will soon have the Earth's future in their hands. What they do will depend on what they know. Let us give them the knowledge to do better tomorrow than we have done today.

We can suggest nature trips, give them magnifying glasses, binoculars, and nature guides. We can let them see frog eggs, dip tadpoles, grass shrimps, mosquitofish and pipefishes. We can take them fishing and crabbing and discover plants that eat insects and bees that pollinate flowers and make honey. We can smell magnolia blossoms, watch flashing fireflies in the late evening, listen to bird songs, and build a house for bats and butterflies. Visits to nature centers, wildlife refuges, botanical gardens, natural sights, and open-air activities are beautiful and educational.

The Reserve is a special place to learn important lessons about sharing our world with other creatures. The Interpretive Center, boardwalks, and nature trails are full of useful information. The Foundation promotes stewardship by acquiring habitat and promotes education when it sponsors fishing events, photography contests, the Alabama Coastal BirdFest, and the informative website.

These things can be complemented with nature books and discussions about the wonder and natural beauty around us. By broadening their interests we will help increase their awareness, concern for conservation, and we will certainly learn more ourselves.

"One of the deepest secrets of life is that all that is really worth doing is what we do for others."

~ Lewis Carroll

STEWARDSHIP

by John Borom

At present, 60% of the planet's inhabitants (more than three billion people) live less than 50 miles from coastlines and six of the world's largest cities are by the sea. In 30 years, six billion people, or 75% of the world's population, will live by the sea. Effluents from agriculture, households, and industry which are already building up along coastlines, will continue to increase. This build-up will result in the destruction of natural habitats, extinction of species, poisoning of fish stocks, lifeless seashores, and increased illness among sea-goers.

Today, pollution severely affects the world's oceans and estuaries. Three-quarters of the debris that pollutes these areas comes from people on the land. Every year, 14 billion pounds of garbage are released into the oceans worldwide. This is in addition to the debris caused by hurricanes that ends up in bays and lagoons.

The flexible plastic loops that hold together six-packs of cans are often dropped on beaches or in the water. They seem harmless, but they become deadly once they float out into estuaries and oceans where sea birds, turtles, fishes, and dolphins may trap their beaks, heads, or snouts in them—often with fatal results.

A study in Texas found that 70% of all the trash found in that state's beaches was made of plastic. Plastic never biodegrades; instead it photo-degrades, a process in which it breaks into even smaller pieces, which then may be consumed by wildlife. Make sure your own rubbish does not reach the sea. Help reduce litter on your street or it will end up in storm drains, which eventually empty into estuaries and the sea. If you fish for sport, never leave your nylon fishing line behind, even if it is broken. It will remain intact for 600 years, and will pose a threat to both sea life and boat propellers.

We cannot halt the migration of the human population to the coastlines, but we can be better stewards of our unique planet. It is important that more consideration be given to the other creatures that share our world with us. It is also important that we understand that the kind of world we leave to future generations is up to us. Our actions and choices make a huge difference.

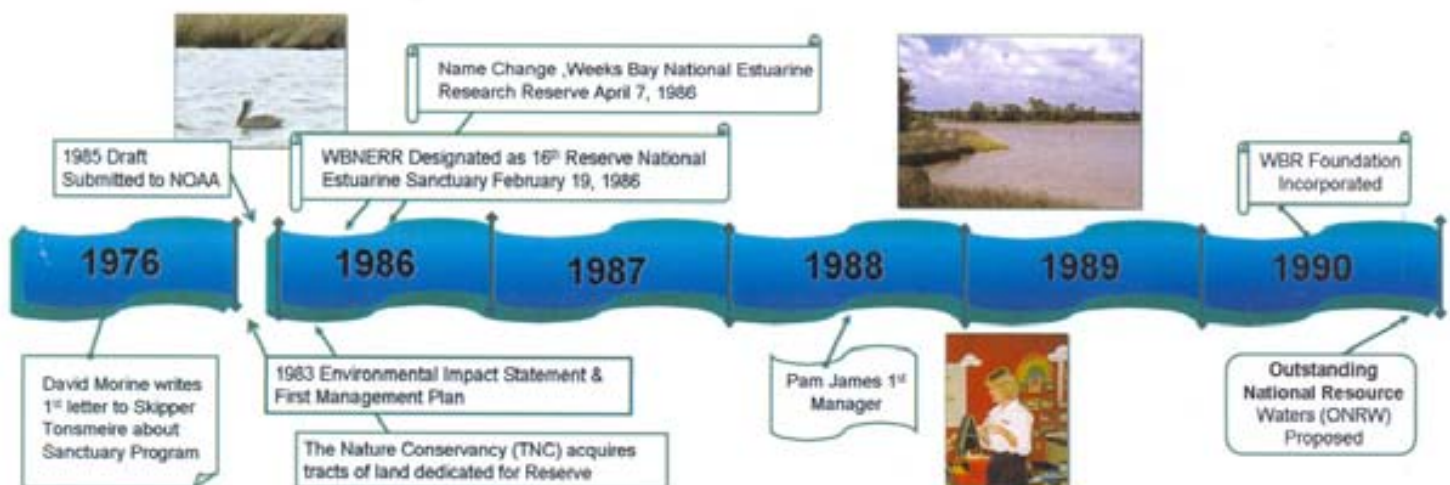
20 YEARS & COUNTING

*Where were you twenty years ago.....
when the Reserve was started?*

In particular where were you on FEBRUARY 19, 1986? This was the formal designation date of Weeks Bay Reserve, the 16th reserve in the national system. The designation ceremony for the Weeks Bay National Estuarine Sanctuary was held at Beckwith Lodge February 25, 1986; the Reserve name was later changed to the Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve that we know today. At that time, as a requirement for designation, Weeks Bay represented a relatively pristine estuary with a diversity of flora and fauna found in expansive wetland habitats.

The Reserve was established as part of the National Estuarine Research Reserve System. This system of estuarine reserves around our nation's coastal areas originated in 1972 legislation as Section 315 of the Coastal Zone Management Act. Since that time reserves, like the one at Weeks Bay, continue to function as living laboratories to learn more about Estuaries...Where Rivers Meet the Sea. So, how is the Bay doing today? Weeks Bay continues to function as an extremely productive estuary. Monitoring tracks short term variation and long term change. As the System-wide Monitoring Program moves into its eleventh year, researchers can begin to look for trends in the data. This will assist our continued management of the resource as challenges in the Weeks Bay watershed are greater than ever.

This issue of *The Pelican Post* will include an historical perspective of Weeks Bay the resource, and program developments of the Reserve. Take note of the Reserve Timeline running through this issue marking some of the milestones in the Reserve's history. Weeks Bay Reserve has grown and developed over the years, adding facilities, staff, and programs. Its success is largely due to strong community support and many champions of conservation. In addition, agencies, environmental organizations, and public officials have shown a dedication of support for Weeks Bay Reserve. Thank you to all those having a part in the success of the Reserve over the last 20 Years!



Estuarieswhere the rivers meet the sea

Estuaries are known to be extremely productive and important as coastal resources. The following is a reprinted article about estuaries from the first issue of *The Pelican Post*, Summer 1986.

WHAT ARE ESTUARIES?

Estuaries occur when rivers or streams meet the sea and the freshwater and saltwater mix. Alabama's estuaries were formed when river valleys which were carved by coastal rivers, flooded as the sea level rose. These resulting shallow water areas are semi-enclosed and have free connections with the open sea.

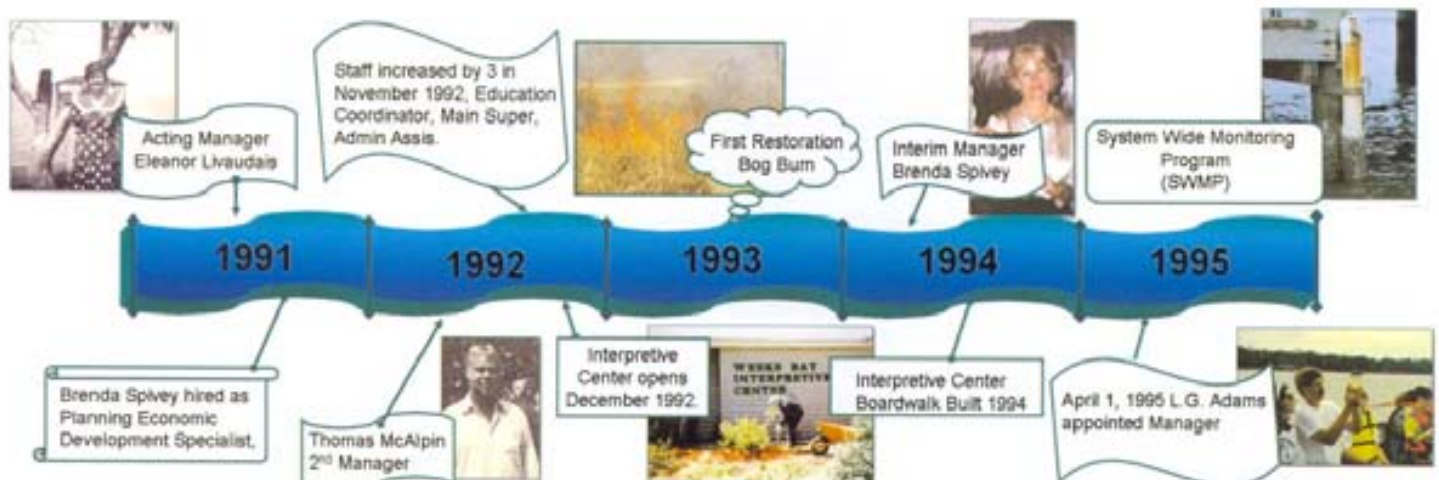
Estuaries tend to be more productive than either the sea or freshwater. Ideal conditions for plant growth exist because of the nutrients carried in by river flow and the fact that sunlight can penetrate the water. Many types of plants can be found in estuaries including trees, cord grasses, sedges and rushes, and aquatic plants in submerged grass beds. Other microscopic forms include mud algae found along the banks of tidal creeks and floating algae known as plankton. These plants die, decay, and break down into tiny particles of material called detritus which is used as food by many animals living in the estuaries.

Estuaries are used as nursery grounds and spawning areas by many fish and animal species. The estuaries also provide protection and abundant food for many juvenile fish. Ninety percent (by weight) of the fish and shellfish including shrimp, crabs, and oysters caught by commercial fishermen use estuaries such as Weeks Bay for spawning, nursery, or feeding grounds.

Almost a third of U.S. marine sport fishing (19.5 million fishing trips in 1979) was in waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Some of the major catch favorites included the spotted sea trout, red drum, and flounder which are all estuarine dependent during some phase of their life.

Estuaries also play an important role in human activities including residential and commercial development. As more people are attracted to the water's edge, swamps, marshes, and mud flats often give way to condominiums, marinas, beach houses, and warehouses. The Gulf coast's growing population has increased the demand for land and wetlands in or adjacent to estuaries.

The marsh areas bordering the estuary absorb and filter out many pollutants entering the water. They absorb both outgoing wastes that would pollute the bays and capture incoming pollutants as well. However, salt marshes can process and filter only limited amounts of water. Pollution can overload a wetland's filtering capability and reduce water quality, killing plants, contaminating fish and shellfish, and limiting wildlife abundance. Careful planning is required if estuaries are to meet the many demands placed upon them.



A Historical Perspective

Education Programs at Weeks Bay Reserve



Education has been ongoing since the designation of the Reserve in 1986. Teachers, botanists, environmentalists, volunteers, and conservation champions all have been promoting and highlighting the Reserve and the ecological and cultural assets that are held within the boundaries. Once designation occurred, formal and informal field activities have visited the site providing a learning experience for all those fortunate enough to visit.

In 1988, the original Nature Trail was dedicated at the old live oak tree that functioned as the trailhead and outdoor classroom for many years. In 1992, with the opening of the Interpretive Center, an Education Coordinator was provided by the Baldwin County Board of Education. This was unique to the National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS) as no other reserve had an educator provided by a local school board. This position has continued through the years scheduling field activities for tens of thousands of school children since the Interpretive Center opened its doors.

As part of the NERRS educational programs, Weeks Bay Reserve has incorporated many national projects into the educational endeavors here in Alabama. Some of these include:

Estuary Net – Classroom and Field Based Coastal Education for Grades 6-12

Coastal Decision-maker Workshops – Adult education on Coastal Issues

Coastal Training Program – Training and Education for Coastal Managers

Over the last ten years a curriculum for school groups has been developed such that when different grade levels visit the Reserve they participate in activities specific to that grade. The curriculum is correlated with the Alabama Science Course of Study for each grade level K-8 with the 9-12th grade curriculum having a field based water quality theme. This has been most beneficial for children coming to the Reserve from year to year as they are involved in new activities that build on their experiences from previous visits. In addition to educational experiences for school children, teacher workshops are held to benefit teachers in their knowledge of the natural sciences.



Weeks Bay Watershed Project

Throughout a good portion of the history of the Reserve, the Weeks Bay Watershed Project has been a faithful partner. Initially named the Fish River Watershed Project in 1993, the Weeks Bay Watershed project began its evolution under the guidance of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Gulf of Mexico Program, Alabama Department of Environmental Management, the Reserve and numerous federal and state agencies. The project at Weeks Bay was one of the first in Alabama and even after 13 years, it remains a model emulated statewide. The principle mission is to provide an integrated, holistic approach to the management of the watershed.

Watershed Project Coordinators have worked with available partners and volunteers to address environmental problems in the watershed. Implementation activities can be loosely consolidated into three main categories: Water Quality Monitoring, Stewardship Projects and Education and Outreach. The Watershed Project is supported by a Citizens Advisory Committee whose members live, work or have significant interest in the watershed, the Baldwin County Soil and Water Conservation District and the Reserve.

In 2004, the Watershed Project was permanently incorporated into the programs at the Reserve. It extends the mission of the Reserve throughout the watershed. Project coordinators: Tina Lynn, Eve Brantley and Mike Shelton have learned more about the functions and value of estuaries and the best, science-based means to protect and restore a valuable coastal resource. After many success stories, the Watershed Project has evolved into a valuable program of the Reserve.



Tina Lynn - first Watershed Coordinator 1994-1998



Eve Brantley (center), Watershed Coordinator 1998-2000

Mike Shelton (left), Watershed Coordinator, recognized the owners of Mountz Tools in Foley for protecting the upper reaches of Magnolia River with Watershed Project Citizens Advisory Committee members, Carey Bentley and May Ann Underwood (first and second from right).



Research in Weeks Bay



Coastal and estuarine researchers recognized early on that Weeks Bay was an excellent site for certain types of research. The entire watershed of Weeks Bay – from the first order blackwater streams at its headwaters to the embedded estuary at its terminus – is within Baldwin County. The usefulness of this small system as a model for much larger systems was not lost on the researchers, educators and conservationists that came together to promote and create the Reserve as it now exists. To begin the process of designation, an environmental impact survey was commissioned and it was published in 1985.



In 1990, The Research Coordinators (RCs) in the system at that time began meeting yearly and discussing issues of importance at the national level. These meetings were the beginning of the System-Wide Monitoring Program (SWMP). The stated goal of SWMP is to “track short-term variability and long-term change” in estuarine systems. SWMP started with the deployment of electronic hydrographic dataloggers at 2 permanent sites. These dataloggers monitor water temperature, conductivity and salinity, depth, pH, dissolved oxygen and turbidity – logging a reading every half hour. Dataloggers were first deployed at Weeks Bay in the fall of 1995 (originally by Dauphin Island Sea Lab staff) and these sites are still being monitored. A weather station monitoring air temperature, relative humidity, barometric pressure, wind speed and direction, photosynthetically active radiation and rainfall was added in 2001. Two more hydrographic sites were added in 2002. In 2003, monthly measurements of ammonium, nitrite, nitrate, phosphate and chlorophyll concentration began at each of the datalogger sites. At one site we began taking monthly tidal cycle samples of these same parameters. All of these data are carefully checked for accuracy and maintained in a database housed at the Belle Baruch Laboratory in Georgetown, South Carolina. These data (from all 26 NERRS in the Nation) are available for querying or downloading on the internet at: <http://cdmo.baruch.sc.edu>. Weather data from Weeks Bay Reserve has been available since 2002 real-time on the web at: <http://cast-net.disl.org/monitoringdata/nep/index.htm>. These real-time data are available through the support of the Marine Estuarine Environmental Research Center at Faulkner State Community College, the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program and Dauphin Island Sea Lab staff.

Another research program initiated by the RCs is the Graduate Research Fellowship Program (GRF). This is a competitive fellowship providing a stipend for graduate students who do their research at a NERRS site. Each Reserve has two fellowships at a time that last for 1, 2 or 3 years. Since the beginning of the GRF program at the Reserve, there have been eight projects finished and two are ongoing. A new fellowship will be awarded June 1st of this year. For more information on the GRF program, see the NERR website at: <http://ners.noaa.gov>.

The Research Coordinator position was established at the Reserve in the fall of 1999. The Research Coordinator oversees SWMP and the GRF program, directs original research projects and coordinates/cooperates with visiting researchers on their projects within the Reserve. The SWMP technician position was added in 2002. A Graphic Information Systems (GIS) technician was also added through the Protected Area GIS initiative at NOAA. This specialist is involved with mapping, remote sensing and data management. Earlier, the Watershed Coordinator position was established and more recently, a Stewardship Coordinator position was created. A more detailed history of these departments is included elsewhere in this issue. The Watershed Coordinator is involved in non-point source pollution investigation and mediation and the Stewardship Coordinator is involved in conservation biology and restoration ecology.

Research within the watershed has increased exponentially since the establishment of the Reserve. As we collect more baseline data, and more research is based here, the overall knowledge base becomes greater which attracts even more research! This symbiotic enhancement is simply illustrated by the list of 20 research institutions (list found elsewhere in this issue) that have had researchers working at the Weeks Bay Reserve in the last 5 years. Most importantly, research from Weeks Bay directly affects management decisions of this valuable natural resource.



Volunteer Spotlight

Volunteers have been an integral part of Weeks Bay Reserve from the beginning. Our twentieth anniversary is an appropriate occasion for us to recognize the Weeks Bay Reserve Historical and Archeological Committee, the first official volunteer committee formed in the spring of 1993. Under the guidance of George Ewert, the mandate of the committee was to "produce an interpretive exhibit highlighting the environmental, economic, and social themes that form the history of Weeks Bay from 1715 to the present." Through the efforts of this dedicated group of volunteers, Weeks Bay Reserve is fortunate to have many exceptional historical exhibits. The collections includes a collection of arrowheads and Indian pottery found around the Weeks Bay area, from Rick Yager, local Indian artifacts from Flo Simmons and Doris Allegri, a collection of historical information, photographs and old maps depicting the history of the Weeks Bay area from Doris Rich, artifacts relating to the turpentine industry from Charles Ebert, Jr., civil war artifacts from Frances Cleverdon, indian pottery, arrowheads, a bone handle knife, large hurricane ball, a civil war cannon, early fishing related items, and a pine needle basket made by Harriet Cowen in the early 1900's from Lee Brown Adams, an oral history collection that includes a memoir of "Life in Baldwin County" by Christine Heiming, and a collection of Native American artifacts on loan from Rev. Erle D. Curtis and Dr. Earnest M. Curtis.



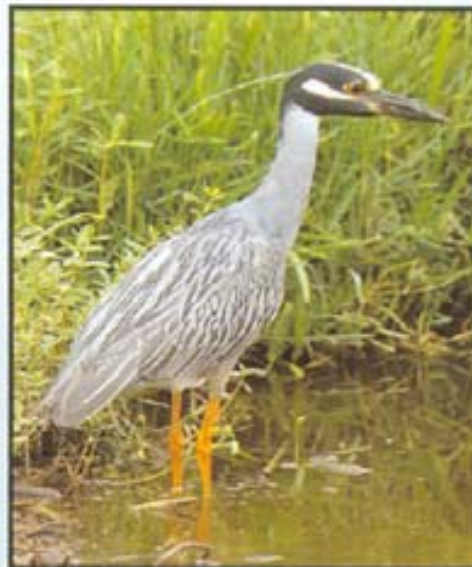
This pioneer group of volunteers assumed an active role in organizing an "Indian Heritage Day," held at Weeks Bay Reserve in 1993. More than 400 people attended this event, many of whom brought artifacts to be identified and cataloged by Dr. Judy Bense, an archaeologist from the University of West Florida in Pensacola. Through their efforts, much valuable local history was discovered and documented.

After accomplishing their mission, the Weeks Bay Historical and Archeological Committee disbanded in June, 1994. Weeks Bay Reserve would like to acknowledge and thank the members of this remarkable group of dedicated volunteers for their immense contribution to our fundamental goals of education, research, and conservation.



White-topped Pitcher Plant
(*Sarracenia leucophylla*)

This species is endemic to our region with a center of distribution in southern Alabama and westernmost Florida. The beautiful pitchers are actually modified leaves designed to entrap and absorb insects and small prey. Photo by Jamie Rasinen



Yellow-Crowned
Night Heron
(*Nyctanassa violacea*)

Active day and night, this species forages for aquatic invertebrates. Photo by Marlene Cashien



Brown Pelican Chicks
(*Pelecanus occidentalis*)

Brown Pelicans require predator-free sites, often on islands and close to foraging areas, to nest successfully. Photo by Jared Peyton

*Kurt G. Wintermeyer Boardwalk:
Since 1993, An Education and Conservation
Success Story*

From the very beginning, when the overstory was cleared from the pitcher plant bog in early 1993, an important objective of the Reserve has been the preservation of this rare natural area for the education and enrichment of future generations. Many of the spectacular plants which are found in the bog can grow only in this very specialized habitat, and some are quite rare. Today, after more than a dozen years of careful development and management, the pitcher plant bog has become one of the best-known and most popular outdoor recreational and educational sites in Baldwin County.



The beautiful lavender-colored pale grasspink orchid (*Calopogon pallidus*) has been seen only a couple of times in our bog



As part of our twentieth anniversary celebration at the Reserve, we can look back with satisfaction, to see how far we have come in our efforts to preserve, and at the same time, make the bog accessible to the public. These photographs should also remind us that, as a delicate and complex natural community, the bog will continue to demand our best efforts and all of our expertise to meet the challenges of the future.

Small, delicate yellow fringed orchids (*Platanthera integra*) are found only in healthy pitcher plant bogs, like the one at Weeks Bay Reserve. Only about a dozen populations of these rare orchids are known in Alabama



Though there are hundreds of White-topped pitcher plants (*Sarracenia leucophylla*) in our bog, over collection, fire suppression, and habitat loss have made these beautiful plants increasingly rare. They are considered endangered in Alabama.



Boardwalk visitors view White-topped pitcher plants in the bog at Weeks Bay Reserve



The uncommon pine lily (*Lilium catesbaei*) blooms in the bog in August and September. Some years these pretty red flowers bloom by the dozen in the bog, and other years, only a few can be seen. We still have a great deal to learn about pitcher plant bogs!

DID YOU KNOW?

by John Borom

The rainbow snake (*Farancia erythrogramma*) is one of North America's most beautiful serpents. It is shiny black, heavy-bodied with three thin red stripes running the length of the back. The belly is mostly red with two or more rows of large black dots. The head is round and indistinct, and the tail has a sharp spine that may help when holding slimy prey. The record length is 66 inches. Because of its secretive behavior and largely subterranean lifestyle, it is generally difficult to find and is considered uncommon to rare.

Adults are found in association with clear, unpolluted moving water in streams, river systems, swamps, and other aquatic habitats inhabited by their primary prey, American eels. Young rainbow snakes spend their first year or two in small isolated wetlands that have an abundant supply of tadpoles and salamanders.

Rainbow snakes usually emerge from their daytime retreats only well after sundown, then seek seclusion again before daylight. On warm, rainy days they may be active earlier and later in the day than usual. Flooding rains can bring them to the surface at any time of day probably in response to increased foraging opportunities.

Habitat preservation is critical to the survival of this species. Human modifications such as highways can create barriers and increase mortality of adult females traveling from lowland swamps to upland habitats to lay eggs. Rainbow snakes probably fall victim to aquatic and terrestrial predators. They are very docile when captured by humans and do not bite.

The photo shows Reserve staff member Dianna Quinn holding a rainbow snake that was collected in Fish River. It was brought to the lab and later released.



NATURE'S CALENDAR

by John Borom

When you think of a tyrant, an image of a ruthless despot comes to mind, except those familiar with the behavior of the tyrant flycatchers, of which the Eastern Kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*) is the most widespread representative in North



Eastern Kingbird
(*Tyrannus tyrannus*)
Photo by Marlene Cashen

America. Its Latin name means "king of the tyrants", and when defending its nest, it is willing to attack much larger birds. An Eastern Kingbird in hot pursuit of a crow is a common sight on the Gulf Coast. It will sometimes land on the back of crows, hawks, and vultures, pecking and pulling their feathers. Not only does it fiercely attack potential predators, but it is equally violent in attacking such harmless birds as doves and herons.

The Eastern Kingbird is about eight inches long with a black head, slate gray back, white belly, and a distinctive white terminal tail band. A small red central crown patch is usually concealed and seen only when the bird is displaying.

Favorite habitat includes open areas with scattered trees and shrubs. The vegetation provides nest sites and along with fence posts and wires furnish perches from which to watch over fields of prey. Like so many insect-eating birds, they may eat berries in the autumn, usually hovering in front of the twig to pluck the fruit.

The species breeds on the Alabama coast and is common spring, summer and fall. Diurnal migration begins from Alabama early in September and loose flock of birds move southward to their winter quarters in South America, mainly eastern Ecuador and Peru and western Brazil. Their return flight to the northern Gulf Coast peaks in mid April.

To learn more about neotropical migrants, go to the Foundation's website www.weeksbay.org and click on photo album.

Top Twenty

20 Research Institutions...

...that have had research projects in Weeks Bay Reserve over the past 5 years:

1. Dauphin Island Sea Lab
2. University of South Alabama
3. Troy University
4. Auburn University
5. University of Alabama
6. Mississippi State University
7. Eastern Illinois University
8. Southern Illinois University
9. Gulf Coast Research Laboratory
10. University of New Orleans
11. University of Southern Mississippi
12. Louisiana State University
13. Texas A&M University
14. University of West Florida
15. The Ohio State University
16. Case Western Reserve University
17. Geological Survey of Alabama
18. United States Geological Survey
19. AL Dept of Environmental Management
20. and, of course, AL Dept. of Conservation and Natural Resources, Lands Division

20 Research Institutions...

that have had research projects in Weeks Bay Reserve over the past 5 years;

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| 1. Dauphin Island Sea Lab | 11. University of Southern Mississippi |
| 2. University of South Alabama | 12. Louisiana State University |
| 3. Troy University | 13. Texas A&M University |
| 4. Auburn University | 14. University of West Florida |
| 5. University of Alabama | 15. The Ohio State University |
| 6. Mississippi State University | 16. Case Western Reserve University |
| 7. Eastern Illinois University | 17. Geological Survey of Alabama |
| 8. Southern Illinois University | 18. United States Geological Survey |
| 9. Gulf Coast Research Laboratory | 19. AL Dept. of Environmental Management |
| 10. University of New Orleans | 20. and, of course, AL Dept. of Conservation and Natural Resources, Lands Division |

20 Important Things...

.....that Estuaries and associated habitats provide:

1. Environments that are among the most productive on earth
2. Habitats that create more organic matter than any other
3. Abundance and diversity of wildlife such as shore birds, fish, crabs, marine mammals, and shellfish
4. Layover stops for migratory birds
5. Protection against erosional forces
6. Nursery for fish and shellfish
7. Ability to filter water contaminants
8. Protection against flood/storm surge
9. More than 28 million jobs in nation
10. Cultural enrichment for community
11. \$8 to \$12 billion annually through tourism and recreation nationwide
12. Research opportunities for scientists
13. Educational opportunities for all ages
14. Aesthetically pleasing environment
15. More than 75% of America's commercial fish catch, and 80-90% of the recreational fish catch
16. Habitat for unique microscopic organisms and a rich source of plant diversity
17. Transportation opportunity through boating
18. A great abundance and variety of seafood
19. Means of assessing overall ecosystem health
20. A record of storm events through research

Alabama Coastal BirdFest makes donation to Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries

By D. Fran Marley

Once again, the Alabama Coastal BirdFest is making good on its goal to help preserve and protect bird habitats on the Alabama Gulf Coast. John Borom, president of the Mobile Bay Audubon Society and one of the organizers of BirdFest, recently presented a \$10,000 check to John Porter, executive director of Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries, Inc.

"Over the last two years, BirdFest has contributed \$30,000 in both Mobile and Baldwin counties to help acquire bird habitat," said Borom. "We're pleased to give this money to Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries this year, because Dauphin Island is critical for neo-tropical birds that migrate from North America to habitats in Central and South America. We are able to make this donation thanks to all of our wonderful BirdFest sponsors and to everyone who took part in BirdFest." Some of those sponsors include: the Alabama Dept. of Conservation and Natural Resources, State Lands Division; Alabama Power Company; Baldwin County Commission; The Forum; ConocoPhillips; Weeks Bay Reserve Foundation, Mobile Bay National Estuary Program; City of Fairhope; Faulkner State Community College; The Nature Conservancy, Dauphin Island Sea Lab and others.

The 2005 Alabama Coastal BirdFest had over 300 registered tour participants from 13 different states, including visitors from as far away as California, Massachusetts, and Ohio.

"We love introducing people to the beauty of the Alabama Gulf Coast and to the wonders of birding," said Borom. "It's wonderful to know that our efforts can make a difference and can help preserve vital bird habitat in Mobile and Baldwin counties."

Dauphin Island, recognized as the "Birdiest Small City in the US," benefits greatly from birding, according to Porter.

"Birding is very good for our local economy. A study that we commissioned in 1997 showed an economic impact for Dauphin Island of \$2 million over a six-month period. Since then, we're seeing even more birding visitors, so that figure would be even higher now. We thank the Alabama Coastal BirdFest for their help in bringing birders to our area and for their financial support in helping to preserve bird habitats."

The Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries, Inc., a community land trust, is a non-profit corporation dedicated to preserving the island's stopover habitat for all North American migratory birds by working with government and other agencies to ensure a balance between human land uses and conservation, and by educating

John Borom, hands a \$10,000 check to Dr. John Porter, executive director of Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries, Inc.



landowners about practices that strengthen the island's unique ecosystem. Plans for the 2006 Alabama Coastal BirdFest, Oct. 19-22, are underway. Visit www.alabamacoastalbirdfest.com for more information.



American Goldfinch
(*Carduelis tristis*)

Photo by Dave Coggins

BIRDERS NEEDED

Survey points have been designated, maps have been made, protocols determined, and equipment purchased; all we need now are a few dedicated volunteers willing to assist with the first annual Weeks Bay Marsh Bird Survey. The survey will integrate with national efforts to determine trends in marsh bird populations and habitat availability, as well as create local density and abundance indices. This is a great opportunity to experience the beauty and tranquility of sunrise or sunset from the waters of the Weeks Bay estuary. For more information please contact Stewardship Coordinator Eric Brunden, 928-9792 or eric.brunden@dcnr.alabama.gov.

"Let us remember as we chase our dreams into the stars that our first responsibility is to our Earth, to our children, to ourselves. Yes, let us dream, let us pursue those dreams, but let us also preserve the fragile world we inhabit."

~ George Bush

Did You Know?

by John Borom

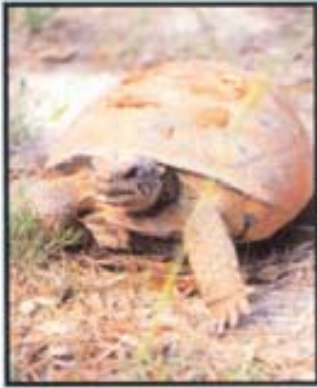


Photo by Iwanne Leigh

The gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) is a large burrowing land turtle in the Coastal Plain where it lives on well-drained, deep sandy soils. Adequate herbaceous foods and sunny nesting sites must be present. The species is greatly reduced from historic abun-

dance, and is locally common in only a few protected areas. It is considered a "keystone species" because its burrow serves as a refuge for at least 39 invertebrates and 42 vertebrate species, some of which are under federal or state protection.

Burrows can be six feet in depth, up to 30 feet or more in length, and the deepest part may be enlarged into a chamber. They are sufficiently wide to allow the tortoise to reverse face at any given point. Within the burrow is a microhabitat in which the gopher tortoise and other creatures are relatively unaffected by climate changes on the surface.

Despite its considerable lifespan of 40 to 150 years, the threatened gopher tortoise is in steep decline due to habitat destruction, predation, and a low rate of reproduction. Biologists estimate that for every 100 eggs laid, only one to three survives to adulthood. These are long odds for this gentle and hospitable creature.



Sandwich Terns
(*Sterna sandvicensis*)
Photo by Jared Peyton

Weeks Bay Reserve

20th Anniversary

Coastal Topics Presentation Series

- March 18 - Wesley Moore: *Crocodylians*
Fr. Dr. Regan: *Dolphin Update, A Historical review of Alabama's dolphins and the latest news, including the fate of dolphins stranded by hurricane Katrina*
- March 25 - Dr. James Connor: *A Geological History of Weeks Bay*
- April 15 - Dr. Hugh MacIntyre: *Harmful Algal Blooms*
Dr. Doug Shelton: *Molluscs*
- May 20 - Nichole Vickey: *Working to Save Alabama's Last Great Places: The Work of The Nature Conservancy's Alabama Coastal Program*
Jo Lewis: *The Forever Wild Program*

All presentations held at the Weeks Bay Auditorium at 10 AM, 11300 Highway 98 Fairhope, AL 36532, 928-9792



Forever Wild Land Trust

You can show your support for Forever Wild and help purchase land by buying a Forever Wild tag for your vehicle. This attractive tag is available at all county courthouses and annexes throughout the state. When you purchase your tag, you can personalize it with up to 6 letters/numbers at no additional cost. For more info concerning this tag contact joec@powernet.org; 256-287-1652, Joe Copeland

Eagle Scout Project Supports Restoration Goals



Chris Eubanks, with the assistance of family and scout troop 42, spent two Saturdays at the Reserve completing requirements for the Eagle Scout Leadership Service Project. Chris's project consisted of constructing two dams in a large drainage ditch within the boundaries of the Nature Trail Restoration Project. The drainage ditch was created when the nearby land was employed for agricultural purposes. The dams will speed up the filling of the ditches and help restore hydrological properties.

CALENDAR

MARCH

- 4 Presentation at Wehle Center, Blakeley State Park by **Mike Shelton**, "Impervious Surfaces: Being hard on Water Quality." 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.
- 7 Citizens Advisory Committee for the Weeks Bay Watershed Project, 6 p.m., Auditorium
- 11 Derelict Crab Trap Removal Day, 8 a.m. - 12 p.m., Fish River Marina
- 13-14 Baldwin County Water Festival, Daphne United Methodist Church, Main Street, Daphne. 9 - 2 p.m.
- 14 Guest Lecture Series. "The Purple Martin Riviera" presented by **Garland Sims**. Faulkner State Community College Fairhope Campus, Centennial Hall. 7:30 p.m. Bring a friend.
- 16 Weeks Bay Advisory Board Meeting, 2:00 p.m. - Auditorium
- 18 **Weeks Bay Reserve 20th Anniversary Coastal Topics Presentation Series** see page for 14 for details
- 22 Baldwin Co. Environmental Advisory Board Annual Meeting, 8:30 a.m. - 1 p.m., Wehle Nature Center, Blakeley State Park. Lunch Provided.
- 23 N-SPECT Nonpoint Source Pollution Modeling Tool Workshop, Faulkner State Community College, 8:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. "Tentative"
- 25 Presentation at Wehle Center, Blakeley State Park by **Maureen and Fred Nation**, "Tour of Natural Habitats and Historic Areas of Blakeley." 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

APRIL

- 1 Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring Training, 8:30 a.m. - 4 p.m., Volunteer Activity Center
- 4 Citizens Advisory Committee for the Weeks Bay Watershed Project, 6 p.m., Auditorium
- 8 Weeks Bay Reserve Foundation Meeting, 8:30 am
- Weeks Bay Day** celebration recognizing Reserve Twentieth Anniversary with Activities from 8-2 p.m., Presentations at 11, and Lunch at 12 Noon.
- 11 Guest Lecture Series. "The Weeks Bay Reserve Foundation" presented by **Walter Ernest**. Government Street Baptist Church in Mobile. 7:30 p.m. Bring a friend.
- 22 South Alabama Regional Conservation Expo, Wehle Nature Center, Blakeley State Park.
- 25 Confederate Memorial Day Holiday, The Interpretive Center will be closed. All trails and boardwalks will remain open for your walking and sightseeing pleasure.

MAY

- 2 Citizens Advisory Committee for the Weeks Bay Watershed Project, 6 p.m., Auditorium
- 2-4 Hydric Soils Workshop, 8 am to 4 pm in the Auditorium. For more information call **Mike Shelton** at 251-928-9792
- 6 Kid's Fishing Day. Safe Harbor pond, 8 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. A project of the Foundation and the Alabama Depart. of Conservation and Natural Resources. For information, call **Walter Ernest** at 990-5004.
- 9 Guest Lecture Series. "Oyster Research and Reef Restoration in Mobile Bay" presented by **Rick Wallace**, Director, Auburn University Marine Extension and Research Center. Faulkner State Community College Fairhope Campus, Centennial Hall. 7:30 p.m. Bring a friend.
- 13 Tenth Annual Weeks Bay Area River Cleanup, 8 a.m. - 12 p.m., Fish River Marina.

- 20 Statewide Alabama Water Watch Annual Meeting and Picnic, Wolf Bay Lodge, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
- 29 National Memorial Day Holiday - The Interpretive Center will be closed. All trails and boardwalks will remain open for your walking and sightseeing pleasure.

JUNE

- 2 Field Trip to Galliard 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. - 1:00 p.m. For reservation, call **John Borom** at 251-990-0423.

New and Renewing Members

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| L. G. & Margee Adams Family | Frank Mitchell |
| Dr. Ellis & Katherine Allen | Dr. Alan, Alison & Ross Moore |
| Jane Allgood | Gary, Kathy & Taylor Moore |
| Hodge & Allison Alves | Eric Nager |
| Kevin, Leslie, & Emily Anson | Greg Nonnenmacher |
| George & Leslie Bailey | Patrick & Nancy Noonan |
| Ruth Beasley | Henry & Ashley O'Connor Family |
| Alan Belcher, DVM | Pat & Julie Ogburn |
| Carey & Billie Bentley | George & Abigail Panayiotou |
| Dr. & Mrs. John Borom | Frank & Robin Parquette |
| Joanne Brandt | Ron & Laurie Perry |
| Dr. & Mrs. Galen Brey | Barbara & Jay Pryor |
| Adair Brown | Marion A. Quina, Jr. |
| Penny & Temple Brown | Stephen Quina |
| Bradley & Rebecca Byrne | Bobby & Dottie Radcliff |
| Kit Caffey | Bobby & Lucy Radcliff Family |
| John Carlton | Greer Radcliff |
| Benjamin & Linda Cohen | Hutch & Suzie Radcliff Family |
| Leslie Colglazier | Self & Cathy Radcliff Family |
| Richard Coram | William M. Rawson |
| Michael & Celia DeLaney | George Roberts |
| Mr. & Mrs. J. Bradley Domaghey | Mike & Cay Rogers |
| Carol Ann & John Dorgan | Ansley Rowell |
| Paul J. Dowsey | Robert & Kathleen Ryan |
| David & Joan Dykes | John & Ann Seknicka |
| George Dyson, Jr | Lee & David Smith |
| Jack Edwards | Lucy Spencer |
| Dr. & Mrs. Robert G. Euhanks | Wes Strauley |
| Phillip Fuselier | Tynes Stringfellow |
| Alida F. Given | Audrey Supple |
| Kenny Hanak | A. Lee Sweetman |
| Paul Harrison | Mr. & Mrs. Robert G. Tate |
| Warren Herlong, Jr. | Jay & Amy Thompson |
| Mary G. Herndon | Jim & Betty Thompson |
| Veronica Herndon & Robb Frelm | Cooper Thurber |
| Kathy Hicks | Dan Tonsmeire |
| Celeste Hinds | Joe & Fran Tonsmeire |
| Bill & Allison Hixson | David Tunstall |
| Charles & Jamie Houser | Genevieve Turner |
| Chuck & Michelle Huguley | Robert Urbank |
| Cliff & Gina Inge Family | Maud VanEysbergen |
| Clifton & Genie Inge | Rick & Susie Wallace |
| Dr. Bobby & Lois Irby | Nancy E. Ward |
| Mr. & Mrs. William R. Ireland, Sr. | Judy White-Spinner Family |
| Dr. Eric & Nancy Jenison | Dr. & Mrs. Warner M. Wiggins |
| Tom Joiner | Wade Wright |
| Bill & Becky Jones | Tom, Catie & Jessica Yeager |
| Chuck, Brooke, Charles & Hannah Kelly | The A.S. Mitchell Foundation, Inc. |
| Margaret Koster | The Thompson Holdings Foundation Fund |
| Michael & Elizabeth Langston | of The Community Foundation of South |
| Frank Laraway | Alabama |
| Michael & Elizabeth Langston | |
| Frank Laraway | |
| David Learner | |
| Dr. Charles J. Lilly | |
| Elvy Lutze | |
| Hunter & Christie Lyons Family | |
| Lucy Lyons | |
| Frank & Joan Martin | |
| Michael McKown | |
| Dr. John McMillan | |
| Larry V. Meese | |
| Walt & Hannah Merrell | |
| Abe Mitchell | |

Weeks Bay Reserve



In Recognition of
Weeks Bay Reserve's
20th Anniversary

Mark Your Calendar to Attend
the Celebration at

WEEKS BAY DAY

Saturday, April 8, 2006

activities 8am-2 pm,
presentations at 11am,
lunch at 12:00 Noon

Weeks Bay Reserve Foundation
Post Office Box 731
Fairhope, AL 36533
251-990-5004
www.weeksbay.org

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Indigo Bunting
(*Passerina cyanea*)

Photo by Dave Cogswell

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LAND TRUST ALLIANCE

"The Earth will not continue to offer its harvest, except with faithful stewardship. We cannot say we love the land and then take steps to destroy it for use by future generations." - Pope John Paul II