Now looking toward its fifth year in October 2008, the Alabama Coastal BirdFest is making a significant impact on the economy of the area and drawing visitors from all over the Southeast and beyond. According to a study conducted by Semoon Chang, Ph.D, Professor of Economics at the University of South Alabama, nearly half of BirdFest’s paying participants (those who registered for a guided tour or evening event) traveled here from outside of the immediate area, which Dr. Chang considered to be Baldwin and Mobile counties, Jackson County in Mississippi, and Escambia County in Florida. “Those coming from outside that area included 20 from the rest of Alabama, seven from the rest of Florida, seven from Georgia, seven from Louisiana, seven from Texas, and many others from Arkansas, California, Kentucky, Michigan, other parts of Mississippi and Florida, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Virginia, Washington, and Canada.”

John Borom, chairman of the Birdfest steering committee, said this emphasizes the wide appeal of birding on the Gulf Coast. “People appreciate the wonderful opportunities we have for watching birds and other wildlife here. And it emphasizes how important it is that we continue to work to preserve our natural environment.”

Dr. Chang’s survey also highlighted the buying power of birders. “Of the paying participants, no less than 72.4 percent had household incomes of $50,000 or more and nearly a quarter of the participants had household incomes of $100,000 or more.”

According to John Borom, all of the survey results reflect national trends. “A survey by the National Forest Service found that in 2003, 89.8 percent of the U.S. population went bird watching, and these people are very likely to travel a great distance for a chance to see a particular bird. Other studies have indicated that people who participate in bird watching come from households with higher than average incomes, and they are willing to spend money on their hobbies. We’re more than happy to welcome them to do that here.”

Proceeds from the first four years of the Alabama Coastal BirdFest have been
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donated toward the purchase of habitat land in Baldwin and Mobile Counties. “With proceeds from 2007, we have dedicated $10,000 to be used as matching funds for a grant for the purchase of four lots on Dauphin Island, adjacent to the Shell Mounds Bird Sanctuary,” Borom said. “This is land that would be forever set aside for wildlife and never developed or sold for commercial development. This is the type of land preservation that we need in Alabama, and I am very pleased that the Alabama Coastal BirdFest can help with this project.”

Organizers are already making plans for the 2008 Alabama Coastal BirdFest, scheduled for Oct. 16-19. Details as they are announced will be posted at www.alabamacoastalbirdfest.com.
Black-chinned Hummingbird

Black-chinned Hummingbirds are migratory and spend most of the winter in Mexico, but a few linger at feeders around the Gulf of Mexico and in the Southeast, a recent pattern of occurrence. They are rare around Mobile Bay in the fall and winter. The adult male is very similar to the Ruby-throated Hummingbird but has a glossy purple throat band instead of the bright ruby throat band. Adult females are often difficult to identify.

A beautiful adult male Black-chinned Hummingbird stayed around my back yard from November through January, and I really enjoyed watching him feed and rest on bushes. In January, I saw another unusual looking hummingbird resting on a camellia bush. It was very different because of a bright pink spot on its head. I could not find one that looked like it in my field guides, so I called my good friend Dr. Bill Summerour who often helps me identify tough birds. Bill said that the bird looked like a female Black-chinned Hummingbird that had been banded and the bright pink spot had been painted on the head to help identify the bird. He also said that Fred Basset probably had banded the bird. I called Fred and he asked me where I lived. When I told him the location, he said that the bird had been banded and marked two days before about a mile from my yard. It is always interesting to observe and think about the other creatures that share our world with us.

Five Rivers Delta Safari

Pontoon boat 2-hour tour of the Upper Delta departs Five Rivers Complex at 10:00 a.m. Saturday March 8. Cost is $17/person. Bring your own beverage or purchase water or soft drinks aboard for $1.50 each. Meet on the deck near the Five Rivers Gift Shop and be ready to board the boat by 9:45. In case of rain an alternate date will be arranged. Limit 25 persons. Register by mailing your check for $17 made out to Five Rivers Delta Safaris – mail to Celeste Hinds, 112 Lake Ridge Dr., Fairhope, AL 36532.

Buy Raffle Tickets
Help Dauphin Island

Terry Hartley has generously donated one of this beautiful bird photographs as a fundraiser. The money raised from the sale of raffle tickets ($1.00 each) will be given to the Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuary. This industrious group is buying property on the island to save for the birds.

The raffle drawing will be held at our March meeting, Tuesday, March 11. If the winner is not present, the winning ticket number will be announced in the next newsletter or you may call Elizabeth (643-7257) or Judy (251-964-5387). The winner will get to choose the photograph of his/her choice. Terry’s photographs are on display at the 5 Rivers Delta Center.
What: Birdathon—Birding for fund and funds
When: Any 24-hour period this spring
Where: Any place you find birds. Dauphin Island and Fort Morgan are prime birding spots.

For many years people have been strolling, walking and running for worthy causes. Our society counts birds! Our Birdathon funds are used to place Audubon Adventures in 4th and 5th grade classrooms. Audubon Adventures is a complete science curriculum kit that the students and teacher can use all year. The goal of Audubon Adventures is “connecting students to nature.”

We are asking each member to participate in this worthwhile endeavor. Think how many students we could reach if each member gave at least $10.00. A $40.00 donation will provide a kit for one classroom the teacher can use all year.

To be a participant in the 2008 Birdathon, here’s what you do:

Be a Counter: Join a Birdathon group and count species during any 24 hours period.
Get sponsors to make pledges for each species you count.

Be a Sponsor: Pledge any amount . . . 10 cents, 50 cents, $1.00 or any amount per species counted. You may choose to give any amount or a one-time gift.

Your contribution is Tax Deductible!

Thank you for participating!

Elizabeth Williams
Birdathon Coordinator
(251)643-7257

☐ I want to be a part of this fun/fund raising, worthwhile program.
☐ I pledge _____________ for each species counted.
☐ Enclosed is my one-time gift of ________

Name: __________________________ Phone: __________________
Address: ________________________________________________

Make check payable to Mobile Bay Audubon Society and place in the enclosed envelop or mail to Mobile Bay Audubon Society, P O Box 483, Fairhope, AL 36532.
A Success Story

Kudos to all those who helped to make the School Film Week a big success. Tom Sterling was well received in each school. This year the schools could choose the film that they wished to show: “The Misty Isles of Scotland” or “Bhutan, The Cloud Kingdom”. We appreciate Lloyd Scott at the Environmental Studies Center coordinating the public school programs. The films were shown at Dodge Elementary School Mobile Christian School, Clark Magnet School, Robertsdale Elementary School, Haskew Elementary School, Government street Baptist School, Hall Elementary School, and St. Luke’s Episcopal School. The Bhutan film was shown Tuesday, January 29 at the 5 Rivers Resort Center. A large group enjoyed this entertaining and informative program.

Daphne Field Trip

Friday, February 29th—Depart Fairhope Unitarian parking lot at 8:00 a, or meet at Alabama Coastal Trail Birding Site No. 25 beside the new D’Olive Bay Restaurant/Shell Station in Daphne about 8:25. After birding this area we’ll go to ACBT Site 24 Bayfront Park in Daphne. Check out the first pier then take the boardwalk to the second pier and continue walking up to Village Point Park via Jackson Oak. A van or car will ferry drivers back to Bayfront to get their vehicles. This is a nice hike but those with walking limitations may choose to not walk up to Jackson Oak—rather go back to the vehicles at Bayfront. I guess the entire hike is nearly two miles—but we walk slowly and make many stops.

A little history about Jackson Oak—the Historic Village Point Preserve is home to one of the largest and most historic live oaks in Alabama. This giant tree, which is 95 feet tall, with a circumference of 28 feet, was a landmark in the eighteenth century. It is shown as a survey line marker in the original Spanish Land Grant Survey map of 1787. According to local traditions, General Andrew Jackson made a speech to his army from one of its massive limbs, while he was en route to Pensacola during the War of 1812.

Experts say there is no really good way to determine the ages of old trees, but this one was large enough to be shown as a landmark on the Spanish Land Grant survey maps, meaning the tree must be at least three hundred years old and it may well have been growing here in 1492.

After this field trip, you are invited to join some of us for a Dutch Treat lunch at Vinney’s in Daphne. For more info call Celeste Hinds, 928-6526.

Wildlife Heritage License

You can help support conservation efforts in Alabama by purchasing the new Wildlife Heritage License online. Please go to www.outdooralabama.com and click on licenses, click on Wildlife Heritage License, and then click on watch the video. This is a simple and important way that we can be good stewards of our environment and help birds. I would like to encourage our members and friends to do this.

John Borom
Registers are ringing for businesses as they cash in on tourists’ fascination with Mother Nature, a growing trend known as Nature Tourism.

Nature Tourism is big business. If wildlife-related recreation were a company its revenue of $45 billion, as stated in a 2006 national survey, would place it on the Forbes Global 2000 list alongside some of the most influential companies in the world (formerly the Fortune 500 list).

The latest figures from the 2006 National Survey of Wildlife Related-Recreation, conducted by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service every 5 years since 1955, show that nearly 90 million Americans (38% of the population 16 years and older) hunted, fished or watched wildlife in 2006. They spent $120 billion on wildlife-related activities. Thirty million Americans (13%) fished, 12.5 million (5%) hunted and 71 million (28%) watched wildlife. Sportspersons spent $75 billion and wildlife watchers spent $45 billion.

Alabama’s Travel & Tourism Industry contributed more than $8 billion to our economy in 2006 and sustained more than 160,000 jobs. Nature tourism is one emerging sector with enormous growth potential. Our vast natural diversity spans wetland and earthy habitats from the Gulf beaches to the lower Appalachian Mountains. In fact, the Mobile-Tensaw Delta is known as one of the most significant and valuable delta complexes in the nation. In 2007, Alabama’s coastal beaches attracted more than four million visitors who spent over two billion dollars. While everyone recognizes that our natural resources—beaches, waterways and seafood—are a primary reason those visitors come, effectively communicating with local businesses about the economic value of healthy ecosystems and educating them about the sustainable use of those natural resources is a challenging task.

There are expanding opportunities to create new nature tourism jobs in Alabama as the state’s population grows: especially in the coastal areas of Mobile and Baldwin counties.

A recent survey conducted by the Alabama Gulf Coast Convention & Visitors Bureau revealed that nearly 300,000 tourists (23% of our annual visitors) listed bird watching or wildlife-related recreation as activities they enjoyed here, up from 100,000 visitors in 2002.

Visitor spending increased from $37 million in 2002 to over $100 million in 2006. The Alabama Coastal Birding trail website has experienced a 91% increase in traffic since 2002.

Alabama’s natural assets rank among the top 3-5 states in terms of overall biodiversity and ranks first among certain species such as mussels, but we also have the unfortunate honor of ranking second, only after Hawaii, in the number of species lost to extinction. (The Nature Conservancy 2002)

Ever-increasing human population growth is effectively shrinking our natural resources. Economic development and growth can occur without creating extreme negative consequences for our natural assets. The more we understand about the habitats and species that make our state so unique, the better we will be prepared to accommodate our living library of wildlife. It is important to continually create opportunities for the public to enjoy the wildlife in our state and to become educated about the requirements for healthy ecological communities.

In the field, well-planned and managed nature tourism businesses have proven to be one of the most powerful incentives to conserve and protect biodiversity. However, tourism in key biodiversity areas can pose a threat, in other words tourists could “love a resource to death” through overuse. For Alabama to realize the economic potential of nature tourism, significant baseline issues must be addressed that will lead to a trained workforce for an expanded nature tourism industry.

The Auburn University Marine and Extension Center in partnership with the Alabama Gulf Coast Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium has launched a Nature Tourism Initiative to expedite the expansion of the coastal nature tourism industry through applied research programs, education, marketing and promotion to improve the economic return of existing nature tourism businesses and facilitate the development of sustainable new businesses. A survey of existing nature tourism businesses is currently being
conducted to determine the specific economic impact this sector represents apart from the current data that monitors revenue in a variety of sectors including accommodations, food service, retail shopping and attractions. Positive progress is already taking place here on the Gulf Coast through the Nature Tourism Initiative. The Alabama Gulf Coast Convention & Visitors Bureau is coordinating the process of designating a state and national scenic byway along the Gulf Coast, including Mobile Bay; this will offer a marketable entity for showcasing the area’s nature tourism assets and provide a venue for promoting good stewardship of them. The potential for new businesses along the byway is a viable solution to the demographic changes our working waterfront communities are experiencing as their traditional maritime jobs are displaced by service and factory jobs.

For the nature tourism industry to become sustainable in local communities a wide cross-section of Alabamians must be fully engaged and should involve cooperation among private citizens, industries, municipalities, business, private organizations and the whole spectrum of governments from the local to the federal level. It is crucial that we all work together to protect and preserve our natural heritage and assure that future generations inherit an environment in which green is not only the color of money.

Joanne McDonough
Nature Tourism Specialist
Auburn University Marine Extension & Research Center
Sea Grant Extension
Alabama Gulf Coast Convention & Visitors Bureau

CALENDAR

Mar. 11 Board Meeting 6:30 p.m. General meeting 7:30 p.m. “Antarctica Adventure—Following Shackleton’s Footsteps” presented by Chester McConnell, Five Rivers—Alabama’s Delta Resource Center. Bring a friend.

Mar. 29 Hummer Bird Study Group Spring Bird Banding Begins.

Bird banding will take place at Fort Morgan State Park. They will band all species that get into the nets including a few hummingbirds. Banding will be from dusk until mid afternoon. There is a charge to get onto the State Park property. Once you get onto the park the bird banding is free. Bring a chair for each one in your party, water, bug spray, your camera and lunch if needed.

Apr. 8 Board Meeting 6:30 p.m. General meeting 7:30 p.m. “Caves in South Alabama” presented by Steven Carey. Five Rivers—Alabama’s Delta Resource Center. Bring a friend.

Apr. 10 Hummer Bird Study Group Spring Bird Banding Ends

Apr. 19 Earth Day Fairhope Pier and Park 10:00 am-6:00 pm. Free Admission

May 13 Board Meeting 6:30 p.m. General meeting 7:30 p.m. “Get to Know the Local Spiders” presented by Roger Clay. Five Rivers—Alabama’s Delta Resource Center. Bring a friend.

May 19 Annual picnic, 4:00 pm, A Lovell Farm in Loxley off County Road 64. Turn left across from the entrance to Valmour Subdivision. Chapter will furnish fried chicken. Bring vegetables, salads, desserts and a friend.

May 30 Field trip to Gaillard 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. to 1:00 p.m. For reservations, contact John Borom at (251)990-0423.
Mobile Bay Audubon Wants You!

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 dynamic chapter and receive a host of benefits including:

- A 1-year subscription (3 issues, one per quarter, excluding summer) of our chapter newsletter.
- Automatic membership in National Audubon Society, and a 1-year subscription (4 issues, one per quarter) of Audubon, its award-winning magazine.
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- A 10% discount on products at select Audubon Nature Stores and more!

Yes! I want to join Mobile Bay Audubon and National Audubon Society!

- $20 - 1 year Introductory Rate
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- $30 - 2 year Special Rate
- My check is enclosed
- Please bill me

Name: ____________________________
Address: ____________________________
City/ST/Zip: ____________________________
Telephone: ____________________________

Make check payable to National Audubon Society and mail to: National Audubon Society, Membership Data Center, P O Box 52529, Boulder, CO 80322-2529

Chapter Code: A01 7XCH

“The struggle to save the global environment is in one way much more difficult than the struggle to vanquish Hitler, for this time the war is with ourselves We are the enemy, just as we have only ourselves as allies.” Al Gore