The 2009 Alabama Coastal BirdFest had visitors from 21 states and Canada and drew an impressive number of first-time visitors, said BirdFest ‘Nestkeeper’ Fran Morley. “We were concerned that the economy might cause lower attendance, but that didn’t seem to happen. Most of our trips sold out and our two evening events were well attended. We’re pleased.”

BirdFest reached out to new attendees this year by having a presence on the social networking site, Facebook, Morley said. “And I think that really paid off for us. We had more younger attendees from all over, who told me that they found BirdFest on Facebook or heard about it through someone’s ‘tweet,’ a reference to Twitter, which is quite appropriate for BirdFest, actually. Our Facebook site has almost taken on a life of its own now, with people posting photos and comments about their trip. I suspect it will be a big help to us again next year.”

Of course any BirdFest is only as good as the birding, and attendees got what they came for, said BirdFest Chairman John Borom. “I heard great things about people seeing the bird they hoped to see. A group from California was pleased to see Black-bellied Whistling Ducks at the Mud Ponds, others were thrilled to see Purple Gallinule and Pileated Woodpeckers, and of course White Pelicans. On trips that I was on, we saw Roseate Spoonbill, Reddish Egret, Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Scissor Flycatcher, Western Kingbird, Whippoorwill, Royal Tern, Tree Swallow and hundreds of Broad-winged Hawks. Overall, I think people were pleased, even if the windy weather wasn’t the best for bird watching.”

The Saturday Bird and Conservation Expo attracted at least 2000 people although it was impossible to get an exact headcount. People enjoyed seeing the raptors, snakes, marine animals, dissecting owl pellets, learning about feathers and making suet. BirdFest gave away 400 bird houses.


Mark your calendars – the 7th annual John L. Borom Alabama Coastal BirdFest is Oct. 14-17, 2010.
This was taken from the Executive Director’s Report—John F. Porter, Jr., Ph.D. in the Newsletter Of The Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries, Inc.

Once again Dauphin Island has won the coveted title of America’s Birdiest Small Coastal City with 189 species! But others are working hard to catch up. Our colleagues at the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory did their count at Port Aransas and came in at 185 species, with San Francisco coming at 179 species. Check the website for the complete results, http://coastalbirding.org.
Audubon Adventures

The Audubon Adventures Natural Resource Kit is an educational project put out by National Audubon. It covers topics from a conservation perspective. It is a great resource that supplements the school science curriculum. The 2009-2020 kits will cover the subjects Action for Planet Earth: Water; Action for Planet Earth: Energy; and Action for Planet Earth: GHabitat. The kit contains student handouts, background information for teachers, and hands-on activities for inside and outside the classroom. Each classroom kit is $45.65. Money raised through the Birdathon last spring and other donations will fund this educational project. 67 classrooms in Mobile and Baldwin Counties in the following schools will receive the kits for 2009-2010: Whitley Elementary School, Forest Hill Elementary School, Collins-Rhodes Elementary School, Castlin Elementary School, J. E. Turner Elementary School, Meadowlake Elementary School, George Hall Elementary School, Dodge Elementary School, Gailliard Elementary School, Hollinger Island School, McDavidd-Jones Elementary School, Lee Elementary School, St. Elmo Elementary School, St. Lukes Episcopal School, Cottage Hill Christian School, Robertsdale Elementary School, Marietta Johnson Organic School, Elberta Elementary School, Central Christian School, Summerdale Elementary School, Gulf Shores Elementary School, Orange Beach Elementary School, Daphne Elementary School, Daphne East Elementary School, Fairhope Intermediate School, W. J. Carroll Intermediate School, Spanish Fort Elementary School and Foley Elementary School.

To Feed or Not to Feed

By Celeste Hinds

Audubon Adventures

Caretaking our world’s water

Noted columnist Marilyn vos Savant says that birds are now fed by so many people that we are providing a feeding option that did not exist in the past. She is right, and perhaps we should take a second look at how and when we feed the flocks.

I will tell you about my system, developed after many years of experience and reading articles by real ornithologists. Note that I am not among the real authorities; rather I am an imposter with a keen interest in birds.

Most of our hummingbirds are Ruby-Throated hummers. They arrive in Lower Alabama beginning in March, and if they are not too tired after crossing the Gulf and if conditions are just right, they may not tarry here—just keep on flying to their nesting grounds. A few may nest south of I-10, but most go farther north to begin their reproduction cycle.

Some years the Conridina (beach rosemary) is in full bloom and many hummers linger to tank up on that nectar. I put my feeders out in March and try to have something blooming nearby to attract them. Any style feeder will do but the beautiful ornamental kinds are not my favorite. They are usually hard to clean and those with a cork stopper always leak. I prefer the cheap ones and those that are not too big because the sugar water tends to mildew and is often wasted.

Omit the food coloring, add one part sugar to four parts water and shake or stir until dissolved. Soon as hot weather arrives, wash the feeder and change the sugar water every few days. If I have neglected my feeders long enough that they have mildew, I soak them in a bucket of bleach water—one cup bleach to one gallon water—then rinse well and I do not feed the flocks for a week. I use a sunny window with hot sun chasing my feeders to speed up the cleaning process. You can also use a mornitron on your feeders, but few have them. I put a mornitron outside in the sun and the sun will kill the bacteria that are in the sugar water.
Calendar

December
8 General Meeting “In the Midst of Gorillas, Zaire, Africa,” presented by John Winn. 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7:00 pm Bring a plate of your special holiday goodies (finger food only). Bring a friend and join us for our annual Christmas party.

January
12 General Meeting “Whooping Cranes,” presented by Chester McConnell. 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7:00 p.m. Bring a Friend.

February
27 Field Trip to Baton Rouge, Louisiana to visit the LSU Museum of Natural Science. Join John Borom for a tour of the Ornithology Section of the LSU Museum of Natural Science conducted by Curator of Birds, Dr. James Van Remsen. A highlight of the guided tour will be a look at the Ivory-billed Woodpecker study skins. We will charter a bus that will leave 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center at 6:00 a.m. and drive to Baton Rouge. We will tour the Museum and eat lunch at Mike Anderson’s restaurant located near the LSU campus. After lunch we will check out some local spots to see birds. We will return to Mobile at 7:00 p.m. There will be a fee and space is limited to 25 people. For reservations call John Borom (251)990-0423.

March
9 General Meeting “Alabama Gulf Coast Wildflowers,” presented by John Borom. 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7:00 p.m. Bring a friend.

Hummingbird Plants

Our hummingbird plant guru, Edith McClinton, has done it again. Each year Edith plants seeds and pots clippings from the numerous hummingbird-friendly plants in her yard. If a plant doesn’t bring in hummers, it doesn’t stay long in Edith’s yard. The potted plants are up and thriving by Birdfest time. Not only does Edith sell the plants at the Saturday Birdfest Exp, but she and her daughter, Ginny, attach an information sheet with pictures to each plant. This year $310 was given to the Mobile Bay Audubon Society’s Audubon Adventure Fund from Edith’s hummingbird garden sale. Kudos to Edith and Ginny for sharing their hummer-friendly garden.

Elizabeth Williams

This was taken from the Executive Director’s Report—John F. Porter, Jr., Ph.D. in the Newsletter Of The Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries, Inc.

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Field Trip Calendar

December
9  Maeher Park, Causeway, Battleship Park. Depart at 7:30 or meet at Maeher Park kiosk about 8:15

January
13  Claude Poteet Mariculture Center and Gulf Shores Water Treatment Plant. Depart at 8:30 or meet at the Mariculture Center Site 16 about 8:30. Wait for the leader to sign in.
27  Magnolia Landfill, Farragut’s Landing, etc. Depart at 7:30 or Site 19 about 8:15. At Site 19 wait for the group outside the fence. Leader will sign in.

February
10  North Pinto Disposal Area aka Blakeley Docks Mud Flats—Depart at 7:30 or meet at Site 25 about 8:00 or Site 30 about 8:30. Be certain you have signed a 2010 permission application and mailed or faxed it several days prior to February 27. You will find it on the web at Alabama Ornithological Society—Birding in Alabama—Blakeley Docks Visitors Pass, or ask me for a copy.
27  Field trip to Baton Rouge, see calendar at left.

March
22,23,24—Those interested in a 4-day, 3-night trip to Wakulla, St Marks and Cedar Key, FL email me at Hindsite5@bellsouth.net or call Celeste (928-6526) and I will send you details, cost, etc. If interested, I need to hear from you by end of January in order to reserve accommodations and boat. This is a carpool or caravan trip. I estimate cost for shared room, boat fee, and transportation, etc. to be about $350 plus food. Limited number for boat trip at Cedar Key.

April
7  Fort Morgan for Bird Banding—Depart Unitarian parking lot at 7:00  Note early departure time. Many migrants take off by mid-morning. Take sack lunch and drink.
14  Splinter Hill Pitcher Plant Bog—Local plant guru Fred Nation will lead the group on this trip looking for birds and pitcher plants. Depart 7:30.
21  Weeks Bay Boat Trip—leader Gaye Lundsey—stay turned for details

Unless otherwise stated, field trips leave from Fairhope Unitarian Fellowship parking lot, 1150 Fairhope Ave at 7:30 a.m. Most trips finish about 11:00 or 11:30 and some of the group may lunch together at a nearby restaurant. Bring money for lunch, entrance fees and if you ride with someone help with cost of fuel.
We seldom cancel due to weather. If in doubt call one of the leaders;
Celeste Hinds 928-6526 (cell 233-3369)
Kris Lundquist 625-8550 (cell 209-1019)
Nancy Martin 625-2160 (cell 751-5679)
Note: Alabama Coastal Birding Trail Sites are being revised. Some of the numbers and sites may be changed.
I send emails about any changes. If you don’t have email call me your phone number”  Celeste 928-6526—email: Hindsite5@bellsouth.net.
mean rinse very thoroughly. Many hummers go north to nest and are scarce here in June and July. In August, they are back in mass to take advantage of my seven feeders. In winter, I remove all but one feeder – that one left up in hopes of attracting a Rufous or Buff-Bellied Hummingbird.

My next favorite group of birds to feed are Goldfinches, who love Niger thistle seed that you can purchase at most supermarkets or at Cecil’s Old Tyme Feed store. Goldfinches love those little net sock feeders, and I spend countless hours watching their antics up and down the sock. For all other birds, any old feeder will do. My favorite feeder, except for the finch sock, is the Sky Café that is practically squirrel and rain proof. It’s not cheap but will last for many years. There are other feeders constructed to thwart squirrels but the Sky Café does best for me. I like watching the squirrels slide off it. Squirrel problems are another entire other subject. Some say that squirrels don’t like safflower seed – but the squirrels here just gobble them up. Black oil sunflower seed are a favorite in my yard. In August when grackles are here in mass, I resort to the cheap mixed seed because they can clean out a bucket of sunflower seed in a few hours.

I stopped buying cracked corn years ago when I read that some birds have trouble digesting it. An orange, cut in half and impaled on a twig, may attract an Oriole. Suet is enjoyed by woodpeckers, but here in South Alabama suet melts and drips and isn’t worth the effort. Peanut butter spread on the bark of a tree or the edge of a platform feeder often attracts woodpeckers. Mealworms purchased on line or from birding stores are irresistible to bluebirds.

Having a source of water nearby and bushes for their security is important. Three things needed most are food, security and water.

Feed birds to attract them to your garden for your own enjoyment, but don’t give yourself a medal for good deeds. Birds won’t starve if you don’t break the bank buying the best of seed. Nature has a wonderful way of providing for them.

Now to Marilyn vos Savant’s concern about creating problems for other wildlife while feeding birds. That’s a new one for me. Maybe I will email her asking for clarification; to what other wildlife does she refer? My friends in Vinegar Bend, Alabama report that a black bear often visited their feeder but I have no way of knowing whether the bear suffered digestive problems from eating black oil sunflower seed.

Ralph Stemp and George Hinds built and installed Bluebird nest boxes to provide homes for more Bluebirds in our area. Their custom designed and constructed houses, complete with predator guards, were installed on private properties and at a retirement village.

If you would like to get your name on their list for future nest boxes call Celeste Hinds at 018-6526.
Nancy Martin wrestles with the scope while George Hinds, Bo Davidson, Jean Golden, Kris Lindquist, Djuana Moreno, Clay Havard and Margaret Barnes search the sand spit for waders just before reaching Dauphin Island. Near the Goat Tree an immature Bald Eagle did a fly-over for eighteen eager birders. The Shell Mounds were productive for several species of warblers and the airport pond was the site of a Clapper Rail that took a leisurely bath a few feet from us. Anne and Ralph Stemp called it a King Rail but were over-ruled by the others. It was not a red letter day, as far as numbers go, but well worth the time and effort. As usual, a mid-morning stop at The Bakery added to the fun.

Field trips beginning in January will soon be scheduled. If you have a 2010 calendar you may want to block out every other Wednesday for birding - beginning January 13. Log on to the Mobile Bay Audubon Society website for details or call me, Celeste Hinds 928-6526.
Scenes from Birdfest 2009
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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:

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A bird does not sing because it has an answer. It sings because it has a song.

Chinese Proverb