JANUARY FIELD TRIPS

Saturday, January 7th
Downtown Birmingham
Half-day Trip

We will start the New Year off close to home with our half-day field trip to downtown Birmingham and the surrounding area. The tall buildings and open areas along the railroad tracks serve as excellent locations to search for Cooper’s Hawks and other raptors as they try to make a meal from one of the many pigeons. Peregrine Falcons are commonly seen also.

Plan to meet at 8:00 am at the McDonalds near St. Vincent’s Hospital on University Boulevard, just east of the Red Mountain Expressway (US 280). Two options will be considered first: a walk along the Vulcan Trail at the top of Red Mountain, or a visit to Sloss Furnaces. Both locations provide good brushy habitat to look for sparrows and other winter songbirds. We’ll then head downtown for the big raptor quest!

Lunch will be optional on this half-day trip; those who wish to stay can join us at one of the downtown eateries. Please contact our trip leader, Greg Harber, at 251-2133 or gharber@mindspring.com if you have questions.

Saturday, January 21st
Guntersville, AL
All-day Trip

Please join us Saturday, January 21, for an all-day trip to view migrating waterfowl and raptors in the Guntersville area. Due to the cold weather already experienced up north, plenty of ducks, geese, hawks and eagles should have come south for the winter.

We will leave at 7:00 a.m. sharp from the Golden Rule Barbeque Restaurant on Highway 79 N in Pinson. After traveling north on Hwy 79, we will stop at the McDonald’s in Guntersville for coffee, biscuits and a restroom break. For those who want to meet us in Guntersville, please be at the McDonald’s at the intersection of AL 79 and US 431 at 8:00 a.m.

During the morning we will make several stops along the Browns Creek Causeway to look for waterfowl on the lake. At noon, we will stop for a hot meal at Clarence’s Rib Shack on Hwy. 69. In the afternoon, thanks to arrangements made by Dick and Linda Reynolds of the North Alabama Birdwatcher’s Society, we will visit the nearby Hawk Farm to view migrating hawks and eagles.

Since temperatures on the water can be even lower than those on land, it would be advisable to wear coats, hats, gloves, etc., and lots of warm layers. Please bring water, snacks and binoculars.

For more information, you may call Chris Underwood, 870-1489. Trip Leader TBA. See you on January 21!
HAPPY NEW YEAR!! I hope everyone had a great holiday season. This New Year is a time for new beginnings and resolutions. OK, how many of you have made a New Year’s Resolution? Who’s already broken theirs? Every year I set goals to try to lose weight, eat more healthy foods and exercise more. Do these sound familiar? And every year I break my resolutions. So this year I am setting resolutions that I know I won’t break, such as, eat more chocolate and go birding more.

The next few months we have several exciting field trips planned. January 7th we will be looking at the Birmingham raptors. No, not a new sports team, but the raptors that are city-dwellers. Last year several of us tried to spy the goshawk that visited our city. We were amazed at the Cooper’s Hawks and Red-tailed Hawks downtown. There’s always a good chance to see the Peregrine, too. January 21st takes us to Lake Guntersville to see the “snow fowl” visiting us for the winter. There’s usually an unusual visitor hanging out at the lake. In years past we have spotted scoters, Pacific Loons, and Red-throated Loons. I can’t wait to see what might be waiting for us. Oh, of course, there are always nesting eagles to view. As of Nov. 26, mom and dad eagle were hanging out on the nest!

February 7th our local trip takes us to Homewood and Mountain Brook to Shades Creek and Jemison Park. We’ll see our local birds and winter neighbors. Then on February 18th we will travel east to the Talladega National Forest at Coleman Lake. Nowhere else in the world can you go to one spot to see Red Crossbills and the Red Cockaded Woodpecker!

March 4th we will travel the eastern part of Birmingham to Ruffner Mountain, East Lake Park and Roebuck Springs. There will be lots of birds to see and various habitats to explore on this trip. On March 18th we will go southwest to Marion Co and Lakeland Farms. We have found White-Crowned Sparrows and Vesper Sparrows in this area, as well as nesting eagles.

April 8 we will be at the Birmingham Zoo for our Family Bird Walk. We walk around the perimeter of the zoo and we do not count the caged birds! April 15 we travel west to the Sipsey River Swamp. We should see or hear Prothonotary Warblers. This trip is always exciting and the habitat is beautiful! April 29th is the Annual BAS Spring Bird Count. This is an excellent way to learn about birds and to see many species in one day. If you haven’t joined a team, sign up now. It will be a long, but rewarding day of birding!

May 11-14 is the fabulous Mentone Mountain Workshop. Learn from the experts about all aspects of nature. Eat good food and bird, bird, bird. May 20th we will visit Tannehill State Park to see the birds.

This year we have three summer trips. June 9-10 is the Bankhead National Forest point count and campout. Here you’ll have time to visit, look at birds, wildflowers and other wildlife, as well as count birds and species. July 29th is the Prattville and Autaugaville trip. Last year the group saw over 40 Swallow-tailed Kites flying over a field near Autaugaville, eating beetles. What a sight! Aug 5th we will go to Gainesville and Aliceville to see kites. Last year we saw over 35 Mississippi Kites over a field.

Then we are back to September with new field trips for the year. So I hope everyone decides to make a New Year’s Resolution to go birding more. BAS can help you meet your resolution.

~Shirley Farrell, President

Dear Birding Friends,

We have 5 spaces open for the Judson College biology department’s study abroad 15-day trip to Costa Rica in April, 2006. I have permission to open the trip to the birding community and invite you to come join us. We will spend 15 days traveling over much of Costa Rica, visiting many unique sites throughout the country. We will have professional birding guides with us for most of the trip. I designed this trip so that we visit the best birding areas, such as Monteverde and Bird Island, and have included a link to my personal web site. Details of the trip plus the itinerary are posted on this site.

Please spread the word about this trip. We need 5 more people to go in order to make our minimum number for the group rates. Half the trip cost is due by January 26th, with the remainder due by March 10th.

Thomas Wilson
http://www.wilsonbiology.info/costarica.htm
SoSo For the Record

Sightings September 26 through November 23, 2005

After Hurricane Rita a September 26th trip to the Decatur/Florence area (Greg and Debi Jackson), was one of the highlights of this period. At Decatur a Sanderling and a Wilson’s Phalarope were noteworthy. At Wheeler Dam there were 102 Laughing Gulls and a Lesser Black-backed Gull (early record). Also seen was a bizarre sight of two American Avocets swimming in the middle of the lake above the dam next to a flock of Common Terns.” The best was to come next. A jaeger flew around an area to the west and landed briefly 300 meters away.

It vanished in a few seconds and then was relocated but farther away making a positive identification very difficult. Jaeger species might be the verdict. Stay tuned. The day ended up with 54 more Laughing Gulls at Wilson Dam making a total of 157 (one at Decatur). “An outstanding number for the Tennessee Valley and a new inland maximum.”

Other birds seen were:

9/14 Olive-sided Flycatcher; Great Crested Flycatcher; Vireos- White-eyed, Philadelphia, and Red-eyed; Gray-cheeked and Swainson’s Thrushes; Warblers- Pine, Black and White, American Redstart, Canada, and Wilson’s; BG (BR et al).

9/19 Thrushes- Wood and Veery; Warblers- Tennessee, Northern Parula, Magnolia, and Black-throated Grosbeak; Baltimore Oriole (7); BG (GHJG,TK).

10/27 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker; Blue-headed Vireo; Brown Creeper; Winter Wren; Ruby-crowned Kinglet; Hermit Thrush; Yellow-rumped Warbler; BG (BR et al).

10/14 White-throated Sparrow; Vestavia (HW).

11/3 Western Sandpiper; Shelby County. Vesper Sparrow; Bibb County (HW, AC).

11/6 Orange-crowned Warbler; Meadowbrook (JI).

11/10 Golden-crowned Kinglet; Common Yellowthroat; Song and Swamp Sparrows; BG (BR et al).

11/16 Purple Finch (3 f.); Vestavia (HW).

11/19 Pine Siskin; Clay (BS, MS).

11/22 Bald Eagle; I-65, near Birmingham Southern College (LB).

11/23 White-crowned Sparrow (nice yard bird!); McCalla (SH).

Contributors:

Louise Brasher
Alice Christenson
Dale Carruthers
Jessica Germany
Stella Grenier
Greg Harber
Sharon Hudgins
John Imhof
Greg and Debi Jackson
Joe John
Helen Kittinger
Ty Keith
Bob Reid
Bob and Martha Sargent
John Swan
Harriett Wright
Larry Wright

Places:

BG-Botanical Gardens

There will not be a SoSo column for the February issue of FF. Please submit sightings for the March FF at least FIVE days before the February 10th deadline to Ann Miller, 520 Yorkshire Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209.
Most people in Alabama never realize they are living in the midst of an extraordinarily diverse and fascinating group of animals: freshwater mollusks. The freshwater mollusks of Alabama include at least 147 species of snails and 171 species of mussels. This represents 43% of the gill-breathing snails and 60% of the mussels found in the U.S. and Canada. Many of these species are found only in Alabama. Once one begins to take the time to notice the many species of snails and mussels in our state, it becomes readily apparent that we live in a “hotspot” of freshwater mollusk biodiversity, much like coral reefs and tropical rainforests are hotspots for marine and terrestrial organisms, respectively. Unfortunately, just as reefs and rainforests are constantly in jeopardy, the mollusks of Alabama, as well as most species in our waters, face constant human-caused threats to their existence. At least 65% of Alabama’s gill-breathing snails and 69% of mussels are considered by biologists to be extinct, endangered, threatened, or of special concern. Dr. Sides will provide an introduction to mollusk diversity in Alabama, focusing on the remarkable biology of these organisms, the threats they face, and ongoing efforts to assure their survival.

Dr. Sides earned a B.S. in Ecology, Evolution, and Organismal Biology at Tulane University and an M.S. and Ph.D. in Aquatic Biology and Systematics at the University of Alabama. While completing his Ph.D., Dr. Sides worked for the Tennessee Aquarium Research Institute conducting mollusk captive propagation research and surveying southeastern streams for mollusks. He has studied mollusks, especially snails of the Mobile River basin, for the past six years. Twists of funding and fate have led him to a research associate position in the Department of Microbiology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Dr. Sides continues his work in mollusk conservation while working at UAB.

Attend and enjoy this program

Please come early at 6:45 to socialize and enjoy some refreshments. Guests are welcome.

~Hans Paul
VP Programs
In the fall of 2005, the Birmingham Audubon Society awarded 23 mini-grants to area teachers to help fund field trips, guest speakers, and special projects. Most of these projects and field trips would not be possible without the assistance provided by BAS.

The financial support for our mini-grant program comes from the Diane Stobert Sessions and Paul Trammell Sessions, Jr. Foundation that was established by the late Tram Sessions to assist BAS in fulfilling its educational and conservation mission.

All teachers in the Birmingham and surrounding area are eligible for these grants which are offered toward the end of the summer on our website at www.birminghamaudubon.org. By clicking on Grants and Scholarships and then Mini-grants, teachers can access the applications and information they need to apply. BAS members are encouraged to inform science and elementary teachers who might be interested in applying.

The following institutions were awarded grants in the fall of 2005:

- Alabama School of Fine Arts - $250 for tools to use in the school garden where the students learn about and practice sustainable agriculture, organic gardening, and seed to table food production.
- Oliver Elementary, Birmingham City School - $150 for a speaker from Ruffner Mountain Nature Center to present to kindergarten students a program consisting of hands-on experiences with live animals.
- New Life Christian School - $144 for students to go on a field trip to the Birmingham Zoo for the “Web of Life” program.
- Jefferson County School System Program for Gifted Students- $250 for the project, “Bird Brains,” that will consist of a kit with lessons and materials for students to explore bird adaptations, to identify birds and bird songs in the schoolyard, and to understand the role of birds within the environment.
- R.F. Bumpus Middle School, Hoover - $250 for students to go on a field trip to Ruffner Mountain Nature Center for a three mile hike led by a staff naturalist.
- Tarrant Middle School - $236 for students to go on a field trip to the Cahaba River led by the education staff of the Cahaba River Society.
- Tarrant Middle School - $131 for a different group of students to go on a field trip to the Southern Environmental Center at Birmingham Southern College to learn about watersheds and recycling.
- Tarrant Middle School - $208 for seventh grade science students to go on a field trip to the Cahaba River. The Tarrant School Board has purchased property along Five Mile Creek where it plans to build new schools. The teachers want the students to learn about the importance of watershed preservation on this trip.
- Mountain Brook Junior High School - $250 to help fund an educational program brought to the school by the Southeast Raptor Center located at Auburn University. The students will learn about the ecosystems of raptors, the importance of raptors to humans, and the role of raptors in our changing world.
- Community Education South, Birmingham City Schools - $250 for the summer Nature Camp program. The BAS grant money will help fund a trip to the Camp McDowell Environmental Center where trained naturalists will guide the children through the forests, fields, canyons, and streams on the camp property.
- Trace Crossings Elementary School, Hoover - $231.79. The forty English-as-a-second language students at this school will play an active role in carrying out this project that consists of expanding the existing garden beds at the school.
- Rocky Ridge Elementary School, Hoover - $250 to help develop a native plant outdoor laboratory.
- Riverchase Elementary School, Hoover - $237.81 for materials to help the students learn to identify and learn about the different types of animals and plants that live on or visit the school campus. An animal track kit, an animal track poster, and National Audubon Society Field Guides to wildflowers, insects and spiders, birds, and rocks and minerals are among the items to be purchased with grant money.
- Greystone Elementary School, Hoover - $237.81 for the same animal and plant identification project.
- Greenwood Elementary School, Bessemer City Schools - 2 grants, each for $250 to enable the first grade classes to go to Ruffner Mountain Nature Center for a naturalist led outing in the woods, a first time experience for many of the children.
- Pathways Shelter - $300 for the homeless women and children in the shelter to take field trips to the Zoo, the Southern Environmental Center, Ruffner Mountain Nature Center, and Oak Mountain State Park.
- Our Lady of the Valley School - $250 to help fund the conversion of the school courtyard into a garden intended to attract birds and beneficial insects.
- R.F. Bumpus Middle School, Hoover - $250 to help bring to the school the program from the Raptor Center at Auburn University. In preparation, the students will read “Hoot”, a novel about protecting endangered Burrowing Owls.
- Clay Elementary School, Jefferson County - $216.80 to be used to help create a Science Literacy Center so that the students will be able to read books that satisfy the Alabama Reading Initiative requirements, but also correlate to the outdoor habitat areas already established on the school grounds. The butterfly garden and pond at the school were partially funded by a previous BAS mini-grant.
- Cornerstone Schools of Alabama Elementary School - $411 for transportation costs so that the lower income African-American students at the school can participate in one of the Discovery Field Trips at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens.
- Hueytown Elementary School, Jefferson County - $250 for transportation costs for the kindergarten students to attend the free program at the Botanical Gardens, “Seeing the Forest for the Trees.”
- Birmingham Botanical Gardens - $250 to purchase 1,000 “tree cookies” (cross sections showing annual growth rings) to be given as a “badge” to kindergarten students who participate in the program, “The Secret Life of Trees.” To earn the badge, each child will plant a tree seed, compare tree bark and leaves, learn about trees as homes for animals, and investigate a fallen decomposing log.
The 2005 Birdathon was a tremendous success! Together we raised over $9,000 to pay for the construction of two songbird aviaries at The Wildlife Center at Oak Mountain State Park. Construction will begin soon and the aviaries will be ready in time for the 2006 baby bird season. Many thanks to all of the donors listed below.

Sincerely,
Greg Harber, Birdathon Chairman

Cerulean Warbler
Memorials for J. Russell Bailey, Jr.

Lela Anne Brewer
Steven & Cathy O’Sheal
Linda B. Reynolds
Harriet H. Wright

Black-throated Green Warbler

Nancy B. Averett
Eugene B. Butler
Robert & Carol Carter
Alice S. Christenson
Jacqueline H. David
Claire H. Fairley
Stan & Dana Hamilton
Jeanette Hancock
Sarah S. Harfield
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Elizabeth Trupp
Elizabeth W. Weeks

American Redstart
Cheryl Jane Adams
Bianca J. Allen
Gussie Arnett
C. Ben Bancroft
Gary T. Barnes
Rupert & Libby Bodden
William & Joan Bowen
Robert P. Brewer
In honor of Lela Ann Brewer
Denson & Jinksie Burnum
Carl & Maryann Carson
Susan S. Collins
Glen & Linda Connor
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Floyd & Rosalind Vassalotti
John & Augusta Vos
John L. Walker
Robert & Katherine Walsh
Frank D. Watson
Joe & Ann Watts
Mary L. Willhelm
Louise A. Wofford
Driving up to the meeting place for the start of our half-day field trip of November 5, I have high hopes that we will see more than just the short of 20 species of birds that I found on a couple of scouting trips to the area. Larry Wright, Ty Keith and Frank Farrell all kindly agree to lead a group so that we can divide up the possible crowd that might appear. I think: Great! No one will need to be in the back missing out on a good bird. Reaching the Irondale Furnace Park, we don't have a crowd, we have 13 birders. The 13 decide to just bird as a group and down the path we move slowly making our way towards Shades Creek.

Good birds appear right away including a Pileated Woodpecker with bright red cap, vivid black back that slowly worked its way up a tree giving us a nice look. Tiny Ruby-crowned Kinglets are active all morning moving quickly from branch to branch in the trees. I notice that our 13 does break up into smaller groups as we move along. The first person to see a bird, especially a new bird, becomes the trip leader of the moment as she or he tells the rest of us where to look.

About mid-morning I suggest that we start back to allow time to relocate to the near by Sessions Audubon Sanctuary. Sharp eyes spot a Winter Wren, a seldom seen bird. The opportunity is too good to pass up and a search is on for more to see it. The wren eludes many of us. The next bird does not. A good find is, by eye, a dark vertical dark shape up on a branch. With binoculars it is an excellent view of a Barred Owl looking directly at us.

We depart Irondale Furnace Park and arrive at the Audubon Sanctuary. Ellen McLaughlin takes us through the Sanctuary field full of dime sized white asters and up the Sanctuary hill. Ellen points out differences in trees and plants between the field and hill. Ellen also tells us of a rich diversity of natural life that she and her colleagues at Samford have found on the Sanctuary including a spider never before identified in Alabama.

Leaving the Sanctuary we enter a grassy area on a high bank above shades Creek. It’s good bird time again! Sharp-shined hawk up, flying fast, wheeling around the area giving us a close look, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, rich brown, white wing markings bathing in the shallows at the edge of the creek and a tiny, dark Winter Wren seen by all. The trip ends with the Lucky 13 finding 35 species.
January

7  BAS Field Trip, Sloss Furnace and downtown, for raptors
10  *Flicker Flashes* articles due
10  Conservation Committee meeting
    7:00 p.m., Homewood Library
19  Board Meeting, (BZA) 5:45 p.m.
    General Meeting, BZA 7:00 p.m.
    Dr. Jeff Sides
21  BAS Field Trip, Lake Guntersville SP
27-29  Alabama Ornithological Society meeting.
    Joe Wheeler S. P.

February

4  BAS Field Trip, Shades Creek and Jemison Park
7  Conservation Committee meeting
    7:00 p.m., Homewood Library
10  *Flicker Flashes* articles due
16  Board Meeting, (BZA) 5:45 p.m.
    General Meeting, BZA 7:00 p.m.
    Dr. Jeff Danter
18  BAS Field Trip, Talladega NF, Coleman Lake

Birmingham Audubon Society
A Chapter of the National Audubon Society
P.O. Box 314
Birmingham, AL 35201

DATEDMATERIAL
Please deliver by January 7th

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