An Introduction to Birds of Prey

Audubon Teaches Nature
Presented by Becky Collier, Coosa River Science School
Sunday, January 12, 2014, 1:00 and 3:00 P.M.
Alabama Wildlife Center at Oak Mountain State Park

The month of January is a good time to look for raptors in Alabama. Their silhouettes are easy to spot in trees bereft of their leaves, and a long drive through the countryside can reward you with sightings of multiple species that are found here in the winter. To whet your appetite, we have arranged once again to feature raptors as our topic for the January Audubon Teaches Nature seminar.

Becky Collier, Program Coordinator at the Coosa River Science School (http://www.aces.edu/4-H-youth/4H-Center/css/index.php) will present two programs featuring majestic birds of prey. Everyone is fascinated by raptors so we are offering programs at 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. Although there is no charge for this program after park admission, seating is limited (60 seats per program) and pre-registration is strongly recommended to ensure you have a seat. You may pre-register by contacting Jay Eubanks, Director of Education at the Alabama Wildlife Center. Participants may e-mail Jay at jeubanks@awrc.org or call 205-663-7930, extension 4. Please leave a detailed message that includes your name, telephone number, and the number of persons in your group who would like to attend. Note that there are two presentations scheduled, so plan your visit accordingly.

Be sure to bring your kids, grandkids, and your best camera too! Plus, there will almost assuredly be a good selection of birds at the feeders to help you pass the time while you wait for the program to start. Refreshments will be served in the Observation Room beginning at 12:30 p.m.

Next Month’s Seminar:
Vernal Pools - Nature’s Incubator for Cool Critters!
Sunday, February 9th, 2:00 P.M. -
David Frings, Guest Speaker (OMIC)
January Field Trip  
Half Day Field Trip: Railroad Park  
Saturday, January 4, 2014 - 8:00 A.M.

Plan to meet at Railroad Park on 1st Ave So. Between 17th and 18th street. Park as close to the pavilion as possible. We will be on the lookout for song sparrows, savanna sparrows, coopers hawk, kestrel and possibly a falcon. Dress accordingly.

**Trip leader:** Susan Barrow 943-8667 (h) 253-8667 (m)

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November Field Trip  
Lake Guntersville Trip  
Saturday, January 18, 2014 - 7 A.M.

Lake Guntersville, one of the premier birding areas in the state, has been chosen as the locale for Birmingham Audubon first full day field trip of 2014. It is in the winter season that the lake really shines with rafts of ducks, grebes, coots and gulls floating and feeding on the water. The City of Guntersville has developed a walking trail paralleling the shore of the lake that has allowed for up close and personal views of the thousands of birds that fill the lake. The lake is an impoundment of the Tennessee River created by the construction of Guntersville Dam.

This area has four designated sites on the North Alabama Birding Trail and Birmingham Audubon will visit at least two of these sites, Site 38 (Guntersville Peninsula) and Site 37 (Guntersville Dam, North). If time allows, we may visit a third near-by site, Lake Guntersville State Park. In January, the park sponsors Eagle Awareness Weekends. As of this printing, there is no information about the weekends available on the park’s website. If you are interested in visiting the park, please visit their website (see below) for current details.

**MEETING PLACE:** Parking lot of the Birmingham Botanical Gardens (2612 Lane Park Road, Birmingham, AL 35233)

**DEPARTURE TIME AND LOGISTICS:** We will leave at 7 a.m. sharp, so please arrive early to make carpooling arrangements. Please have a full tank of gas, a picnic lunch, drinks, snacks, binoculars and/or a spotting scope. Packing an extra layer of warm clothing is also advisable as weather conditions can change rapidly this time of year and temperatures at Guntersville are generally colder than those in the Birmingham metro area.

**TRAVEL PLANS:** We will caravan up Alabama 79 North to Guntersville (70 miles, one and a half hours) and reconvene at the Burger King restaurant around 8:30 (1921 Gunter Av. Guntersville, AL 35967) for a short rest stop. If you wish, you may meet the group there.

From the Burger King, our next stop will be the parking lot of the old Harbor House (on your right at the south end of the U.S. 431 bridge) where we will scan the waters for grebes, coots and ducks. The remainder of the morning will be spent cruising along Lurleen Wallace Drive and Sunset Drive with stops at the various viewing areas. Depending on the weather, we will break for a picnic lunch around midday.

Afternoon will find us at the north side of Guntersville Dam, where in the past we have had excellent views of a nesting pair of bald eagles. Various species of gulls can also be observed at the dam site along with various species of wading birds. Time permitting; some additional areas may be visited.

**WEBSITES:**  
www.birminghamaudubon.com  
www.alabamabirdingtrails.com/counties/marshall  
www.alapark.com/LakeGuntersville/YourPark  

**TRIP LEADER:**  
Susan Barrow 205-942-8667 (h) 205-253-8667 (m)
Charles Darwin visited the Galapagos Islands aboard the ship, the HMS Beagle, between September 15 and October 20, 1835. The insights he gained on this voyage were integral to the theories postulated in his book, “On the Origin of Species.” Mockingbirds, tortoises, and, of course, finches, were among the animals that Darwin encountered on the islands.

In May 2013, our speaker, Greg Harber, visited the Galapagos Islands with the UAB Study Abroad Program under the leadership of Drs. Ken Marion and Jim McClintock. Like Darwin, they too observed mockingbirds, tortoises, and finches, but the Galapagos Islands host many more species - a marvelous variety of flora and fauna.

Greg’s program will open with a Google Earth tour of their journey, which spanned May 24 - June 2, 2013. Then, he’ll introduce us to some of the animals and plants that give the islands their unique place among natural history destinations. Several species of Darwin’s finches and tortoises, numerous species of sea birds, panoply of terrestrial wildlife, along with an equally astounding complement of underwater life, were captured in the lenses of Greg’s camera, and he’ll share these images with us. Greg will close his program with a selection of images set to a musical accompaniment.

Greg is a graduate of Auburn University with an M.S. in Cell Biology. He is best known though his leadership activities with Birmingham Audubon, serving at one time or another as President, Director of Audubon Mountain Workshop, Committee Chair for Audubon Teaches Nature, and Editor of Flicker Flashes. He also holds positions with the Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries, Inc, and the Alabama Ornithological Society. He is a Research Assistant at UAB in the Department of Microbiology.

His photographs have appeared in Alabama Birdlife, “Alabama Wildlife,” and Homewood Life magazine. He also has an article on bird watching at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens published in the February 2012 issue of Birdwatching magazine.

**Fellowship and snack time begins at 6:30 p.m.**
Please come early for refreshments and conversation.

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**Beginner Bird Walk at Wheeler NWR**
January 20, 2014 - 8:00A.M.

Join Birmingham Audubon on Monday January 20, 2014, for the second Beginner Bird Walk to Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge. This trip will focus on winter waterfowl including hooded mergansers, bufflehead, American gadwall, and northern pintail, as well as sand hill cranes, whooping cranes, white-fronted geese and bald eagles. Some of Birmingham Audubon’s top birders will have their scopes and years of experience ready to help participants get a closer view of the birds at Wheeler.

The field trip begins at the Visitors Center for a preview of ducks that may be seen throughout the day. From the observation building, participants may see sand hill cranes, and perhaps, the endangered whooping cranes. Along trails, other migrants may be found near the Visitors Center including cedar waxwings, brown creepers and white-throated sparrows.

**TRAVEL PLANS:**
Our gathering place is the parking lot behind the Wells Fargo Bank at the Fieldstown Road Shopping Center in Gardendale, just off Interstate-65 at exit #271 (665 Fieldstown Road, Gardendale, AL, 35071). Turn right on to Fieldstown Road, then another right onto Odum Road, and an immediate left into the shopping center. We will leave at 8 a.m. and caravan up I-65 north towards Decatur and the Priceville exit (# 334). This is a drive of approximately 60 miles, and we will reconvene at the Hardee’s Restaurant at 9:30 a.m.

The day will include birding for a few hours in the morning, followed by a lunch break, with an option to continue behind closed gates to look for snow geese, American white pelicans and grebes. Please RSVP for this event by either email to huberwamble@birminghamaudubon.org or by calling 205-714-8228.
They are back! Bob and Martha Sargent banded their first Northern saw-whet owl of the season on November 2. At the time of writing, their total for the season stood at eight banded owls. To quote Bob, “I wonder just how many yards in Alabama had tiny silent owls casually passing through their yards while they were peacefully snoozing last night.”

On November 26, Damien Simbeck sighted 23 tundra swans at Waterloo in Lauderdale County. I am wondering if this might be a record for Alabama.

Thank you to Donna Shook for keeping us informed about Operation Migration as they lead a fresh flock of whooping cranes through our area on their first migration.

Other Sightings:

10/6 Blue-winged Teal (6 females); Alabaster (MB).
10/29 Wilson’s Snipe; Limestone Park, Alabaster (KW).
11/2 Marsh Wren; Ruffner Mountain (RR)
Bald Eagle; Smith Lake, Winston County (LR).
11/3 Franklin’s (1st cycle) and Lesser-black Backed (juven.) Gulls; Guntersville (GJ).
11/10 Ring-necked Duck (60+); Lakewood Estates, Bessemer (HP).
11/23 Whooping Crane (4), with approximately 3000 Sandhill Cranes; Wheeler Wildlife Refuge (TB).
11/24 Black-legged Kittiwake, with Bonaparte’s and Ring-billed Gulls; Wilson Dam (seen by TH, reported by PK).

Rusty Blackbird (2); Possible first record for Ruffner Mountain Nature Preserve (SD).
11/26 Purple Finch; Pine Siskin; (6 of each) Clay (BS,MS).

Contributors:

Tom Baker
Mac Braid
Scot Duncan
Tom Haggerty
Greg Jackson
Paul Kittle
Hans Paul
Rick Remy
Liz Rozzelle
Donna Shook
Damien Simbeck
Bob and Martha Sargent
Ken Wills

Please send sightings for February Flicker Flashes at least five days before the January 1, 2014 deadline to Ann Miller, 520 Yorkshire Drive, Birmingham, Al. 35209  annmiller520@aol.com
The birdbath was full of summer tanagers, so the resident cardinal had to wait its turn. Several tiny yellow-throated warblers dashed through the oak leaves as they harvested fat worms. A pair of Baltimore orioles visited branches of the oaks and maples as they captured lots of caterpillars and beetle larvae. This birding activity was going on in our backyard on Prier Drive in Marion, AL.

“I haven’t been able to do any quilting and lunch is not ready. I have spent most of the morning looking through the windows with my binoculars at the birds. You will not believe the birds in our backyard,” so said Doris to me one day in mid September. Doris is an expert backyard birder, and she is usually calm and collected about life in general. However, that day she was beyond excited.

Doris and I have worked on our Prier Drive estate since 1976 to make it a good home for our family and for nature, particularly birds. We started our birdscape by planting just the right trees and shrubs. I planted a scarlet oak in the backyard as the cornerstone tree for our proposed patio, which we built several years ago using landscaping stones hand-selected from Oneonta. Doris has the yard full of plants and flowers that attract birds and butterflies. A coral bark maple blocks the sun on our main bird bath, and the other trees give a dappled shade effect to our entire back yard. Our patio is our perch for watching nature and for doing some fine birding.

The fall migration has slowed and appears to be over. These birds were making our yard a refueling station. The past month has been spectacular birding… some of the best of our lives. In addition to our usual horde of hummingbirds, bluebirds, finches, and woodpeckers, we were blessed with beautiful and unusual songbirds that most people have never seen, or, do not recognize.

The birds arrive like clockwork from noon till 3 p.m. We keep cool, fresh water in the baths. According to Greg Harber of Birmingham Audubon, water features, and, especially the sound of running water, is a major magnet for migrating birds. It is so rewarding to see brilliant yellow warblers splashing, playing, and drinking in the garden fountain, or a big yellow-billed cuckoo bathing in water…an unheard of observation. More bashful birds bathe on the large flat rock with potholes filled with water. In the past few weeks, we have also seen yellow-throated warblers, rose-breasted grosbeaks, blue-grey gnatcatchers, northern parula, red-eyed vireos, yellow-throated vireos, black and white warblers, black-throated green warblers, male scarlet tanagers, yellow-rumped warblers, American redstarts, pine siskins, Eurasian collared doves, along with the usual local wrens, titmice, chickadees, thrushes, and red-headed woodpeckers with several young.

There are five beaver ponds behind our property. I built a birding pier where we sometimes watch marsh birds such as herons, ducks, egrets, hawks, along with snakes, frogs, turtles, fish and bugs. We have planted wonderful aquatic plants in this environment like native aquatic irises, ironweeds, butterfly ginger (national flower of Cuba), crinadonna lilies, pond cypress, overcup oaks, Florida maples, and dogwoods.

As I write this article in my Lazyboy, I am seeing many of the birds listed in this article. When I go fishing on the Black Belt Prairie, we always see great birds such as kites, anhingas, and eagles. Being part of the peaceful side of nature is a blessing and a very healthy lifestyle. A good field guide and a pair of binoculars will get you started on the wonderful journey of birding.

Thomas H. Wilson, biologist
Judson College
“Get Rusty” this spring to save a declining blackbird
Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz
Calling All Birders!

Why? Over the past half-century, the historically abundant rusty blackbird has endured one of the steepest population declines ever documented among North American landbirds. Within the last 15 years, scientists have learned more about this bird’s breeding and wintering ecology, and this knowledge has allowed us to target conservation initiatives during these phases of this bird’s annual cycle.

However, as with many migratory species, we know very little about rusty blackbird ecology, distribution, and habitat use during migration. Are there hot spots where many individuals congregate? Are there stopover areas that are used predictably each year, and are these locations protected? The Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz will address these and other questions to help focus future research and conservation of one of North America’s most vulnerable blackbirds. We’re recruiting an army of birders to participate in this effort to help conserve this fascinating songbird. Will you accept our birding challenge?

Who? The International Rusty Blackbird Working Group, eBird, and the Vermont Center for Ecostudies are partnering with local organizations to recruit volunteer observers from across the southeastern U.S., East Coast, Midwest, Alaska, and Canada. In Alabama, the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources-Wehle Land Conservation Center is supporting this effort.

What? Each participating state, province, and territory will have a 3-8 week target window during which birders will search for rusty blackbirds. Within this window, birders may explore favored birding haunts or newly identified areas that they suspect may harbor rusty blackbirds. We’ll provide some guidance on potential habitats to explore, but birders should feel free to get creative - and ambitious! - with their searching.

When? Spring 2014 kicks off the first year of this three-year Spring Migration Blitz; the Blitz window will span early March through mid-June, with more specific timeframes identified for each state or province to account for the northward migratory progression. The target date for Alabama is the entire month of March.

Where? Get ready for a continent-wide event! The Spring Blitz will span the rusty blackbird’s entire spring migration range, from the wintering grounds in the southeastern United States, up the East Coast and through the Midwest to Canada and Alaska.

How do I get involved? Easy! If you’d like to contribute data to the Spring Migration Blitz effort, bird as you normally do, focusing on potential rusty blackbird habitat during the Blitz time frame established for your region. You can seek out the best-known places for rusty blackbird sightings or explore uncharted territory. Make sure to submit ALL of your observations to eBird – we want to know both where you saw these birds and where you didn’t. Check out the newly revamped website of the International Rusty Blackbird Working Group (http://rustyblackbird.org/outreach/migration-blitz/) for information about identification, vocalizations, habitat preferences, and types of data to collect to support this initiative. Also, check with your Alabama Coordinator Eric Soehren (eric.soehren@dcnr.alabama.gov) for additional ways you can help with the Blitz efforts in your region, or contact Spring Migration Blitz Coordinator Judith Scarl (jscarl@vtecostudies.org) to get involved in the broader Blitz initiative!

Thanks for “Getting Rusty” with us this spring! Like us on Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/rustyblackbirdspringblitz) to follow up-to-the minute information about our Blitz, and happy birding!

The International Rusty Blackbird Working Group
eBird and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology
Vermont Center for Ecostudies
Membership Application

Birmingham Audubon Society*

- New Members and Renewals $20.00
- Seniors (62 or better) $15.00
- Full-time Students $15.00

Please make check payable to: Birmingham Audubon Society

Send application and check to:
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   And/Or

2. Join National Audubon Society directly through the National Audubon website www.audubon.org. Birmingham Audubon Society serves as a local chapter of the National Audubon Society. Joining National Audubon Society also provides you a membership to Birmingham Audubon Society and access to all chapter activities and benefits. You will receive the National Audubon magazine. Your dues support the work of National Audubon Society and a small percentage of your dues are returned to the Birmingham Audubon Society for local efforts.

BIRMINGHAM AUDUBON
Flicker Flashes Articles due for February issue

Half-day Field Trip - Birmingham's Railroad Park

Audubon Teaches Nature - An Introduction to Birds of Prey - 1 & 3 p.m., Alabama Wildlife Center at Oak Mountain, Pre-registration strongly recommended

Winter Waterfowl Class for Beginners, 6 p.m. Community Education South in Avondale

Monthly Program: The Galapagos Islands: A Virtual Tour of a Natural Wonder presented by Greg Harbor, 7 p.m. Birmingham Botanical Gardens, Hodges Room

Full-day January Field Trip - Lake Guntersville Trip

Beginner Bird Walk - Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge (Reservations required)

Alabama Ornithological Society Winter Meeting, FL

Consider gifting a membership to Birmingham Audubon for a special occasion
www.birminghamaudubon.org or 205-714-8227