

THE Pelican Post

A quarterly publication - Weeks Bay Foundation



Spring 2009
Vol. 24, No. 1



"In all things of nature there is
something marvelous."

- Aristotle

Jack Edwards Celebration

The Foundation held an event in honor of **Jack Edwards** and his accomplishments for conservation on the Alabama Gulf Coast. The event featured a seafood buffet, and was held at the newly rebuilt Fairhope Yacht Club on Thursday, December 4, 2008. Entertainment for the evening was provided by a local band, The Wayfarers. Over 200 people attended including former Congressman **H.L. 'Sonny' Callahan** and current U.S. Representative **Jo Bonner** and many of Jack's family and friends.



Sonny Callahan, Jack Edwards and Jo Bonner



Jack Edwards served as Congressman for Alabama's First District from 1965-1985 and was instrumental in the designation of the Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge, the Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve and the Coastal Land Trust. He served as chairman of the Foundation from 1991-2008. During this time, his leadership resulted in the Foundation being instrumental in all of the land acquisition projects that expanded the boundary of the Reserve. "The Foundation is very grateful for Jack's longtime contributions to our natural resources," said Foundation President **Skipper Tonsmeire**. "Without his efforts, there would be no Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge, no Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve and no Coastal Land Trust."



The Foundation Board of Directors has established the Jack Edwards Conservation Fund to be used for wildlife habitat protection. Proceeds from the Alabama Coastal BirdFest are also used for bird and wildlife habitat protection. **John Borom** presented a \$10,000 check from the 2008 Alabama Coastal BirdFest proceeds to Jack Edwards at the event for the Jack Edwards Conservation Fund. You can help conservation efforts and save habitat for



birds and other wildlife by supporting the Foundation and BirdFest.



Sponsors of the event were the Coastal Land Trust, Inc., Tonsmeire Properties, the Fairhope Yacht Club, Hand Arendall LLC, Bon Secour Fisheries, BankTrust, David Sutley, Southern Capital Services, Inc. and Stone, Granade & Crosby, P.C.

From the Executive Director...



The Foundation's event honoring the excellent leadership and conservation accomplishments of **Jack Edwards** was very successful. Please check out the details on page two.

The Foundation, Reserve and Mobile Bay National Estuary Program have begun work on an upper Fish River water-quality monitoring project, and it could not have happened without the support of the **Scott Ireland Memorial Water Quality Fund**. Scott was a resident of Magnolia Springs and he and his family resided on Magnolia River.

Water quality has been of great importance to the Foundation for quite some time.

The Foundation was able to acquire two property donations in December, 2008. Both of these parcels have important features of conservation value. Please check out the details on page 11.

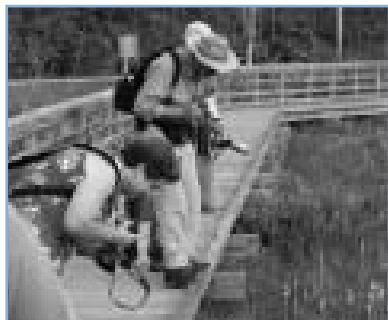
We have begun planning for the 11th annual Kid's Fishing Day that is scheduled for May 2. Also, the deadline for submission to the 10th annual Weeks Bay Photography Contest will be in June. Look for more information on these two events on the back page.

One of the things we often take for granted is that the Weeks Bay Foundation is one of many organizations that support national estuarine research reserves throughout the United States. Many friends' groups/non-governmental organizations are instrumental in providing support to the individual reserves. These organizations could not be successful without the support of members and volunteers. We thank you for supporting our conservation and environmental stewardship efforts. I hope you enjoy this issue of *The Pelican Post*.

Working for Conservation,

Walter

Photography Weekend



The Foundation and the Reserve will offer a digital photography workshop May 1-3. The workshop will be taught in collaboration by **Julie E. Brent**, photographer-instructor, guiding you in seeing with an eye for lighting and composition and **Fred Nation**, naturalist, guiding you in seeing the plants and ecology of the Weeks Bay Reserve. The fee for the workshop is \$300, and \$40 for an optional beginner's workshop on Friday afternoon.

To register, or for additional information, go to www.moonsunearth.com/WeeksBay.htm or call Julie Brent at (502) 727-4931. Space is limited to 15 participants, so register early.

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The Weeks Bay Foundation is a non-profit organization whose members work to protect the natural resources of coastal Alabama and to provide assistance and support for the Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve's goals and programs.

Cover Photo

Weeks Bay,
 photo by
 Angela Underwood,
 Reserve Education Assistant

Layout and Design by
 Kelly Anderson
KellyAndersonDesigns.com

Weeks Bay Arboretum

An arboretum is a living museum, a place where trees are planted and nurtured for education, aesthetics and for conservation. Arboreta are outdoor classrooms, offering visitors the unique opportunity to observe, on a single site, many species that are never found together in the wild. Tree sizes, forms, flowers, fruits and leaves can be examined in detail and compared. Weeks Bay is the only member of the Reserve System with an arboretum, and it is being developed as a volunteer project, at no cost to the Reserve.

The objective of the arboretum committee, headed by **Dr. Harry Larsen**, is to develop the arboretum into an important collection of native trees and shrubs, with special emphasis on trees that are native to Baldwin



Harry Larsen, Forrest Worrall and Fred Jordan plant a tree at the Weeks Bay Arboretum.

County, Alabama. According to Larsen, "So far we have 65 species, labeled with signs that provide common and scientific names, and plant families. Since about 125 trees are native to Baldwin County, we have a ways to go, but we already have some beautiful trees, and some rare species that folks are not likely to see elsewhere."

Recent projects include treating the area for fire ants, and installation of a water system, with a new well and pump, to make it possible to water the trees during drought. Also in progress is an area of reflection and repose, in memory of **Dr. Claudia M. Rogers**. Stone benches will be constructed, and native azaleas and blueberries will be planted in the area.

The Arboretum is located in the Safe Harbor area, across U.S. Highway 98 from the Interpretive Center. This 82-acre tract was acquired by the Foundation in 1997 and 81 acres were conveyed to the State of Alabama in 2004. The Foundation retained one acre with a house which is now the Foundation office. Group visits to the Arboretum can be made by prior arrangement with the Weeks Bay Reserve.

Holiday Open House

On Wednesday, December 10, volunteers and staff enjoyed

good food and fellowship at the Holiday Open House held at the Arthur C. "Skipper" Tonsmeire III Weeks Bay



Resource Center. Many volunteers and supporters of the Reserve attended this event at the new facility overlooking beautiful Weeks Bay. Thanks and appreciation were voiced to all the volunteers that give so much of their time, energy and expertise



throughout the year in support of Reserve programs and activities.

Advisory Committee

On Wednesday, December 10, the Weeks Bay Advisory Committee met in the new Arthur C. "Skipper" Tonsmeire III Weeks Bay Resource Center. This committee represents agencies, institutions and governor appointees that assist the Reserve with management and resource issues of

Weeks Bay and surrounding coastal areas. **Kevin Anson**, biologist with Marine Resources Division, ADCNR, accepted the chair position of this advisory body. The previous chair, **Mike Dardeau**, marine scientist with the Dauphin Island Sea Lab, passed the gavel, recognizing the two-year term that Kevin has ahead of him. Many thanks go out to Mike for his past leadership and to Kevin for accepting the new chair position.



Mike Dardeau (right) passes the gavel to Kevin Anson.

Reserve manager **L.G. Adams** and members of the staff personally thanked the volunteers for the time and expertise they donate to the Reserve.

The meeting was followed by a luncheon, with staff and volunteers visiting together over red beans and rice.

State Champion Trees

The Alabama Forestry Commission has recently designated the second State Champion Tree at Weeks Bay Reserve. The first is a Chickasaw Plum (*Prunus angustifolia*) located on the canal in the Safe Harbor area. The second is a Sweetbay Magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*) on the boardwalk behind the Interpretive Center. This huge tree is 10 feet in circumference, 88 feet tall, with an average crown spread of 36 feet.



Pat Waldrop, Baldwin County Forester, conducting the official measurement of Weeks Bay's State Champion Sweetbay Magnolia.

Big trees generate interest in trees, and they offer great opportunities for people of all ages to connect with the natural world and to learn about the environment. The new champion tree at Weeks Bay is in a great location, where thousands of people will pass by it each year on the boardwalk, and they will be able to read the sign which proudly proclaims that "This is the largest of this species known to exist in Alabama."

More information about the Alabama Champion Tree Program is available online at forestry.state.al.us/PDFs/Champion_Trees_2008.pdf.

Volunteers Meeting

On Tuesday, January 13, the Weeks Bay Volunteers enjoyed holding their annual meeting in the new Arthur C. "Skipper" Tonsmeire III Weeks Bay Resource Center. More than 40 volunteers gathered to elect their board of directors for the coming year, to reflect on the accomplishments of the year just passed and to review upcoming Reserve needs and projects.



Reports were given for two on-going volunteer projects. **Dr. Harry Larsen** spoke about the arboretum: what has been accomplished so far and what they have planned for this year. **Fred Nation** explained the purpose and function of the herbarium and its importance to researchers at the Reserve. Members of the Weeks Bay Reserve staff discussed some of their programs for the coming year and their needs for volunteer assistance.

Director of State Lands



Patti Powell has been named as Director of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) State Lands Division. Ms. Powell will oversee Division activities relating to all state-owned lands, including administering various leases and land management practices to generate revenue for the respective trusts.

The State Lands Division manages undeveloped state-owned lands, most of which are held in trust for specific purposes.

“We are very happy to have someone with Patti’s background and experience as our new Lands Director,” said **Barnett Lawley**, ADCNR Commissioner. “She has hit the road running and everyone in our Department is very glad that we made this appointment.”

Ms. Powell served as In-House Counsel and Vice President of Credit Quality for Guilford Capital Corporation in Montgomery, Alabama, from 2000 to 2006. Guilford was acquired by Column, a Credit Suisse Company, in 2006 where Ms. Powell served as Vice President - Legal prior to joining ADCNR in late 2008. She replaces **James H. Griggs**, who retired in December 2008.

“As a native Alabamian, I take a great sense of pride in our state, and look forward to helping promote the stewardship of Alabama’s natural resources,” said Ms. Powell. “I am also thankful for the unique opportunity to build upon Mr. Griggs’ impeccable reputation and dynamic leadership of the Division.”

Before moving to Montgomery in 2000 Ms. Powell, a native of Hoover, Alabama, was a partner with Burr & Forman LLP, a law firm based in Birmingham, Alabama, that serves national and international clients.

Ms. Powell is a graduate of the University of Alabama’s College of Communication and School of Law, and is a member of the Alabama State Bar Association.

The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources promotes wise stewardship, management and enjoyment of Alabama’s natural resources through five divisions: Marine Police, Marine Resources, State Lands, State Parks, and Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries. To learn more about ADCNR, visit www.outdooralabama.com.

Submitted by the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

Education Initiatives

In early December, the Baldwin County Grasses in Classes Program partnered with the American Modern Insurance Group to plant pine seedlings at Graham Creek Nature Preserve in Foley and at the Gulf State Park. The partnership began when the education coordinators at the Reserve were approached by **Natalie Green** with American Modern Insurance. Natalie works in the marketing department and came up with the idea to plant a tree for every customer who agreed to join their paperless billing program. Although American Modern Insurance is located in Ohio, Natalie is a native of Fairhope and persuaded the company to help replace trees along the Gulf Coast that were lost during recent storms.

American Modern Insurance Group purchased the pine seedlings and the Reserve staff selected locations to plant them. Fairhope High School teachers and students have been growing native grasses for longleaf pine habitat restoration and as a result were asked to plant the pine seedlings.

Megan O’Neill’s students planted approximately 800 Loblolly pines at the



Students participating in longleaf pine restoration at Gulf State Park.

Graham Creek site. **Will Underwood's** students planted approximately 450 longleaf seedlings at the Gulf State Park. American Modern Insurance Group was so impressed with the students' enthusiasm that they donated \$1,000 to the Weeks Bay Foundation to help continue the work of the Baldwin County Grasses in Classes Program.

Weeks Bay Reserve staff will be conducting a direct to the internet EstuaryLive broadcast on May 15 from 10am to 11am CST and again that same day from 1pm to 2pm. The theme of the broadcast will be threatened and endangered animals of the estuary. EstuaryLive is an interactive broadcast for classrooms. To participate, teachers should contact **Margaret Sedleck** at (251) 928-9792.



Students planting pines at Graham Creek Nature Preserve.

Outward Bound

Outward Bound team members have once again assisted Weeks Bay personnel with an important project. On previous visits, the Outward Bound team removed exotic invasive species from the Swift Tract which borders Mobile Bay. On their latest visit, team members enthusiastically built a boardwalk to be used by visiting researchers. The raised boardwalk will allow researchers to more easily reach test plots in wetland areas and minimize soil compaction that would normally result from repeated foot traffic.



The Reserve staff looks forward to working with Outward Bound in the future. The skill set and ambition they bring makes large projects seem small.

New Reserve Website

Weeks Bay Reserve has been developing a new website that can be found at www.weeksbayreserve.com. Users of this site will be able to access detailed information on the programs and features of the Reserve and the characteristics of the Weeks Bay estuary and other coastal habitats.



In addition, the site will contain valuable links to current tide and weather data. To access this information, click on the **Research** link on the homepage. This page summarizes the reserve system's research goals and includes links to the **System Wide Monitoring Program (SWMP)**. Selecting this link will take users to the SWMP page which includes links to **Data for Weeks Bay (archival data)**, **Current Weeks Bay Water Data**, **Current Weeks Bay Weather Data**, and **Tide Data for Weeks Bay**, which links to the Weeks Bay National Water Level Observation Network station. You can also view data from all the Reserves by selecting the **Centralized Data Management Office** link.

Of course, internet users can still access current water and weather data via the Weeks Bay Foundation website at www.weeksbay.org.

Please visit the Reserve's new and developing web site and look for other features in future issues of *The Pelican Post*.

www.WeeksbayReserve.com

2009 Endangered Places

The Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC) is using the power of the law to defend hundreds of imperiled areas, to ensure clean air and water, and to help chart a new energy future for our region. The SELC has targeted ten special places that are facing immediate, potentially irreversible threats *today*. Ranging from the Southern Appalachians to the South Atlantic, this year's Top Ten Most Endangered list illustrates the ecological, scenic, and cultural riches at stake—and the important actions needed in 2009 to protect our own environmental heritage and the legacy we will leave for future generations. Weeks Bay was selected as one of these threatened places.

Weeks Bay, tucked along the eastern shore of Mobile Bay, is an oasis of forested wetlands, marshes, and swamps—an area so extraordinary it is one of only three in Alabama to receive the designation of Outstanding National Resource Water. The area is home to several endangered animals and plants, and the bay's clean, shallow waters are a vital nursery for shrimp, blue crab, and other shellfish that support Alabama's \$450 million commercial fishing industry. But like much of the South's coastline, the Mobile Bay area is growing at an unprecedented rate. Unchecked development has already eaten up thousands of acres of wetlands. Because Weeks Bay is located in a county without zoning, there is concern that overdevelopment will generate polluted runoff and other contaminants that will wash into the bay, degrading water quality and conditions for wildlife. One example is a company's recent proposal to build a sewage treatment plant right in the Weeks Bay watershed. Without stronger regulations to rein in this kind of inappropriate development, Alabama risks losing one of its most productive

natural resources and treasured landscapes.

The waters of Weeks Bay form a broad, shallow estuary that teems with life. Connected by a small inlet to Mobile Bay and fed by the Fish and Magnolia rivers, Weeks Bay serves as a nursery for species vital to Alabama's \$450 million commercial fishing industry, including shrimp, blue crab, anchovy, sea trout, red drum, flounder, mullet, and menhaden. Nineteen federally protected species make their home in and around Weeks Bay, among them the Bald Eagle, the Florida black bear, the marsh rabbit, and the Wood Stork.

Weeks Bay is also an area of exceptional beauty. Along its shores are wetland forests of cypress, bayberry, and tupelo, as well as upland woods of pine and oak. It's no wonder that Weeks Bay has been designated an Outstanding National Resource Water under the Clean Water Act and was selected as the site of a National Estuarine Research Reserve.

Located in Baldwin County, which lacks strong zoning laws, Weeks Bay and its tributaries are vulnerable to new development springing up along the Gulf Coast and the infrastructure that supports it. Emerging threats include increased polluted runoff from pavement and construction sites and a proposal to build a new wastewater treatment plant in the Weeks Bay watershed.

Working with the Mobile Baykeeper and other partners, SELC will protect Weeks Bay by ensuring thorough enforcement of state and federal environmental laws and by advocating stronger local controls to prevent degradation of the bay and its remarkable biological diversity. For more on SELC's Top Ten Endangered Places, visit www.SouthernEnvironment.org.

Submitted by the Southern Environmental Law Center, Charlottesville, Virginia.

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Join us by returning the enclosed
membership envelope or
look for the link on our home page at
www.weeksbay.org.

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

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

Spring 2009 Calendar

MARCH

- 3 **Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting for the Weeks Bay Watershed Project.** Weeks Bay Auditorium, 6:00 p.m.
- 10 **Guest Lecture Series "Trip to the Galapagos Islands"** presented by **Chester McConnell**, retired wildlife biologist and Mobile Bay Audubon Society Board Member. 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7:30 p.m. Bring a friend.
- 11 **Weeks Bay Advisory Committee Meeting.** Arthur C. "Skipper" Tonsmeire III Weeks Bay Resource Center, 2:00 p.m.
- 13-17 **Volunteer Opportunity: Marsh Bird Survey.** Volunteers needed to assist with the identification of local species. For more information, contact **Eric Brunden** at (251) 928-9792.

APRIL

- 3 **Volunteer Opportunity: School Field Trip.** Regional School for the Deaf and Blind will visit the Reserve for a field trip. To volunteer, contact **Eric Brunden** at (251) 928-9792.
- 3-5 **Baldwin County Master Gardener Plant Sale.** Safe Harbor at Weeks Bay, across U.S. Highway 98 from the Reserve Interpretive Center, Friday and Saturday 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and Sunday 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- 4 **Weeks Bay Foundation Annual Membership Meeting.** Weeks Bay Foundation office, 11401 U.S. Highway 98 (across from the Reserve), 8:30 a.m. Open to the public. For more information, contact **Walter Ernest** at (251) 990-5004.
- 13-17 **Volunteer Opportunity: Marsh Bird Survey.** Volunteers needed to assist with the identification of local species. For more information, contact **Eric Brunden** at (251) 928-9792.
- 14 **Guest Lecture Series "Road Kills on Battleship Parkway and the new Alabama Red-bellied Turtle Fence"** presented by **Dr. David Nelson**, University of South Alabama Department of Biology. 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7:30 p.m. Bring a friend.

25

Earth Day Mobile Bay 2009. Environmental displays and activities, Science Project Fair and interactive activities for children and adults. Fairhope Pier, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Live music until 7:00 p.m. Free admission.

27

Confederate Memorial Day Holiday. The Interpretive Center will be closed. All trails and boardwalks will remain open for your walking and sightseeing pleasure.

MAY

1-3

Digital Photography Weekend at Weeks Bay. Nature photography workshop taught jointly by **Julie E. Brent** and **Fred Nation**. For more information, go to www.moonsunearth.com/weeksbay.htm.

2

Kid's Fishing Day. A joint project of the Foundation, the Reserve and ADCNR State Lands Division, Coastal Section and Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division. Safe Harbor pond, across U.S. Highway 98 from the Reserve Interpretive Center, 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. For more information, contact **Walter Ernest** at (251) 990-5004.

9

Weeks Bay Area River Cleanup. Fish River Marina, 8 a.m. to 12:00 noon. For more information, contact **Michael Shelton** at (251) 928-9792.

12

Guest Lecture Series "Additional Sites along the Alabama Coastal Birding Trail and the New County Birding Trails throughout Alabama" presented by **Eric Soehren**, terrestrial zoologist, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources State Lands Division. 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7:30 p.m. Bring a friend.

25

Memorial Day Holiday. The Interpretive Center will be closed. All trails and boardwalks will remain open for your walking and sightseeing pleasure.

Land Trust Update

One of the functions of the Weeks Bay Foundation is to serve as a land trust for coastal Alabama.



In December of 2008, the Foundation received two important land donations of high conservation value. The **Balzli Preserve** is a 22.4 acre maritime forest in Point Clear that was once the site of a turpentine plantation. The second donation is a half acre waterfront lot on Fish River, adjacent to the **Juniper Preserve** in

the Marlow community. These parcels are now protected and will continue to provide critical habitat for wildlife and rare plants. The Foundation is very grateful to both of the willing donors.



For more information about donating property to the Foundation, please contact the Foundation office at (251) 990-5004, or visit the Foundation's website at www.weeksbay.org and click on Conservation Options.

Register Early!

Art Without Limits!

A Summer Program hosted by the Weeks Bay Reserve and Eastern Shore Art Center.

- Field trips • Seining • Nature walks
- Art projects • And more...

Sessions:
June 8th, 10th, 11, 15th, 16, 17th & 18
9:00 - 3:00

Ages 8+. Cost is free, but space is limited. Please RSVP by May 25th

Contact: Eric Brunden (251) 928-9792

Did You Know?

by John Borom

The Snow Bunting (*Plectrophenax nivalis*) is a stocky ground-dwelling bird with a short tail and pointed wings. It breeds in the remote dry tundra and rocky, barren areas in the Arctic Zone north to within 7 degrees of the North Pole. It winters across southern Canada and the northern part of the United States, rarely farther south. This bird can survive temperatures as low as 58 degrees below zero and often tunnels in the snow to keep warm. It is predominately white in color, at least in winter, and its wings are almost entirely white. No other sparrow-like bird possesses nearly as much white, and no other songbirds are found farther north than this species.



On January 2, 2009 a beautiful male in winter plumage turned up in the Weeks Bay watershed at the Magnolia Springs landfill. It was the first record for the state of Alabama documented by photos and at least three experienced observers. The photo was taken by Dr. Bill Summerour.

Coastal Discovery Day Camp

Hosted by Coastal Wonders & Weeks Bay Reserve

nature games * eco-art * netting in the bay * trail hikes * swimming * canoeing * live animal encounters * astronomy * pontoon boat tour * and much, much more!

6th - 8th GRADE SESSIONS:
 June 1st-5th
 July 13th-17th

4th - 6th GRADE SESSIONS:
 June 22nd-26th
 July 6th-10th

Contact Audrey or Parker at Coastal Wonders
 Phone: 251-928-2248
 Email: coastalwonders@bellsouth.net

The fee for camp is \$180 per session and includes all programming and supplies, a t-shirt, a water bottle, and morning and afternoon snacks each day. Days are from 8:30AM to 4:30PM, campers bring their own sack lunch.

Photo Contest



2008 Best of Show
Narrow-leaved Sundew
Richard Dowling - Pratoille, AL

It's that time of year again...
start preparing your pictures for the
10th annual Weeks Bay Photo Contest!

This year's entry deadline is
Saturday, June 13, 2009 at 4:00 p.m.

All entries must be delivered to the Reserve by this date.
Entry forms and contest rules are available on the
Foundation website.

For more informaton, please call (251) 990-5004
or visit www.weeksbay.org.

Kid's Fishing Day

Join us for the 11th annual Kid's Fishing Day,
free of charge to all participants!

Saturday, May 2, 2009
8:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
Weeks Bay Reserve
Safe Harbor Pond

For more information, contact the Foundation office at
(251) 990-5004 or visit www.weeksbay.org.



Weeks Bay Foundation

11401 US Highway 98
Fairhope, Alabama 36532
(251) 990-5004
www.weeksbay.org

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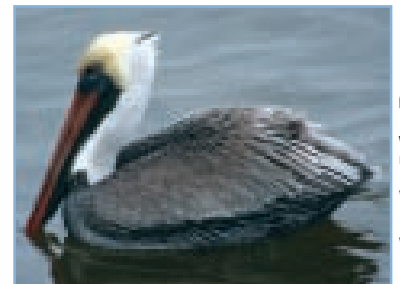


photo by John Borom

Brown Pelican
(*Pelecanus occidentalis*)

*"The lakes and rivers sustain us; they flow through the veins of the earth and into our own."
- Albert Gore*