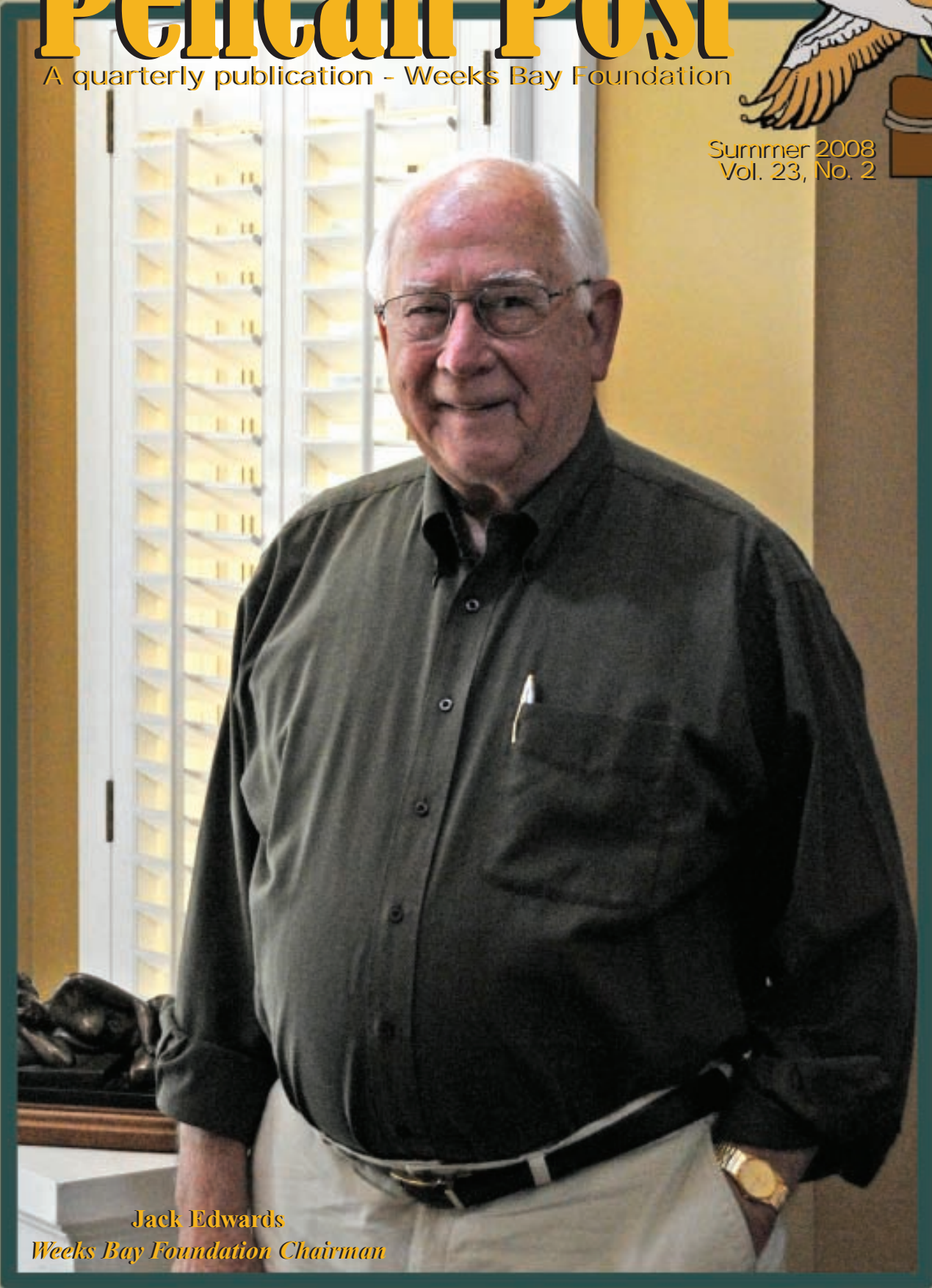


THE Pelican Post

A quarterly publication - Weeks Bay Foundation



Summer 2008
Vol. 23, No. 2



Jack Edwards
Weeks Bay Foundation Chairman

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

Cover Photo:

Jack Edwards
 Weeks Bay Foundation
 Chairman

by Walter Ernest

Design by Kelly Anderson
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From the Executive Director...



Summer is a time of great recreational pleasure. When I launch a boat at the Fish River Marina, I often think of how it became part of the Reserve. It benefits the public today because of what the Foundation and the Coastal Land Trust did in 1997. These two private, non-profit conservation groups were the successful bidders at an auction. They pooled their resources for a total high bid of \$1,531,875 for 105 acres near the Fish River bridge. This property was eventually sold to the State of Alabama and became an important part of the Reserve. Special thanks go to **Otilie Halstead** for support of the Foundation at this critical time. The state will soon complete a new education facility on the site and this resource will only get better.

The Environmental Protection Agency defines sustainability as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Are you practicing sustainability? We can all do this by using green building codes, protecting our natural resources and conserving energy. The Foundation is committed to sustainability. At the last board meeting, the board of directors voted to support the Alabama Water Agenda. This is another example of supporting protection of our natural resources.

The Foundation held another Kid’s Fishing Day, and is in the process of conducting the Photography Contest. Please remember that these conservation and stewardship efforts can not be accomplished without the support of the members.

Enjoy the summer issue of *The Pelican Post*.

Working for Conservation,

Walter

“Green” Renovations

The Foundation office has been renovated utilizing green building features. It has a new metal roof, HardiPanel siding and energy star appliances. Pervious concrete was used for the driveway and sidewalk to reduce storm water runoff. The grounds surrounding the house will be landscaped with native plants.



Office hours are 9:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. You are welcome to stop by and see it. The phone number for the Foundation office is (251) 990-5004. Visit the Foundation website at www.weeksbay.org.

Changing of the Guard

At the annual Membership and Board meetings of the Weeks Bay Foundation on April 19, 2008, the Board reluctantly accepted the decision of **Jack Edwards** to end his two decade tenure as Chairman of the Foundation.

Jack's extensive contributions to Weeks Bay and the environment of Coastal Alabama extend over 30 years. In the late 1970's, local conservationists led by **David Morine**, the National Vice President of Land Acquisition for The Nature Conservancy, approached Jack about establishing a National Wildlife Refuge to protect the "Perdue Property", a 1,400 acre tract of Gulf, lagoon and lake frontage on the Ft. Morgan Peninsula.

Jack took on this task and the Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1980. The Perdue Property had been purchased by The Nature Conservancy, thanks to financial participation by the R.K. Mellon Foundation of Pennsylvania, Ligonier, Pennsylvania, represented by **Mason Walsh**.



Jack Edwards & Ellis Allen

The Nature Conservancy purchased the Swift Property, which has three miles of frontage on Bon Secour Bay, just east of the mouth of Weeks Bay.

Years later, in conjunction with an expansion of the authorized boundaries of the Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service suggested that the Swift Property be deleted from the Refuge due to its geographical location far away from the Ft. Morgan Peninsula.

David Morine suggested that a National Estuarine Research Reserve be established. Jack again delivered and the Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (WBNERR) was formally established in 1986. The Nature Conservancy donated the Swift Property as the cornerstone of the WBNERR.

Jack went even further in his conservation efforts through facilitation of the establishment of the Coastal Land Trust which has protected 30,000 acres in the Delta.

Jack's many accomplishments on behalf of Alabama's coastal environment provide perpetual habitat protection and outdoor and recreational opportunities for Alabamians and their visitors.

Jack will be succeeded by **Dr. Ellis Allen**, a long time Board member of Weeks Bay Foundation and resident of the Weeks Bay watershed.

Water Festival 2008

On February 18 and 19, 2008 in Daphne, more than 1,000 Baldwin County fourth graders and teachers were provided a fun and educational experience at the Fifth Annual Baldwin County Water Festival. **Michael Shelton**,

Watershed Coordinator, was on the Water Festival steering committee. Since 2004, the Water Festival has instructed nearly 4,500 students about the pollution contained in stormwater runoff, the behavior of pollutants in water and the ecological degradation caused by pollution.

The hands-on activities in which students participated were designed to instill a general environmental awareness and stewardship ethic in students. Water Festival charged no fee to schools or students. All transportation costs were provided to make it easier for students and schools to attend. Every student and teacher received a Water Festival t-shirt. Students from eleven schools including J.L. Newton, W.J. Carroll, Daphne Elementary East, Rosinton School, Robertsdale Elementary, Bay Minette Intermediate, Loxley Elementary, Elsanor School, Stapleton School, Gulf Shores Elementary and Magnolia School participated this year.



Angela Underwood (green shirt) leads students in the coastal food web activity.

As in years past, the Weeks Bay Volunteers, Weeks Bay Foundation and many other agencies and businesses were generous supporters of Water Festival. Volunteers perform all instruction, cleanup, bus parking and supply



Students explore runoff pollutants using a watershed model.

distribution tasks. The nearly 80 area volunteers, including individuals, high school students, government agencies, utilities and Snowbird groups, donated their skills, time and elbow grease. Work will begin soon on the 2009 Baldwin County Water Festival. The Steering Committee invites interested sponsors and volunteers to get involved early. Please contact Michael Shelton at the Reserve at (251) 928-9792 for more information on how organizations and individuals can help educate students about protecting Baldwin County's water resources.

Make a Difference

Your contributions to the Foundation can make a difference. Please consider making a donation designated to one of the following funds:

Land Acquisition Fund: This is designed to assist in the costs associated with land acquisition activities.

Stewardship Fund: This is designed to assist with the costs associated with long-term stewardship of properties.

Gaynor McCown Environmental Education Fellowship Fund: This was established to assist with the educational outreach activities of the Reserve and Foundation. (This currently funds Education Assistant, **Casey Stephenson**, at the Reserve.)

Scott Ireland Water Quality Fund: This is designed to assist with water quality monitoring and testing activities.

Office Renovation/Landscaping Fund: This is designated to help with the renovation and landscaping of the Foundation office.

Operating Fund: This is utilized to help with the day-to-day activities of the Foundation.

As a 501(c)3, the Foundation can accept gifts of real estate, stocks, and life insurance in addition to donations of cash. If you have questions regarding any of these funds, or other ways to support the Foundation, please contact **Walter Ernest** at (251) 990-5004.

New Employee



Melissa Applegate recently joined the Reserve staff as an Information Technology/Education Specialist. She will be developing the Reserve webpage and assisting with education and outreach programs. Melissa spends most of her free time outside fishing and surfing, or in her kayak exploring on

Weeks Bay and Mobile Bay. She loves the Bartram Canoe Trails and camping overnight in the Mobile-Tensaw Delta to study and observe wildlife. She also enjoys hiking, swimming and watching sunsets at the Fairhope Pier with her dog **Wicket**. Originally

from Canton, Ohio, Melissa knows harsh winters and says she would like to stay in the warmth of Gulf Coast area as long as possible.

Did You Know?

by *John Borom*

The 46 inch tall Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) is often seen standing patiently at the water's edge. It varies its fish diet with frogs, crawfish, small snakes, salamanders, grasshoppers, and small mammals. In flight, with its long neck folded back upon its shoulders and its wings beating slowly and deeply, it moves with graceful silence. This species is the most widespread of all North American herons, and is seen along rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, and in marshes.

Throughout much of their range Great Blue Herons nest in colonies of a few pairs to several hundred birds. Courtship displays are performed mainly

at the nest and involve various motions to show off the plumes. The bulky nests, which are rather flimsy structures made of sticks, are used year after year and may grow to be four feet



across. Nests are usually placed in tall trees and contain three to six pale blue or greenish eggs. Incubation is about 28 days, by both sexes. Chicks are born nearly naked, and with their eyes tightly closed. Gangly young birds snooze within the nest's slightly hollowed interiors. Juvenile birds teeter on nearby branches,



squawking and flapping their wings. Their parents bring them food and regurgitate it, whole or partially digested, onto the nest or directly into the open mouths of the chicks. When adult birds return to the nests with food, the young,

sensing a meal, begin pushing, shoving and squealing. Young birds leave the nest about eight weeks after hatching.

Volunteer Spotlight

Archie Miraldes was born and grew up in Rhode Island, where he met **Maxine** on a blind date, and they were married 54 years ago. They eventually moved to Connecticut where Archie worked for 31 years with Pratt and Whitney, retiring as a welding inspector. Archie and Maxine have two children, **Ted** and **Linda**, who still live in Connecticut.



Like many visitors, Archie and Maxine fell in love with Baldwin County while traveling through this area during numerous vacation trips over the years. After three trips specifically to this area, they decided to move here permanently 11 years ago.

Archie's special appreciation for Baldwin County and his "life theory" of volunteering and becoming involved in the community led him to Reserve soon after their arrival. Working with **Mark Cooper**, Archie built the storm shutters for the buildings and blazed the upland trail across from the pitcher plant bog. Archie is one of those most coveted of volunteers who can do anything, from repairing a pier or boardwalk to hosting a luncheon.

Since he has curtailed the most physically demanding jobs, Archie is currently serving as the President of the Board of Directors for the Weeks Bay Volunteers. He and Maxine also work as cashiers during the Fall Native Plant Sale. They often prepare meals during special events and they work with fourth graders during the Baldwin County Water Festival. Archie especially enjoys helping young fishermen bait hooks during Kid's Fishing Day.

In addition to volunteering at the Reserve, Archie & Maxine are also substantially involved with the Nix Senior Center in Fairhope. After volunteering for several years, the Center hired Archie as a Day Manager, where he oversees all of the scheduled activities during the two days that he and Maxine are on-duty.

They still indulge their love of travel and their

interest in what Archie calls "our national story." As members of the Escapees travel group, they make spring and fall excursions each year to explore new places around the country, and of course, they often travel back to Connecticut to visit their children.

Archie says that he enjoys volunteering, and he especially likes the people at the Reserve. We are very fortunate that Archie's "life theory" led him to us, where he and Maxine continue to be two of our treasured volunteers.

Stream Restoration

A stream restoration workshop was held at the Reserve on April 15 and 16. It focused on riparian reference reaches and regional curves for the Alabama Coastal Plain. Reference reaches are segments of undisturbed streams or creeks which



USGS technician explains function of Hamilton Creek gage.

are used as models for the restoration of eroding waterways. Regional curves contain important physical and biological information about undisturbed channels and are used to improve the condition of degraded stream channels as part of a restoration project. The workshop included lectures by **Chris Metcalf**, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

stream restoration specialist and highlighted the application of reference reach and regional curves in the field. Chris has been involved with stream related research and natural channel restoration projects along the coastal plain of Florida, Alabama and Georgia. The workshop

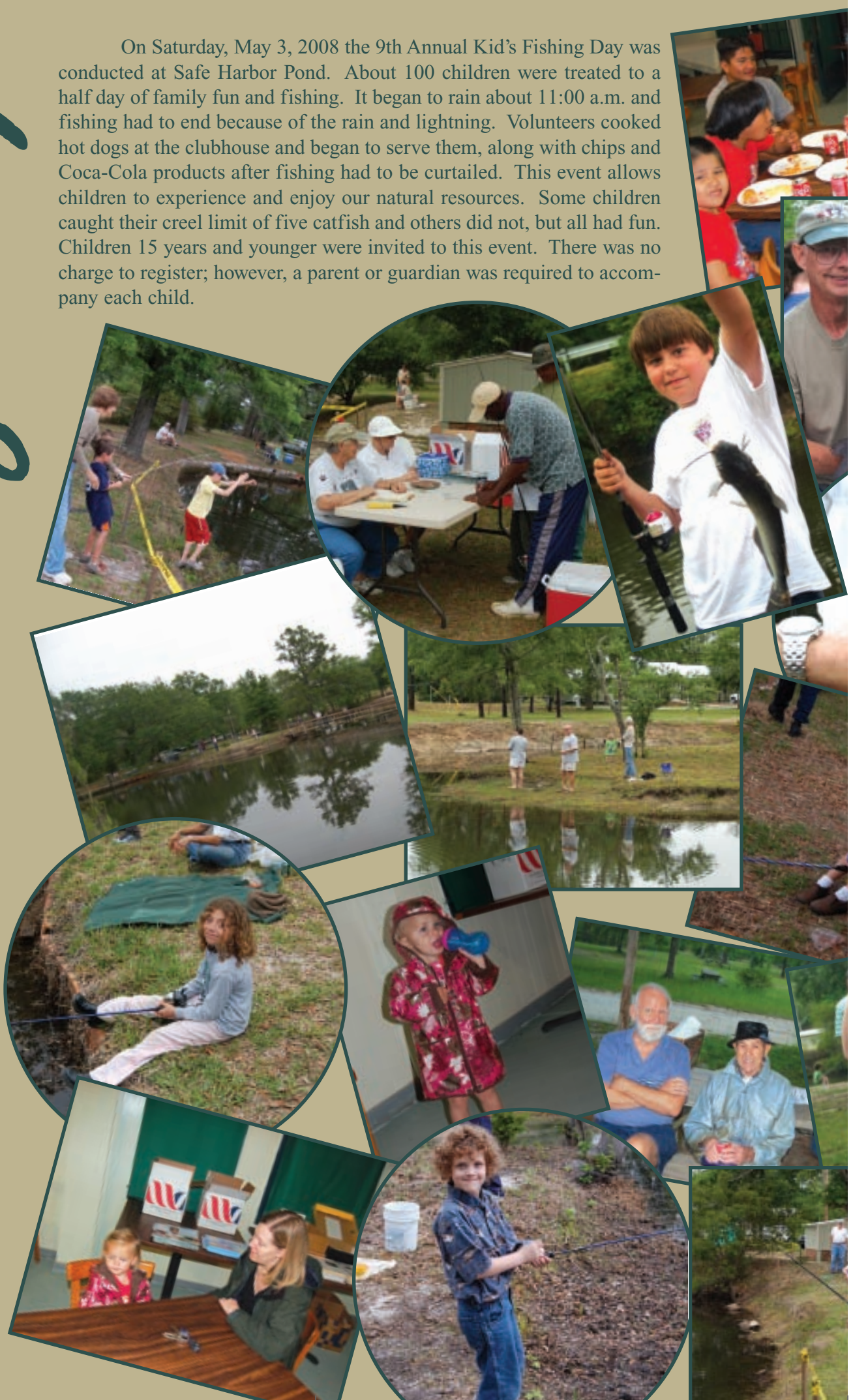


Chris Metcalf (orange) describes hydrodynamics of creek restoration.

was sponsored by the Alabama Department of Environmental Management and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. It was hosted by **Michael Shelton**, Coastal Training Program Coordinator, **Randy Shaneyfelt**, Alabama Department of Environmental Management, and the Baldwin County Soils and Water Conservation District.

Kid's Fishing Day

On Saturday, May 3, 2008 the 9th Annual Kid's Fishing Day was conducted at Safe Harbor Pond. About 100 children were treated to a half day of family fun and fishing. It began to rain about 11:00 a.m. and fishing had to end because of the rain and lightning. Volunteers cooked hot dogs at the clubhouse and began to serve them, along with chips and Coca-Cola products after fishing had to be curtailed. This event allows children to experience and enjoy our natural resources. Some children caught their creel limit of five catfish and others did not, but all had fun. Children 15 years and younger were invited to this event. There was no charge to register; however, a parent or guardian was required to accompany each child.



New Buildings

The new buildings under construction at the Fish River Marina are very close to completion. The metal roof is going on and once completed, the inside will be finished out with floor coverings, window dressings, and ceiling tile. This is a very exciting time for the Reserve as these buildings replace structures damaged by Hurricane Ivan. The buildings will support conservation programs largely for education, stewardship, and outreach and in particular the Coastal Training Program. Dedication of the new buildings is set for June 19, 2008 at 10:00 a.m. This will be on site and part of the agenda for the Forever Wild board meeting. Forever Wild is the land acquisition program for the State of Alabama, purchasing lands for conservation to remain forever wild and pristine.



New buildings in final phase of construction with dedication planned on June 19, 2008

The Education Building will provide a classroom that will be used for a variety of activities. These will be directed toward many different audiences that include K-12 to graduate students and researchers, continuing education groups, environmental organizations and enthusiasts, conservation partners, non-profit organizations, and the local community and public at large. In making contact with these audiences, activities will include K-12 local and regional school class visits, formal workshops and conservation class and course work, internet-based learning opportunities, field-based experiential learning activities, summer estuary camps, local and regional conferences, research symposia, and public and community meetings. The Coastal Training Program will utilize the site for programs that transfer technical information to coastal managers for the purpose of making informed decisions that will better conserve and protect natural res-

ources in coastal Alabama. Audiences targeted by CTP include municipal employees, engineers, soil scientists, wetland ecologists, and conservation professionals. The educational classroom will provide an opportunity to highlight natural resources of the Weeks Bay estuary and raise public awareness of conservation in coastal Alabama.

The Multipurpose Building will be used to support conservation programs at the Reserve.

Education Activities

Spring was a busy time at the Reserve. Hundreds of elementary students have toured the Interpretive Center and boardwalks and some were lucky enough to see a Great Horned Owl and blooming native azaleas, in addition to the many other native trees, shrubs and creatures.

The Baldwin County Grasses in Classes Program has been busy with restoration projects. Students from Spanish Fort High School and Baldwin County High School planted approximately 500 black needle rush and smooth cordgrass plants along the shoreline of Weeks Bay at Camp Beckwith. They were planted in an effort to dissipate the energy from waves and to help hold sediments in place to stop the shoreline from eroding.

Daphne High School students planted approximately 1,000 bitter panicum, purslane, elder and sea oat plants at Gulf State Park Pavilion in a dune restoration project. Beach plants help to trap sand to build dunes as well as provide shelter and food for animals. Foley High School students conducted dune restoration at the Bon Secour Wildlife Refuge.



Students from Fairhope High School also traveled to Montgomery to plant native azaleas and other native flora on the grounds of the Capitol. This special event was an extension of the Grasses in Classes Program. Students not only planted the plants but also met **Governor Bob Riley** and the **First Lady**, a most memorable event for Reserve staff and the attending students.

5th Annual BirdFest



Greg Harber

Organizers are busy planning trips and events for the 5th Annual Alabama Coastal BirdFest, set for October 16-19, 2008, and two excellent evening speakers have been confirmed. On Thursday night, there will be a presentation by **Greg Harber**, a biologist with the University of Alabama at Birmingham who is also an expert birder and photographer. On Friday night, attendees will enjoy a presentation from **Dr. Frank Moore**, chairman of the Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Southern Mississippi. Dr. Moore and his team have spent many years documenting and studying the behavior and ecology of migration.

Greg Harber traces his interest in the outdoors to family trips when he was growing up in Florida. "Our parents engendered in us a love of nature, an appreciation and respect for the outdoors, and the knowledge that we should never let school limit our learning," Harber said.

A member of the Alabama Ornithological Society and the Birmingham Audubon Society, and President of the Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries, Inc., Harber will present a program called "Through the Delta and Beyond" at BirdFest's Thursday night reception. "The program will feature a variety of birds and their habitats, beginning in the farthest reaches of north Alabama, through the landscapes of the inland coastal plain and into the Mobile-Tensaw Delta and the Gulf of Mexico," Harber said. "It is a journey millions of birds undertake each spring and fall, and through slides set to music accompaniment, I hope to share the magic and wonder of Alabama's birds and their incredible journeys."

Harber's photographs have appeared in *Alabama Birdlife*, Journal of the Alabama Ornithological Society, and the four-volume set *Alabama Wildlife*, published by the University of Alabama Press.

BirdFest's Friday night speaker, Dr. Frank Moore, notes that migration is one of the most fascinating behaviors in nature. "Some biologists speculate that long-distance, landbird migrants experience the best of two worlds. They enjoy increased reproductive success by virtue of breeding in food rich, competitor poor temperate areas in the summer, and increased survival by spending the temperate winter in the tropics. This argument has merit, but we must keep in mind that migration is a costly, energy expensive, high-risk event that takes its toll in increased mortality, especially among young, naive birds of the year."

Dr. Moore's talk will touch on the high cost of migration, habitat selection during migration, behavioral response to the energy demands of migration, and a landscape analysis of migration. "Our research has recently taken on a sense of urgency because populations of many migratory songbirds are on the decline. Declines are linked to deforestation on wintering grounds in Central and South America and fragmentation of breeding habitats, but our work is calling attention to a third factor - the availability of suitable habitat during migration."

Proceeds from the Alabama Coastal BirdFest are used to help preserve and protect bird and wildlife habitat on the Alabama Gulf Coast. Since 2004, the Alabama Coastal BirdFest has donated more than \$40,000 to this cause.

More information about the 2008 Alabama Coastal BirdFest is coming soon. Visit www.alabamacoastalbirdfest.com for more information. Registration opens in mid-July.

Photography Contest

It's that time of year again... start preparing your pictures for the 9th annual Weeks Bay Photo Contest!

REMINDER: This year's entry deadline is Saturday, June 14, 2008 at 4:00 p.m. All entries must be delivered to the Reserve by this date. Entry forms and contest rules will be available on the Foundation website.

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

Ruddy Turnstone

by John Borom

Ruddy Turnstones (*Arenaria interpres*) are common shorebirds on the Alabama coast fall, winter, and spring and are uncommon in the summer. Most



forage on beaches and on rocky shores, but this adaptable species may also be seen begging for bread-crumbs or French fries with Laughing Gulls, eating earthworms in plowed farm fields, taking small crustaceans on mudflats,

and picking through trash at garbage dumps. They search for hidden prey by turning and inserting their short, pointed bills under rocks and other objects and flipping them with strong neck muscles. Sometimes several will cooperate to turn a dead fish or roll up mats of seaweed to find out what is underneath. They pick up insects, spiders, crabs and snails, and hammer barnacles open. They nest chiefly on coastal far north tundra, and the breeding adults have brilliant ruddy tones above and harlequin head patterns. They feast on sedge seeds when they arrive on their northern breeding grounds, and fatten on crowberries before they leave. The nest is a hollow in the ground near water, lined with grass and seaweed. Usually four grayish-green eggs are incubated for around three weeks by both adult birds. The downy young leave the nest soon after hatching, and become independent at about three weeks. Winter birds are dark brown streaked with black above and white below.

Research

A Graduate Research Fellowship has been awarded to **Molly Mintz**, a graduate student from the University of South Alabama. Her proposal is entitled "Effects of non-point source nutrient pollution and environmental variation on native/non-native aquatic plant interaction in Weeks Bay, Alabama." This study will have two parts; the first portion will investigate the effects of non-point source pollution on aquatic plant community structure and the susceptibility of the

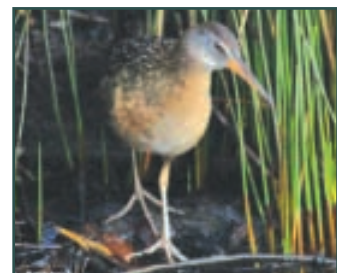
community to invasion, while the second part of the study will take place in the laboratory and will examine the competitive ability of native and non-native plants measured by photosynthetic performance, the comparative uptake of nutrients and nitrate reductase activity. Although funding for this two-year study will not start until the first of June, Ms. Mintz has already begun work and is in the process of selecting sites and acquiring preliminary data on the environmental conditions at those sites. This research will add to the ability to prioritize management of invasive aquatic plants in the watershed, and it will also provide key information on how environmental stress and invasion are interrelated.



Weeks Bay GRF recipient,
Molly Mintz

Marsh Bird Monitoring

Watershed and Stewardship sectors conducted a Marsh Bird Monitoring Protocols Workshop designed to teach and demonstrate monitoring techniques useful throughout North America. Protocols taught in the training were established to assist wildlife scientists, natural resource managers and other researchers to estimate population trends. Accurate population estimation enables resource managers to evaluate effectiveness of management practices or alteration in the ecosystem or habitat. In addition, volunteers assisting in bird counts can enhance their skills and benefit from the workshop. Workshop participants learned the protocols in a series of lectures and practiced them in extensive field exercises. The three-day workshop held March 4-6 required participants to be in the field in the early morning and evening when the marsh birds are most active. Field Exercises were conducted from the water on small powerboats. **Nick Bartock**, principal instructor, worked with the University of Arizona and **Courtney Conway**, author of *Standardized North American Marsh Bird Monitoring Protocols* (Wildlife Research Report #2005-04. U.S. Geological Survey, Arizona Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, Tucson, AZ). Nick has conducted Marsh Bird Workshops for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other university, state and federal agencies.



Summer 2008 Calendar

June

- 9-20 **Arts Without Limits.** Eastern Shore Arts Center Summer Camp Program. Weeks Bay Reserve. For more information, call (251) 928-2228.
- 10-11 **Coastal Applications GIS Workshop.** Weeks Bay Reserve and Grand Bay Reserve Coastal Training Programs offer workshop on using GIS in coastal management. Jackson County Community College, Gautier, Mississippi, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. For more information, call (251) 928-9792.
- 11 **Weeks Bay Advisory Committee Meeting.** Weeks Bay Auditorium, 2:00 p.m.
- 12-13 **Coastal Inundation Mapping GIS Workshop.** Weeks Bay Reserve and Grand Bay Reserve Coastal Training Programs offer workshop on using GIS in floodplain and storm impact management. Jackson County Community College, Gautier, Mississippi, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. For more information, call (251) 928-9792.
- 14 **Weeks Bay Photography Contest.** Deadline to deliver entries to the Weeks Bay Reserve is 4:00 p.m. today. For more information, call (251) 990-5004.
- 19 **Forever Wild Meeting & New Building Dedication.** Education Building at the Fish River Marina, 10:00 a.m. For more information, call (251) 928-9792.

July

- 1-31 **Weeks Bay Photography Contest.** Winning photos will be displayed at the

Eastern Shore Art Center during the month of July. For more information, call (251) 990-5004.

- 7-11 **Summer Science Camp.** Alabama School of Math & Science. Reserve and Camp Beckwith.
- 21-25 **Summer Science Camp.** Alabama School of Math & Science. Reserve and Camp Beckwith.
- 30 **AmeriCorps Team** to work at the Safe Harbor area of Weeks Bay Reserve and with Habitat for Humanity. July 30 through August 22.

Summer Activities

The Reserve will host several educational and restoration activities this summer. **Nancy Raia** of the Eastern Shore Art Center will join forces with Reserve staff to offer Arts Without Limits. This program will provide area students with opportunities that blend art and science. The first session will be for students who are new to the area while additional sessions will be tailored towards deaf and blind students. **Barry MacPheal** of the Alabama School of Math and Science will bring a group of students to the Reserve for a Summer Science Camp to conduct original research, and Camp Beckwith staff will collaborate with Reserve staff to provide summer camp opportunities for fifth through eighth grade students.

Outward Bound Discovery of Fairhope and an AmeriCorps team will assist Reserve staff in removing woody species from the pitcher plant bog and dilapidated structures from Safe Harbor. They will also help in efforts to control invasive species. These efforts will assist with the ongoing program of the Reserve to restore natural habitats and limit invasive exotic species on Reserve lands.

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 Weeks Bay Foundation!**

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 look for the link on our home page at www.weeksbay.org.

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photo by John Borom

Forster's Tern
 (*Sterna forsteri*)

*"A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in."
 - Greek Proverb*