



# *Mobile Bay Audubon Society*

## **“Rays of the Bay” Touch Tank Exhibit Opens March 16 at the Estuarium at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab**

The Estuarium at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab is about to open its first outdoor touch tank, an exciting exhibit that invites visitors to learn about the “Rays of the Bay.” This 6,400-gallon tank will house cownose rays, southern stingrays and bonnethead sharks, and visitors will be allowed to gently touch these animals once the exhibit opens on Saturday, March 16.

“Rays of the Bay” is sponsored by Lulu’s at Homeport Restaurant and the Hearin-Chandler Foundation.

“We’re so pleased to offer this exhibit so all our visitors, whether they’re local or visiting from around the world, can learn about these creatures that inhabit our local waters,” said Dr. John Dindo, Associate Director at the Sea Lab. “The Sea Lab has been a steady proponent of hands-on education; we believe that experiential learning leads to life-long learning, and what could be more hands-on than having the ability to stroke a ray or shark?”

The Sea Lab, in its commitment to alternative energy sources, will operate the touch tank through a geothermal heating and cooling system, keeping the saltwater temperature at a comfortable 70 degrees year-round. The heat pump loops are buried in a freshwater aquifer 170 feet below ground, where the temperature is a constant 70 degrees. The freshwater circuit will heat or cool the saltwater circuits, depending on the need.

“Not only is this more cost-effective than paying to continually heat or cool the tank,” adds Dr. Dindo, “this is in line with all our other efforts to support and promote alternative energy. We already have solar power and a permeable parking lot; this is a natural next step, and we want our visitors to learn about this as well as the rays and sharks.”

Visitors will be able to visit this unique showcase on Saturday, March 16.

### **\*\*\*\* MBAS NEWSLETTER TO BE DELIVERED ELECTRONICALLY \*\*\*\***

Beginning in 2014, the MBAS Newsletter will be delivered electronically. This will save the Society over \$1300 annually as well as reducing waste and saving energy. Currently we print 1000 copies of the newsletter three times a year. The cost of each printing is about \$250 and each mailing is about \$130, for a total of about \$380. So three printings equals \$1160. Add the annual cost of the mailing permit (\$190) and the total cost is \$1350.  
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*Electronic Delivery of MBAS Newsletters, continued  
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In addition to saving money (which may be used for conservation projects), we will be able to provide more timely information in cases of unexpected events.

We will continue to provide printed copies for members who do not use email, and for distribution at libraries and other public places.

If you wish to continue to receive hard copies, please send a letter to MBAS, PO Box 483, Fairhope, AL 36533. Include your name and mailing address.

To receive the electronic version, you must go to the MBAS website ([www.mobilebayaudubon.org](http://www.mobilebayaudubon.org)) and click on the "Click here to sign up for the electronic version of the newsletter" link on the right side of the home page. Do it NOW before you forget!

## MBAS SPRING 2013 CALENDAR

### March

**12 General Meeting.** "Birding Program" presented by **Dr. Bill Summerour**. Come and hear one of the best birders in Alabama. 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center. 7:00 p.m. Bring a friend.

### April

**9 General Meeting.** "Dauphin Island Audubon Sanctuary Update" presented by **Matthew Capps**, Executive Director Dauphin Island Park and Beach Board. Learn how the new agreement with the Weeks Bay Foundation will protect critical birding and wildlife habitat for present and future generations. 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center. 7:00 p.m. Bring a friend.

### May

**14 General Meeting.** "Building Nature's Playground Sculpture" presented by **Dean Mosher**. Come and hear the story behind the epic 40-foot wildlife sculpture in Gautier, Mississippi that was designed and built in Fairhope, Alabama. 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center. 7:00 p.m. Bring a friend.

## Housing Boom Begins Again in Baldwin County

Submitted by Ralph Stemp

Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*) need housing too. In the past they often nested in a cavity formed at the top of a deteriorating wooden fence post. And we know, that convenient situation is rapidly fading away in Baldwin County.

Eastern Bluebirds have survived very well thanks to people putting out simple nesting boxes for them. If you would like to have a nesting box installed on your property, then email Celeste Hinds at [hindsite5@bellsouth.net](mailto:hindsite5@bellsouth.net). Celeste is the long-time Secretary of the unique Bluebird Housing Authority of Baldwin County. She can put you on a list to receive an installed nesting box, free of charge.

### Did You Know?

By John Borom

Least Sandpipers (*Calidris minutilla*), are the smallest shorebirds in the world. The length is from five to six inches and they generally weigh less than an ounce and the wingspan is about 11 inches. They are similar in appearance to other sandpipers, but they differ in having dull yellow-green legs while the other species have dark legs. The black bill is about the length of the head and slightly drooped with a fine tip. They favor wet, muddy, or grassy areas and salt marshes and inland ponds where they forage with their heads down, picking for insects, crustaceans, small worms and mollusks.

For such small creatures, Least Sandpipers migrate all the way from where they breed in northern Alaska to Newfoundland south to James Bay and Nova Scotia. They winter from Oregon and North Carolina south along the Pacific and Atlantic Coasts and the Gulf Coast through Mexico, Central America to the Brazilian rain forest. Not necessarily needing coastal shorelines, they will also winter in open fields, along rivers, and any productive wetlands. They arrive on their breeding grounds from May to June. Nesting occurs in a grass or moss lined cup nest in open marshes. Usually four pinkish buff colored and blotched with dark brown eggs are laid. The eggs are mostly incubated by the male for 19 to 22 days, and the female migrates south just after eggs hatch.

The eggs and chicks are preyed upon by gulls, foxes and a host of other hungry animals. Adult birds mostly fall victim to habitat loss.

## Eastern Shore Birding Field Trips Winter / Spring 2013 Calendar

Here is the spring 2013 schedule! About a week before each field trip, I will send out an email giving details to those who have signed up. This includes meeting time and place, lunch plans, etc. If you are not currently receiving the emails and wish to, please email me at [gplindsey@bellsouth.net](mailto:gplindsey@bellsouth.net) or call 929-2837.

**March 20** – Blakeley State Park

**April 3** – Dauphin Island - Spring Migration

**April 10** - Ft. Morgan – Bird Banding and Spring Migration

**April 17** – Extra trip to DI or Ft. Morgan if birds are good

**May 1** – Boat Trip - place, time, leader TBA

**May 15** – Mystery Trip – place, time, leader TBA

Although their numbers are stable, recent surveys have shown the eastern United States population to be in decline. They are common on the Alabama coast from July through May.

If you would like to learn more about birds in our area, come along on some of our field trips and attend our meetings.



Least Sandpiper, Photo by John Borom

This photo was taken in a mud puddle along the road at Battleship Parkway.



**When: Saturday, April 6, 2013**

**What: Help build a Living Shoreline on Mobile Bay**

**Where: Pelican Point, South of Fairhope**

Join Alabama Coastal Foundation, Mobile Baykeeper, The Nature Conservancy and The Ocean Foundation as we build a 224-foot living shoreline as part of the 100-1000: Restore Coastal Alabama project. The project will ultimately build 100 miles of oyster reef to protect and restore 1,000 acres of marsh.

We need 500 volunteers to help place 20,500 interlocking blocks along the shoreline of Mobile Bay, forming the foundation of four reefs. Each building block is 35 pounds. Due to the heavy lifting involved in the event, it is not suitable for children under 16. There will also be jobs for those who cannot do the heavy lifting, so recruit your friends and family (especially the young, strong ones)!

Details and online registration are available at [100-1000.org](http://100-1000.org) See you there!

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## **Volunteers needed for Water Testing**

By Sally DeMott

Few people are aware of the Alabama Water Watch Program. According to the Alabama Water Watch Website (<http://www.alabamawaterwatch.org/about/>) the program is “a citizen volunteer water monitoring program covering all of the major river basins of the state”. Michael Shelton, Coastal Training Program Coordinator at the Weeks Bay Reserve, coordinates the program for the Weeks Bay Watershed. Currently volunteers are needed to test the waters of Fish River, especially north of Route 104.

If you enjoyed playing with a chemistry set when you were twelve, you will love this! All you need is about two hours a month, which includes travel time to your assigned site, collecting the sample, running the tests, and reporting the findings via the internet. The testing takes place on the 3rd weekend of the month between the hours of 10:00 am and 4:00 pm. After collecting a water sample, you perform simple tests for dissolved oxygen, pH, turbidity, hardness, alkalinity, and (if you have access to an incubator), *E-coli*. Training and equipment for the testing are provided through the Weeks Bay Reserve. Once you are trained, you are assigned a specific location to do the testing.

If you are interested in becoming involved in this important activity, please contact Mike Shelton ([michael.shelton@dcnr.alabama.gov](mailto:michael.shelton@dcnr.alabama.gov)) or Sally DeMott ([sallydemott@bellsouth.net](mailto:sallydemott@bellsouth.net)). Once there are enough volunteers, Mike will set up a day-long training session. After that, you will be assigned a location for testing and will be issued the equipment and chemicals for the testing.

If you have any questions, please contact Sally DeMott at [sallydemott@bellsouth.net](mailto:sallydemott@bellsouth.net).

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## 4th Annual Louisiana Trip

April 12, 13, and 14

Here we go again. This will be our 4<sup>th</sup> trip to Louisiana and this year we plan to go to the City of New Orleans. Can you believe neither football, nor the Quarter, nor shopping are on the itinerary? However, we will take time to enjoy some of the world's best food.

Once again, there are so many wonderful places to choose from to see birds, it is difficult to choose one and not another. The plan is to see as many birds as possible. We will visit wetlands, bottomland hardwood forests, lakes, rivers, bayous and some parks.

We will have guides from Orleans Audubon Society and the Tulane University School of Ornithology and other guides are managers of the Refuges we hope to get to. These are some of the places we are considering; the Bonnet Carre' Spillway, the Bayou Sauvage N. W. R., Big Branch N.W.R., Breton Sound Marina and Docks, and the Jean Lafitte N HP, the Barataria Unit, and the Chalmette Battlefield Unit.

So, don't delay making your plans. We have limited space and it is filling up fast. Hotel accommodations are pending and will be announced as soon as possible.

I can be reached at:  
251-709-7765 or 251-928-8967  
[elivaday@bellsouth.net](mailto:elivaday@bellsouth.net)

Eleanor Livaudais



Cedar Waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) in Fairhope, Photo by John Borom

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### Annual Picnic May 25, 2013 Weeks Bay Reserve

Come enjoy a ride on the Weeks Bay Reserve pontoon boat, eat good food, and visit with other members of the Mobile Bay Audubon Society!

The MBAS annual picnic will be held at the Tonsmeire Center of the Weeks Bay Reserve on May 25, 2013, beginning at noon. Please bring a pot luck dish to share. If the weather is nice, you might want to bring folding chairs and sit outside and enjoy the view.

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**!!!! Help build a living shoreline along Mobile Bay or assist with water  
quality testing in Fish River. See page 4 for details. !!!!**  
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## **Mobile Bay Audubon Wants You! Join Today!**

Every membership supports Audubon's vital efforts to protect birds, wildlife and natural habitats. As a member, you'll become an important part of our chapter and receive a host of benefits, including:

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- A one-year subscription (3 issues) to our chapter newsletter.
- Automatic membership in National Audubon Society, and a one-year subscription to Audubon, its award-winning magazine
- Admission to Audubon Centers across the country

To join, go to their webpage [www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org) and click on Member Center. Follow that to the page to join. If you do not have access to the web, you can send your membership information to National Audubon Society, Membership Data Center, PO Box 422247, Palm Coast, FL 32142-6716. A one year membership costs \$20. Be sure to include our chapter code A01 and 7XCH so that you will receive our local newsletters as well.