



# Mobile Bay Audubon Society

A Chapter of the National Audubon Society Since 1971

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## What Are The Real Impacts Of The Motor-sports Park?

*Chester McConnell*

For several years Gulf Coast Entertainment, LLC (GCE) has attempted to get permits to construct a \$625 million "Motor-sports Park" in Mobile County, AL. The proposed project would be located on a 2,600 acre tract which includes 819 acres of wetlands, over 9.5 miles streams and an estimated population of 45 gopher tortoises (threatened species). According to GCE, the originally proposed complex would contain an asphalt speedway one mile long, a 3 mile road course, a quarter-mile drag strip, a dirt oval track, a Kart track, a moto-cross track, a 5,000 space/140 acre motor home/RV park, residential space, 44 acres of industrial space, retail shopping, hotels, entertainment district, impermeable parking spaces, 35 miles of paved access roads, and onsite water detention and retention basins. As a result of all the development, the original project design would have had destroyed 177 acres of wetlands and 16,350 linear feet of streams. Virtually all of the upland long-leaf pine and hardwoods on sandhills will be likely destroyed or altered as a result of the Motor-sports Park construction.

Mobile Bay Audubon Society and other groups opposed the project due to the obvious severe adverse

effects to the natural environment. We urged the U. S Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) to require an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to properly evaluate the project. We did so because we know there will be numerous other costly items that the taxpayers will be called on to pay for. On August 27, 2007 the Corps initially acted responsibly and notified GCE that an EIS would be required. Unfortunately, this requirement was not enforced later in the process. Read on.

Believing that an EIS would require two to three years to prepare, GCE decided to revise and decrease the scale of their project. They believed that environmental impacts could be reduced and avoid requirements for an EIS. GCE eliminated 3 of the originally planned 6 race tracks and reduced the length of another track. These changes would reduce the destruction of wetlands from 177 acres to 84 acres. Likewise, destructive impacts to streams would be reduced from 16,350 linear feet to 3,119 linear feet. Forest destruction on uplands will remain unchanged.

Even with the reduced impacts Mobile Bay Audubon Society still contends that the adverse impacts remain unacceptable. We met with

GCE officials to discuss our concerns, especially the wetland losses. On the invitation of GCE, Audubon and three other conservation groups located several more suitable sites, with less wetlands, where the Motor-sports Park could be located. We furnished maps and landowner information to GCE. GCE reviewed the sites and wrote: "There were admittedly other sites investigated which may have presented fewer environmental challenges, but these sites presented other major challenges which could not be overcome, or simply did not meet the development criteria essential for this project to move forward. They were sites on which this development would simply not have been financially viable and would not have been built." Audubon contends that possibly the chosen site also may not have been "financially viable" if the Corps properly enforced applicable federal laws.

The Corps made no agency review of Audubon's and other groups suggested sites and accepted GCE's assessment. The Corps then reversed its earlier decision and decided not to require an EIS for the Motor-sports Park. Finally, the Corps prepared an Environmental Assessment which explains their decision that GCE's Motor-sports

(Continued on page 2)

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(Continued from 1)  
Park will have no significant impacts. The Corps determined that the least environmentally damaging alternative had been selected. Despite opposition from Audubon and several other groups and many individuals, the Corps authorized a Section 404 permit for the project on December 5, 2008. The Corps included a number of legal conditions and mitigation requirements in the permit. The Corps wrote GCE that "No work

authorized by the permit shall commence until a final mitigation plan has been approved by the Corps. Wetland mitigation measures must offset the loss of 84 acres of wetlands. Fifty-percent of the wetland measures shall include the preservation of 418 acres of high quality wetlands adjacent to Chickasaw Creek and the remaining 50 percent provided through purchased credits from an approved mitigation bank. The mitigation plan shall also include

measures to offset impacts to 3,119 linear feet of stream. In addition the plan must include the preservation of a protective buffer 50 to 100 feet in width along 18,302 linear feet of Chickasaw Creek. All on-site mitigation areas (418 wetland acres and Chickasaw Creek buffer) shall be permanently protected from future construction or development impacts in perpetuity. The wetland areas will be described in a Conservation Easement or

Restrictive Covenant to be recorded in the Mobile County Courthouse before the start of construction. In addition, Best Management Practices prescribed by Alabama Department of Environmental Management shall be implemented to minimize erosion, siltation and damage to adjacent wetlands and streams. And, before construction, the Gopher tortoise population must be removed from the property and relocated at the Powell Creek Conservation Area in northwest Mobile County.

Admittedly GCE's revised Motor-sports Park plan includes reduced environmental impacts to the wetlands on the proposed site. Likewise the proposals have improved for mitigation of adverse environmental impacts to the wetlands that will be destroyed. Are these concessions by GCE adequate? Certainly, Mobile Bay Audubon Society does not believe so. But we cannot prove all of what we believe because our request for information was either denied to us or was never produced. We, nor any of the public, had reasonable access to available information on which to properly evaluate GCE's project or its impacts.

What we do know is that preservation of the 418 acres of wetlands on the site should not be considered mitigation for losses. The federal Clean Water Act already provides protection for these wetlands, assuming the law is enforced. We also know that many millions of taxpayer dollars will be required to build new roads and upgrade existing ones so that people can drive to the Motor-sports Park. Likewise we know that many more millions of taxpayer dollars will be needed to upgrade Prichard's sewage treatment facility so it can handle sewage from the thousands of people who will visit and live at the Motor-sports Park. And there is much more. We contend that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mobile District failed in its responsibilities to properly require disclosure and evaluation of this planned intensive development on 2,600 acres. The Corps has the legal

authority and responsibility to require an Environmental Impact Statement for this proposal. Such a disclosure document would provide the public with knowledge about the major proposal and aid us in understanding how public resources will be affected. When our government agencies and public officials fail to carry out their legal responsibilities we must seek other remedies.



## Peregrine Falcon

John Borom

Peregrine Falcons ( *Falco peregrinus* ) are about the size of American Crows--females are larger and more powerful than males. They are nature's fastest fliers and are spectacular hunters specializing in ducks, other wetland bird species and pigeons. Their prey is taken in the air and peregrines have been clocked diving at speeds of up to 220 miles per hour! The species has nearly worldwide distribution, but suffered drastic population declines throughout their range as the result of pesticide contamination. Shortly after World War II the pesticide DDT was widely applied to crops and mosquito-infested areas. Carried up the food chain to birds of prey, the poison caused eggshells to thin. Some eggs crushed under the weight of incubating birds, and others failed to hatch. By the mid-1960's, no Peregrine Falcons were breeding east of the Mississippi River, and they were in severe decline throughout much of the western United States. Now, thanks to the ban on the use of DDT, captive-breeding programs and natural colonization, the peregrine population is slowly recovering. Migrant peregrines can be seen on the Alabama coast after the first cold front in the fall and some remain all winter. The

beautiful photo of a Peregrine Falcon with its prey on a Dauphin Island sand dune was taken by Lisa Comer while she was on a BirdFest fieldtrip on October 18, 2008.

## Film Week a Big Success January 26-30, 2009

### Film: Alien Plants and Wildlife in Florida and Along the Gulf Coast

The film was shown in 10 schools with one night showing at the Environmental Studies Center. In the film the students learned of the many alien or introduced species (plants, birds and wildlife) that have taken over the habitat of our native species and the impact that this has had. Tom Sterling, photographer/naturalist, explained how some of the alien species were introduced by accident but most were brought in by man. The film shows many mammals, dozens of bird species and over 50 alien fish and reptiles. At the end of each session, the students were given time for questions and discussion. Such an ambitious program involves many volunteers. We thank Lloyd Scott, Director of the Environmental Studies Center, who coordinates the public school schedule. The film was shown at Dodge Elementary School, Mobile Christian School, Clark Magnet School, Robertsdale Elementary School, Baker High School, St. Luke's Elementary School, George Hall Elementary School, Government Street Baptist School, Hollinger's Island School and Cottage Hill School. Dinner hosts were Bob and Laura Ridgeway, the Lovell family in Loxley, John and Bev Winn and John and Charlene Dindo. Laurie and Charlie Bailey graciously open their home to Tom for the week. We appreciate and thank our sponsors: Degussa, Ciba Specialty, Dupont and John and Bev Winn. The program would not be possible without their financial help.

# Birdathon 2009



*What: Birdathon—Birding for fun 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 2009 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.



# ANNUAL Audubon Picnic

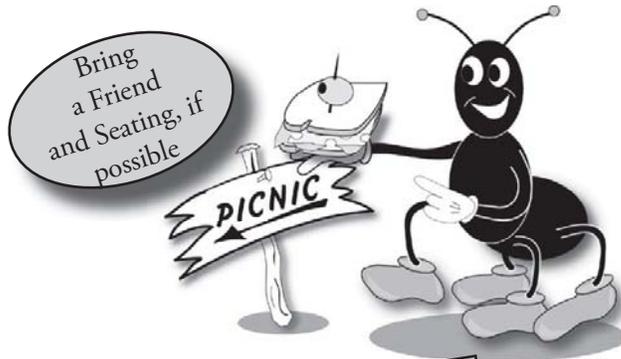
Lovell Pond, Loxley

Saturday, May 16, 12:30 p.m. til

Good old fashioned hamburgers & hot dogs with  
all the trimmings

Sweet tea, ice furnished

Bring chips, dips & deserts



RSVP by May 11 to the following:  
747-4818 Cell, 947-5972 Work,  
964-5387 Farm (night)

### Direction

From Hwy 59 @ Burris Market, take County Road 64 West, go 1.3 miles, take left  
From County Road 64 going east to Loxley, @ Fish River Bridge, go 3.5 miles, take right  
Turn into driveway with iron wagon wheels, follow signs past house to pond.  
"Valamur Subdivision Entrance" is across road from driveway to picnic.



On January 2 a beautiful male Snow Bunting in winter plumage turned up in Magnolia Springs at the landfill and photographed by Dr. Bill Summerour. It was the first record for the state of Alabama documented by photos and at least three experienced observers. The beautiful Hooded Oriole was seen in early February by Kathy Hicks in Barnwell. It was the first one ever reported in the state of Alabama.



*Photos by Bill Summerour*

*Dr. Summerour is the speaker at the barbeque and seafood social on Friday evening at the next Alabama Coastal BirdFest scheduled for October 15-18, 2009*

# Calendar

## March

- |    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                        |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| 7  | Coastal Birding Assn: Trip to Blakely Island Mud Lakes for causeway birding and shorebirds. Meet at the Alabama Game and Fish Commission Office parking lot adjacent to Five Rivers Center on the Mobile Causeway. We will bird the general Five Rivers area and the the State Dock's Blakeley Island Mud Lake property for shorebirds. You must have completed and sent in your yearly hold harmless form to enter the State Dock's property (go to the AOS website for instructions and forms). | 8:00 a.m.              |
| 10 | Board Meeting<br>General Meeting, " <b>Trip to the Galapagos Islands</b> " presented by <b>Chester McConnell</b> , Retired wildlife biologists and Mobile Bay Audubon Society Board Member. Five Rivers Delta Resource Center. Bring a friend.w                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 6:30 p.m.<br>7:30 p.m. |

## April

- |       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                        |
|-------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1     | Meet at Fairhope Unitarian parking lot for trip to Fort Morgan. <b>Note this trip leaves at 7:00 a.m.</b> For additional information contact Celeste Hinds , 928-6526                                                                                                                | 7:00 a.m.              |
| 4     | Meet at the Fairhope Unitarian parking lot for trip to Mariculture Center, Gulf Shores Water Treatment Plant and Uzzell property. Take picnic lunch. On the way down we will make a quick pit stop at Hardee's in Foley. For additional information contact Celeste Hinds , 928-6526 | 8:00 a.m.              |
| 4     | Coastal Birding Assn: Fort Morgan, Baldwin County, for spring migrants. Meet at the Stable Grounds near the fort entrance. Please note there is a \$5.00 entrance fee to bird at the fort.                                                                                           | 8:00 a.m.              |
| 8     | Field trip to Fort Morgan; also departing at 7:00 a.m. from the Fairhope Unitarian Church in hopes of arriving at banding site before the migrants take off. For additional information contact Celeste Hinds , 928-6526                                                             | 7:00 a.m.              |
| 11    | Coastal Birding Assn: Bring a friend field trip to Dauphin Island for spring migrants. Meet at Shell Mound Park on the island and bring a friend to introduce to birding.                                                                                                            | 8:00 a.m.              |
| 14    | Board Meeting<br>General Meeting, " <b>Road kills on Battleship Parkway and the new Alabama Red-bellied Turtle fence</b> " presented by <b>Dr. David Nelson</b> , University of South Alabama Department of Biology. Five Rivers Delta Resource Center. Bring a friend.              | 6:30 p.m.<br>7:30 p.m. |
| 17-19 | Alabama Ornithological Society (AOS) Spring Meeting on Dauphin Island. Check at the AOS website and spring AOS newsletter for updates on registration and field trip schedules.                                                                                                      |                        |
| 18    | Leave the Fairhope Unitarian Church for Blakeley State Park. 3\$ entrance fee. If the park isn't open when we get there, we will bird the area near the entrance for a short while. Long hike. Take a picnic lunch                                                                   | 8:00 a.m.              |
| 22    | Marsh bird tour of Weeks Bay on pontoon boat. 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. Requesting \$10 donation to Weeks Bay Foundation. For information and reservation call Gaye Lindsey 929-2837. (Space is limited to 30)                                                                          | 7:00 a.m.              |

## May

- |    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                        |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| 9  | Coastal Birding Assn.: Splinter Hill Bog for pitcher plants and Bachman's Sparrows. Meet at the Chevron gas station located at Exit 45 off Interstate 65 in Baldwin County. From there we will carpool to the Splinter Hill Bog to look for sparrows as well as pitcher plants and other pine savannah plant species.                           | 8:00 a.m.              |
| 12 | Board Meeting<br>General Meeting, " <b>Additional Sites along the Alabama Coastal Birding Trail and the New County Birding Trails throughout Alabama</b> " presented by <b>Eric Soehren</b> , terrestrial zoologists Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Lands Division. Five Rivers Delta Resource Center. Bring a friend | 6:30 p.m.<br>7:30 p.m. |
| 16 | Annual Picnic at the Lovell farm (see page 5 for details)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 12:30 p.m.             |

- 30 Coastal Birding Assn: Gaillard Island, Mobile Bay, for nesting pelicans, gulls and terns. Meet at 7257 Bay Road. If you plan to join the Coastal Birding Assn. on this trip you must contact Howard Horne by phone (252)605-9043 or email [hhorne@earthlink.net](mailto:hhorne@earthlink.net) about 2 weeks before the trip date to reserve a spot on the boat to the island. 7:00 a.m.

## June

- 19 Field atrip to Gaillard Island in Mobile Bay to observe nesting Brown Pelicans as well as gulls, terns, and Black Skimmers. Meet at Beachcomber Maarine Supply at Dog River in MobileCounty going south, take the first left at the sournth end of the Dog River Bridge. There will be a \$15 per person fee. Limited to 20 people. For reservations contact John Borom at (251)990-0423. 9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

**If you have any questions about any of the Coastal Birding Assn. trips, call Howard Horne at (251)605-9043 or Chazz Hesselein at (251)666-3118. Field trips may be canceled due to adverse weather or other reasons, so make sure and call Howard or Chazz if in doubt.**

From time to time there are additoions or changes to filed trips. Please go to [www.mobilebayaudubon.org](http://www.mobilebayaudubon.org) for updated calendar events.

# Birdfest Stewardship

Fran Morley

migratory birds that pass through here have a place to rest and eat,” said BirdFest chairman **John Borom**. “As we all know, land on the coast is expensive, so we are happy that we can do a part toward helping these organizations purchase land that will be protected habitat.”

BirdFest proceeds come from event fees, merchandise sales, and donations from sponsors and supporters. In 2008,

Foundation, The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, The Talking Phone Book, City of Fairhope, Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce, and Gulf Shores Convention & Visitors Bureau. “We also want to recognize Cub Scout Troop 47 of Fairhope for their help,” Borom said. “The boys and their parents built bluebird houses for us to give away and supervised the birdhouse build at the Expo, helping more than 200 kids build their own birdhouse or feeder. If that was not enough, they also made a small donation to BirdFest with proceeds from the drink and popcorn they offered that day. These are fine young boys, and I am honored that they and their families and their leaders are a part of BirdFest.”



**Dr. John Porter, executive director of Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries, Inc. (DIBS) and Venetia Friend, DIBS board member, accept a check for \$10,000 from Dr. John Borom, chairman of the Alabama Coastal BirdFest.**

Since 2004, the Alabama Coastal BirdFest has introduced thousands of locals to the joys of birding, welcomed hundreds of birders from all over the U.S. and Canada to our piece of heaven, and donated more than \$50,000 toward the preservation and protection of birding and wildlife habitat land in Mobile and Baldwin counties. This year, with combined proceeds from the 2007 and 2008 events, the John L. Borom Alabama Coastal BirdFest donated \$10,000 to Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries, Inc. and \$10,000 to Weeks Bay Foundation for the new Jack Edwards Conservation Fund. Both organizations will use the donations for land acquisition.

“It is vital that we protect natural habitat along the coast so that the millions of

these included Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Lands Division; 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, Alabama Power, The Forum, Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, Faulkner State Community College, Evonik, ConocoPhillips, Baldwin County Commission, Mobile County Commission, Alabama Coastal Heritage Trust, Holiday Inn Express-Fairhope, Dauphin Island Sea Lab, Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries Inc., Weeks Bay Foundation (The Foundation is the fiscal agent for the Alabama Coastal BirdFest.), The Munson



**Dr. John Borom accepts a check from Jenna Smart, Cubmaster of Cub Scout Pack 47. The scouts donated a portion of their proceeds from drink sales at the BirdFest Expo to the Alabama Coastal BirdFest.**

# 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.
- Admission to Audubon Centers across the country.
- 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

\$1,000 - Individual Life Membership

\$15 - 1 year Student/Senior Rate

\$1,500 - Dual Life Membership

\$30 - 2 year Special Rate

My check is enclosed

Please bill me

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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 human race is challenged more than ever before to demonstrate our mastery, not over nature, but of ourselves," Rachel Carson, 1907-1964.*

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