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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE: Status of Conservation Projects

Gary Parsons

The Chapter presently has 3 conservation projects underway. We are creating a birding site brochure for Walton County similar to one we did for Okaloosa County last year. We are exploring the feasibility of nature trails around the Northwest Florida State College campus and we are seeking a project for the Parkel donation to Rocky Bayou State Park.

For the brochure, we completed a survey of potential birding sites, selected a dozen and wrote a brochure narrative description giving directions and favorable times of the year to visit the site. We had strong support from the Walton County Tourist Development Council even after the retirement of Sonny Mares, the director. Unfortunately, our support went away with the installation of new staff members and a new director. We do have funds that could be used for this project that were donated by the Kellogg's. At our board meeting on 7 October we approved a motion to proceed with the brochure using this money. We are obtaining cost estimates for the design, layout and printing of the brochure.

The conservation committee has made several surveys of the federal property adjacent to NWFSC. This property is currently restricted and requires an Eglin permit for entry; however, once the midbay bridge Phase III connector is completed, the property will be effectively closed off from the rest of Eglin making it suitable for nature trails. In our survey we found steep head streams, mature longleaf pine sandhills, ponds and flatwoods. We prepared a short presentation for Dr Darryl Ritter, head of the science department. Dr Ritter was very supportive and agreed to take the presentation to the Dean and in November, to the College Board. We are awaiting further input from the College.

We have been working with Dan Laird, Rocky Bayou State Park superintendent and Dr George Murphy, Friends of the Park to identify a project to enhance the Parkel's vision of the Park. At a meeting in September, Mr Laird showed us a proposed location for a gazebo overlooking the streambed of what used to be Puddinhead Lake. We recommended that the gazebo be placed southwest of the old dam. Dan agreed to have an architect draw up a plan for the gazebo and have state biologist survey the site since some small live oaks may have to be removed to make room for the gazebo.

If you would like to participate in these projects or have some ideas for new ones, please contact me.

CAS Members Weekend Retreat at

Park Place in Cedar Key, FL

February 11th & 12th 2011

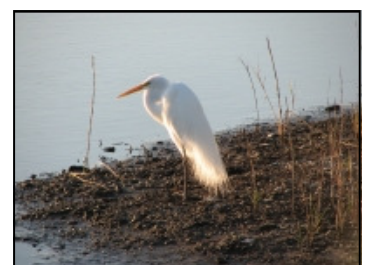
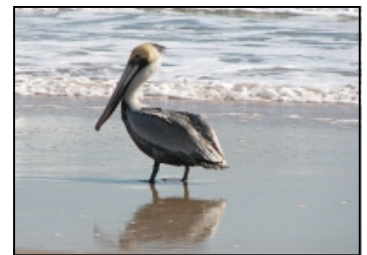
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Schedule of Events:

All programs are free and open to the public on the first Thursday of the month from August to May at the NWF State College, Niceville, (NWFSC) in the Learning Resource Center, **LRC Room 128**. Socializing, refreshments and conservation topics begin at 6:30 PM prior to the featured speaker at 7 PM. Non-members are welcome.

Programs

November 4: "Introduction and Photo Tour of the Unique Amphibian and Reptile Communities of Eglin Air Force Base". Kelly Jones, Wildlife Biologists, will present an overview of local herptofauna with an emphasis on some of the rare species, including Flatwoods Salamanders of Eglin AFB.

December 2: "Christmas Bird Count". Donald Ware, CAS Count Coordinator, will get us ready for the annual CBC. Learn about the history of the CBC, the impact the count is having on understanding changes in bird populations and what birds we should look for.

January 6: "Environmental Legislation Which May Come Before the Florida House in 2011." Honorable Matt Gaetz, State Representative District 4, will speak on pending environmental legislation, his position on the legislation and his thinking.

February 3: "Basic Bird Identification Techniques". Lenny Fenimore will tell us how to get started identifying birds and is eminently qualified to lead us in the right direction.

Bird Walks, Field Trips, & Events

Members and non-members of all levels of experience are invited to all **BW** (bird walks) and **FT** (fieldtrips). You are encouraged to wear long pants, a hat and bring binoculars, a bird book, and bug spray.

11/5: Audubon Eventures in Crestview. RSVP to Nonie Maines 862.9588

11/13: BW South Walton Courthouse Annex with Dee Nickerson. Meet at Winn Dixie, BWB 7:30 AM or at Annex at 8 AM 897.2035

12/16: Choctaw River Christmas Bird Count. Contact James Hill to volunteer 814.323.2001

12/20: Choctaw Bay Christmas Bird Count. Contact Don Ware to volunteer 862.6582

12/18: CAS Members Christmas Party

1/15: FT Ivory-billed Woodpecker Habitat with Don Ware. Meet at Badcock Furniture, Niceville 8 AM 862.6582

2/11-13: CAS member's retreat, Cedar Key FL. Check website for details.



CAS CHRISTMAS PARTY

On December 18th, we will be meeting in the party room at Ed's Seafood and Steaks (where Perry's Restaurant used to be) at 1027 John Sims Parkway, Niceville, in Palm Plaza for our annual holiday event. The party starts at 6:30 pm, and we will order from the menu and have the private room until 12:00 am.

Come out and see if a bunch of birders have so much fun together that they stay out 'til midnight. It won't be as much fun without you. Dress up OR NOT--your preference. Our chapter is full of wonderful, interesting, and intelligent people. Let's celebrate that!

Conservation Corner: Winter 2010

Gary Parsons, Conservation Chair

On the 13th of October I attended the Panhandle Shorebird Workshop at Panama City Community College. The purpose of the workshop is to document the success of beach nesting birds, raise issues associated with the BP oil spill and make recommendations to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). The Workshop was organized by Audubon's Julie Wraithmell and attended by 20 representatives from State Parks, National Wildlife refuges, Federal Parks, the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the State FWC. Each representative reported their findings which were tabulated on a spreadsheet for later distribution to attendees. State Parks on the eastern panhandle including St George Island and St Joe Peninsula State Park reported very low fledging success primarily due to depredation from coyotes. A similar story was reported from the Crooked Island and Tyndall surveys. Shell Island does not have coyotes but visitors frequently bring dogs to the beach and they disrupt the colonies reducing nesting success and increasing abandonment.

State parks in Bay, Walton and Okaloosa counties reported very low numbers of beach nesting birds and a modest fledging rate. We had no report from Eglin. The National Seashore area at Navarre reported that the Least Terns and Black Skimmers had left the causeway, where they bred in previous years, and were successful in the area of Opal Beach. Unfortunately, over 100 least terns and chicks were road kill. Apparently the traffic count on the road is up as is the speed.

Colonies of Least Terns and Black Skimmers have rebounded (estimated at 1500 and 500 respectively) at Fort Pickens since the road was closed by Hurricane Danny in 2005. Unfortunately the road has reopened and apparently due to the presence of BP cleanup crews, all nesting activity was abandoned.

Lanark Island off Carabelle reportedly has huge colonies of Brown Pelicans and Laughing Gulls. The Island is difficult to access without disrupting the colonies and actual counts were not available.

In addition to Eglin, counts were not available from rooftop nesting, Dog Island, St George Island Causeway and FSU marine lab at Alligator Point.

This meeting painted a grim picture of the reproductive success of our shorebirds. BP crews were poorly trained and often intrusive, uncontrolled predation is a growing threat especially from coyotes, biologists were often overwhelmed by other duties related to the spill and unable to conduct their counts. Lanark Island certainly needs to be picked up under the Save or Florida funding. Let me know if you would like to have a copy of the spreadsheet and the report issued on this meeting.

CAS Shorebird Surveys

by Don Ware

In June, while the oil-well blowout was still gushing, Chris Larson told me that our local Audubon Society should do something. Others who spoke with Gary Parsons felt the same way, so Gary put the issue on the June 29th CAS board meeting agenda. The breeding season for our many Least Terns and fewer Snowy Plovers and Black Skimmers that nest on our beaches was nearly over. Our territory (Walton County west to Navarre) beaches and water were still relatively clean. Though we were not trained to handle oiled birds and turtles, we could report oiled wildlife and develop a data base of the birds that depend on our coastal habitat for a living.

The birds that use our beaches in large numbers move away from their breeding grounds after fledging, whether that is on the islands west of Florida, inland lakes, or the Arctic regions. The effects of oil during next year's coastal breeding season and on migrating birds could show up as reduced numbers next year but we would need a data base to analyze them.

We voted to take a "snapshot" of shorebird populations throughout our territory each Saturday morning. Since most of the birds did not move much while the light level was low, we requested all surveys be completed within two hours of sunrise. As Bird Count Coordinator, I divided our territory into 20 manageable sections of 1-4 miles each, on both sides of the Eglin restricted beach of 13 miles. Other board members, **Gary Parsons, Sylvia Cowen, Phyllis Cheney** and **Shelly Langshaw** agreed to accept a section assignment, and I used my Bird Lovers e-mail list to recruit more people. I recommended www.natureinstruct.org, Dendroica, USA as a quick learning tool for those who could not identify the 28 species that I put on a Field Form. On July 3rd, just five days later, we surveyed all beach sections except those in Walton County.

We wanted to get volunteers who lived close to the beach sections that needed surveying, so we did not add much to environmental pollution by weekly car miles. We also needed backup **Beach Birders** to fill in when an assigned birder had a priority commitment elsewhere. We used newspaper articles, the Walton Outdoors Newsletter list, and the NAS general volunteer list for recruiting. We surveyed 15 sections of beach most weeks, though we only had enough people to get useful data in three sections of Walton County. We surveyed 10 miles of Walton beaches, 14 miles in Okaloosa County and 4 miles in Navarre. In addition to our CAS effort, two Jackson Guard naturalists made twice monthly point counts every half mile of the 13 miles of the Eglin AFB restricted beaches, both Gulf coast and sound side. Incorporating that, with caveats, would provide essentially continuous bird population data from the breeding season thru most of the migration season for **41 miles of the gulf coast**.

Besides our board members, the **Beach Birders** that we owe thanks to are: **April Rieveschi, Heather Giddings, Elizabeth Bittner, Susan Forsyth, Cynthia Turner (and her 9-year-old daughter Ali), Kathleen Root, Karen Wagoner, Christina Larson, Nelda Seever, Norene Gideon, Anita Page, Lenny Fenimore, Charlie Saleebe, Reggie Veteto, and several of their spouses**. We also trained several backup birders for the surveys starting next July.

Personally, I enjoyed those 15 Saturday mornings on our beautiful beaches at sunrise, with many of our feathered friends. In my 1.7 mile walk to the west jetty of the Destin Pass my bird count topped out at 1196 birds of 13 species on August 21st. I saw 27 species that used that beach section for a living. I look forward to our next weekly **Shorebird Surveys starting in July**, and I hope others will join us, at least as backup birders so all sections are covered each of the 15 Saturdays. Call me at **862-6582** if you want to be on our Beach Birder assignment list. Also, you can meet us at a bird walk listed at www.chocotawhatcheeaudubon.org.



Choctawhatchee Audubon Society Membership

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When you join you will be part of national, state, and local Audubon groups and will receive...

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To join, mail this form and a check, payable to National Audubon Society, to;

Audubon National, PO Box 422250, Palm Coast, FL 32142-2250

CAS ONLY memberships are available and include SHORELINES NEWSLETTER ONLY.

To join CAS ONLY mail this form and a check payable to CAS to; *P.O. Box 1014 Fort Walton Beach, FL 32549.*

New Member Newsletter Only- \$10.00 **Renewal Member Newsletter Only- \$10.00**

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Chapter Code: C0ZE110Z



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