Birmingham Audubon Introduces
New Teaching Naturalist

Ansel Payne, Ph.D. has joined the staff of Birmingham Audubon as teaching naturalist. A native of West Virginia and a former high school science teacher, Payne most recently worked as the Program Assistant in charge of admissions at the University of Virginia’s Rare Book School. An avid naturalist, he holds degrees from Harvard University (BA Biology) and Tufts University (MS Biology), as well as a PhD in Comparative Biology from the American Museum of Natural History.

While Payne’s doctoral research focused mostly on the evolution of wasps and bees, it also created plenty of opportunities for recreational birding. “Going on international research trips turns out to be a great way to build up your life list,” he says. In addition to work in Israel, Mexico, and Nicaragua, Payne has also conducted wasp surveys throughout the American West from the mountains of Southern California to the deserts of eastern Oregon. Along with his scientific and educational projects, Payne continues to write for public audiences on the relationship between humans and natural world. You can find his work in TIME, The Appendix, and in a forthcoming issue of Nautilus.

Payne will interpret both the Urban Bird Habitat Initiative in Jefferson and Shelby Counties, bird and habitat conservation in Birmingham Audubon’s seven county service area, and education and outreach programs provided by the organization. He can be reached at 205-719-3678 ext. 2 or anselpayne@birminghamaudubon.org.

The Blue Ghosts of the Mentone Forest

Three years ago while on an owl walk at Birmingham Audubon Mountain Workshop, I learned how to call to owls with a recording or with John Imhof’s expert voice rendition of a barred owl. On the walk back, I discovered something equally amazing - the blue ghost firefly! I walked with the owl calling group to the end of the road, not missing my forgotten flashlight since most in the group had one. Then I ended up walking with a friend back to camp in the dark when I left the group early. It was a magical walk back to camp as we saw hundreds of tiny blue lights, lighting up the dark lush undeveloped forest. We stopped often to view the scene that reminded us of fairies busy flying through the night, fluttering silently and mysteriously amongst the forest trees. Most flew only 2 or 3 feet off the forest floor and their exquisite tiny blue lights didn’t blink like typical fireflies - Instead, their lights shown brightly for 30 seconds or longer and then gradually faded into the trees. And their numbers were in the hundreds or possibly thousands.

Since that evening, I have read more about the blue ghost firefly which is found in the Southern Appalachians. It is most common in North Carolina, especially in the Dupont state forest and Mount Pisgah area. Studies about them can be found online, although specific information is sometimes lacking. We do know they require areas of dense undisturbed intact forests and that it is the males that fly at night with their magical lights. The fireflies are about the size of a grain of rice, much smaller than fireflies we see in fields or in our yards on summer evenings. The females have a grub like appearance, light up like males, but do not have wings and live in the moist leaf litter of the forest floor, requiring high humidity.

The blue ghost firefly comes out only for a couple of weeks or less and we really don’t know how long they can be seen in the Mentone area. There are still many questions such as: How do they control the intensity of their light and with more than one light segment, could they be turning on one segment at a time? And what controls their activity when we see them: temperature, humidity, number of hours of darkness? We do know that we see them less on nights with a full moon. With their requirement of needing an intact, undeveloped forest, we need to be mindful of preserving areas where these amazing insects can still be found.

There is still time to sign up for the Birmingham Audubon Mountain Workshop (see page 6) where you can walk beside the forest home of the blue ghost firefly and hope to see their enchanting lights on a May night. Remember to pack a flashlight for BAMW, but try turning it off on some of your night walks.

- By Michelle Blackwood
May Half-day Field Trip
Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge and West Blocton Coke Ovens Park
Saturday, May 14, 2016 - 7 A.M. - 12 Noon

Two sites on the West Alabama Bird Trail near West Blocton are sure bets to see and hear the many birds that occur there for breeding; among them are Louisiana waterthrush, yellow-throated warbler, Acadian flycatcher and Swainson’s warbler.

Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge, famous for its stands of Cahaba lilies, will be our first destination, as we will want to visit this site early in the morning to enjoy the peace and solitude of the river. In addition to the birds mentioned above, we will surely hear and see northern parula and American redstarts along the refuge road that flanks the river. Once we have finished our birding and nature watching at the refuge, we will retrace our route back toward West Blocton, to visit the West Blocton Coke Ovens Park - a gem of riparian woodland habitat nestled along the banks of a small creek bordering the park. Here is where we will have our best chances at locating the Swainson’s warblers that breed in the dense thickets that flank the primary road in the road in the park. Additionally, the historic coke ovens for which the park is named will warrant a visit. You will want to bring your camera.

This will be a half-day trip, but you are welcome to bring a lunch as there are picnic tables and restrooms available at the park. Drinks and snacks are advisable. Remember, weather this time of year can be warm and the insects plentiful, so dress appropriately. If you do not have binoculars, they may be borrowed from Birmingham Audubon for the trip.

Meeting Place and Travel Plans: Our meeting place is the parking lot at the McDonald’s at 1731 Montgomery Hwy, Hoover, AL 35244, across from the Galleria. We will depart from here at 7 a.m. and caravan, via I-459 and Alabama Hwy 5, to West Blocton, where we will turn left (east) on Bibb County Road 24. Both the national wildlife refuge and the park are located east of town on CR 24.

Trip Co-leaders: Susan Barrow, 205-942-8667 (H) or 205-253-8667 (C) and Matt Hunter, 205-915-8186.

Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge:
GPS: 33.0931632-87.0593142

West Blocton Coke Ovens Park: GPS: 33.115466 -87.107076

June All-day Field Trip
Paint Rock River, Larkin Fork and Jackson County, AL
Saturday, June 18, 2016 - 6:30 A.M.

Birmingham Audubon kicks off its summer field trips with a trip to scenic Jackson County in northeast Alabama where we will spend the morning birding at a couple of sites along the Larkin Fork of the Paint Rock River. One of the target birds for the trip will be cerulean warblers, which breed in the area, along with the usual species common to forested, riparian zone habitat. American redstarts and worm-eating warblers are a good possibility too.

Following a picnic lunch in the field we will head east to the Skyline Wildlife Management Area where we will continue searching for species typical of the habitat found there. Certainly indigo buntings will be plentiful. There are several other birding options in Jackson County we can explore as well as time and weather permit. While we will not have enough time to descend the trail all the way to the Walls of Jericho, if there is interest we may have enough time to hike partway down the trail which has been productive in the past.

This trip is one of the more distant trips Birmingham Audubon takes so plan accordingly and bring plenty of drinks and snacks in addition to your picnic lunch, a full tank of gas, insect repellent, rain gear, and appropriate summer attire.

Trip Leader: Greg Harber, 205-251-2133 (H) or 205-807-8055 (C, day of field trip only).

Travel Plans: (Note the earlier than usual departure time). Depart at 6:30 a.m. from the Birmingham Botanical Gardens parking lot. We will carpool and caravan north on Alabama Highway 79 (Tallapoosa Street) through Guntersville to the town of Gurley, located on US Highway 72 east of Huntsville. We’ll reconvene about 8:30 a.m. at the Hardee’s in Gurley, on the main highway. Those wishing to meet us directly at the Hardee’s are welcome to do so; an advance notice to the trip leader is appreciated. Once we have had a short rest break we will depart for our first birding stop located up County Road 65.

This trip is one of the more distant trips Birmingham Audubon takes so plan accordingly and bring plenty of drinks and snacks in addition to your picnic lunch, a full tank of gas, insect repellent, rain gear, and appropriate summer attire.

Trip Leader: Greg Harber, 205-251-2133 (H) or 205-807-8055 (C, day of field trip only).

All Birmingham Audubon field trips are free and open to the public.
Birmingham Audubon is once again offering two summer field trips to search for kites, storks and scissor-tailed flycatchers. If you have never witnessed the spectacle of Mississippi and swallow-tailed kites feeding on the wing you are missing one of the most spectacular aerial shows on earth. Kites are regular late summer visitors to the Tombigbee and Alabama River systems in the upper coastal plain. Their acrobatic maneuvers while catching insects in flight is truly spectacular.

Hopefully, we will also see wood storks on these outings; their numbers fluctuate from year to year, but hopefully we will have at least some to view – particularly on the Lakeland Farms-Greensboro trip. Wood storks have to be one of the homeliest creatures the good Lord ever made, but in the air their striking black and white forms are beautiful sights indeed. You won’t want to miss these field trips so mark your calendars now and be ready to brave the summer heat!

Here are the details for both trips:

**Autaugaville and Prattville**

**Saturday, July 30 trip:** We will head to the Prattville/Autaugaville area as we have in previous years, based our success in finding kites on previous trips. These are wide ranging species so I feel confident we will observe them on our trip at some point. Plus, the areas east of Autaugaville have yielded sporadic sightings of painted buntings and lark sparrows in the past so we’ll focus our birding efforts here in the morning.

Our departure point remains the same: The McDonalds on US 31 in Hoover located at 1731 Montgomery Highway (US 31) across from the Galleria. Plan to depart at 7 a.m. and caravan to our destination from there. We will have lunch at Chef Lee’s in Autaugaville to take a break from the heat we will likely experience.

After lunch, for those who wish to continue their summer adventure, we will drive to the south side of the Alabama River where we will check a few sites where we've observed kites in the past. The picturesque “ghost town” at Robinson’s Switch Road will be worth a short visit as well.

If the necessary arrangements can be made, we’ll visit an alligator farm/heron rookery in Pine Level, south of Montgomery off US Hwy 231, at the end of the day. We will have dinner at Red’s Little School House Restaurant in Grady at 5:30 and then depart for the rookery from there. If you participate in this optional side trip expect a very long day in the field as we will be at the rookery until sunset. The return trip to Birmingham is about a two-hour drive.

**Lakeland Farms and Greensboro area**

**Saturday, August 6 trip:** The Galleria McDonalds, located at 1731 Montgomery Highway (US 31) across from the Galleria, will serve as our departure point for this trip, too. Plan to leave at 7 a.m. again. We will caravan west on I-59/20 to exit #97 and head south on AL Hwy 5 to Centerville/Brent where we will make a rest stop before continuing to Red Bamberg Road and the many catfish ponds south of Greensboro. We will have lunch either at the Faunsdale Bar and Grill in Faunsdale, or the Pie Lab in Greensboro, depending on which arrangements can be made in advance for a group our size. A stop at Marion Fish Hatchery and/or Perry Lakes Park to watch herons and egrets returning to their roost at day’s end is a likely bet, too.

Remember, these trips will be daylong affairs so plan accordingly and bring plenty of drinks and snacks in addition to a full tank of gas, insect repellent, rain gear, and appropriate summer attire and sunblock.

**Trip Leader for both of these trips:** Greg Harber, 205-251-2133 (H) or 205-807-8055 (C)

N.B. Your fearless trip leader for these summer trips has been known to arrange additional trips on short notice, so remember to monitor the Birmingham Audubon website, the BAS-Birding Yahoo Group or the Birmingham Audubon Facebook page for up-to-date summer trip plans!
One of the first signs of Spring is the arrival of the Louisiana Waterthrush. Charles Grisham reported the first one for this year at Monte Sano Nature Preserve near Huntsville, Alabama on March 14. Who could ever forget that glorious song. He was able to photograph this special bird beautifully for Alabama Birds.

**Other Sightings:**

3/6 Osprey; Nest at Stevenson Park, Stop 43 Alabama Birding Trail (TR).

3/9 Swallow-tailed Kite (3); Near Foley, Al. (DMcK).

3/12 Blue-throated Vireo; Monte Sano N.P. (CG).

3/19 Ruby-throated Hummingbird; Irondale (SH,DH).

3/27 Warblers: Black-throated Green; Hooded; Ruffner Mountain (SD).

3/27 Cedar Waxwing (1095!!!) UAB. Largest Flock I have ever seen (GH).


**Contributors:**

Scot Duncan  
Charles Grisham  
Stan and Dana Hamilton  
Greg Harber  
Don McKee  
Rick Remy  
Tom Ress

Please, send sightings for September Flicker Flashes at least five days before the August 1 deadline to Ann Miller, 520 Yorkshire Drive, Birmingham, Al. 35209, annmiller520@aol.com

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**Martha Sargent’s Marvelous Suet Cakes**

Have you ever wanted to make your own suet to feed the birds visiting your backyard? Well, Martha Sargent created the near-perfect formula for suet. Here is the recipe:

1. Melt in pan one cup of lard (no substitutes) and one cup of crunchy peanut butter.
2. Add two cups of corn meal, two cups of oatmeal and one cup of flour.
3. Pack into a container and slice in portions as needed.
May

That perfect month! No more freezes. No more cold weather. The trees are leafed out in full. Flowers are blooming everywhere, and the birds are singing all around us. What more could one ask for?

Our year-round birds are finishing up with their first brood of the year. You may still hear the begging, insistent calls from the young birds. Mockingbirds, brown thrashers, towhees and cardinals may be working on a second nesting. Local cavity nesters usually raise only one brood, but may try a second time if the first was unsuccessful. Carolina wrens may have nested in a bird box, in a hanging fern, on a wreath on a door or on a shelf in a garage. These little birds have been known to raise up to three broods in a year! The mama wren looks pretty bedraggled when you see her at the feeder in August. Eastern bluebirds may also raise three broods in a year. You should feel lucky if you have any of these “home town” birds in your yard.

All of the winter sojourners are back for nesting time. This does make for excitement as they are nearby singing. You may frequent their habitats to hear and see them. What a precarious time it is for these birds. Upon their migration’s end, they must establish a territory and sing the hours away to stake their claim. These songs also advertise for a mate. You wonder how they even find each other. Nature’s ways are simply unfathomable to the human mind. May the mystery remain.

The earlier migrants such as the blue-gray gnatcatcher, Louisiana waterthrush, indigo bunting, the vireo species, as well as the warblers such as the yellow-throated, black and white, hooded and Kentucky have likely already found a mate and are enjoying the courtship period prior to nest building.

May also brings us so many new bird songs. The rollicking notes of an orchid oriole will get your attention. How about that avian clown, the great-crested flycatcher, who with his ‘wheeps’ and ‘querks’ will make you laugh, but these same sounds help him attract a mate. Then you have the bright red summer tanager singing his pleasing song to his golden mate. You may even be privileged to live near woods and hear the unique flute-like notes of the wood thrush. His song is a balm for any soul.

May…the perfect month. Enjoy these 31 days. They come only once a year. Shall we ask for more?

- By Harriet Wright

“Hail, bounteous May! That dost inspire Mirth, and youth, and warm desire; Woods and groves are of thy dressing, Hill and dale dost boast thy blessing. Thus we salute thee with our early song, And welcome thee and wish thee long.”

John Milton (1608-1674)

Harriet Wright is a living titan among the conservation movement in Alabama. She has been a member of Birmingham Audubon longer than many of us have been alive, and has served our organization in nearly every capacity from president to editor of Flicker Flashes. In 2013, Birmingham Audubon honored Wright with its Merit Award. Her influence extends beyond our organization and birding. She is a published nature photographer with contributions in such volumes as “Wildflowers of Alabama” by Blanche Dean and Joab Thomas and “Birds of Alabama” second edition by Tom Imhof. She is the living embodiment of our organization, the conservation movement and human kindness.

Harriet, we salute your continuing influence on our state, our community, our organization and our lives. For all that you have done, and all that you will continue to do, thank you!

Alabama Wildlife Center at Oak Mountain - Help Line

Trained Wildlife Help Line specialists provide free advice and information on how to deal with all kinds of wildlife problems and emergencies. You must leave a message to be assisted by a trained wildlife specialist since specialists are busy caring for animals and monitor this line on an hourly basis from 8am to 8pm every day of the year. If the animal does not have obvious injuries, please wait for a return call BEFORE bringing birds to them. Thank you!

Call 205-663-7930, ext. 2 - 8am-8pm, 7 days a week
Join Birmingham Audubon in exploring the natural history and ecology of the southern Appalachian Mountains at the 39th Annual Birmingham Audubon Mountain Workshop on May 5 through 8 at Alpine Camp.

A broad overview of the natural sciences and regional culture is provided through classes on topics including animal ecology, beginning and advanced bird identification, stream biology, mammals, insects, reptiles and amphibians, geology and fossils, canoeing, mountain crafts, and many more. Classes take place on the campus of Alpine Camp, around Mentone, an old Alabama resort area, and on the waters of the Little River.

The rich tradition of our nature-based workshop was inspired by Blanche Dean’s Nature Workshops, which began in the 1950s exploring a blend of local fauna, flora and geography of Alabama. In 1984, the late Dan Holliman of Birmingham Southern developed a broad curriculum for the workshop he described as an activity that “has attracted naturalists who are intrigued by the concept of ‘outdoor’ education.”

We invite you to look over the schedule and the faculty/course descriptions to get a better understanding of why the Birmingham Audubon Mountain Workshop has attracted nature lovers for generations. There are separate programs for adults and Young Naturalists. You will find the curriculum and registration information at this link (available March 1, 2016): www.regonline.com/birminghamaudubonmountainworkshop

This year we will be offering a one day participation rate of $175. Come stick your toe in the Birmingham Audubon Mountain Workshop water. At this price, you can sample a Friday or Saturday at camp. Try this one-day experience by taking classes, eating camp meals, and enjoying the scenic beauty for a special price.

The Young Naturalist Program offers a curriculum for children ages 5 to 12. The Young Naturalist courses and activities are taught and supervised by our academic adult faculty along with our guest director and Birmingham Audubon’s staff. Young Naturalists love this program that includes lots of hands on activities with extensive science and nature based learning.

The 2016 Birmingham Audubon Mountain Workshop requires online registration. You register for the workshop and make all class selections on line. Class sizes are limited. Timely registration ensures best class selection.

Birmingham Audubon member (1)..........................$290
Birmingham Audubon nonmember (1)...................$315
Young Naturalist (includes t-shirt).......................$265
Mountain Resident member (2)...........................$275
Mountain Resident nonmember (2).......................$300
One Day Participation (3)....................................$175

Registration prices will increase by $25 after April 22, 2016
Onsite registration will be $370 per person
(1) Registration includes tuition, room and meals, beginning with Thursday evening meal and ending with Sunday lunch.
(2) Registration includes tuition and meals beginning with Thursday evening meal and ending with Sunday lunch.
(3) Registration includes one day (either Friday or Saturday) of camp activities (classes and evening activities) and meals (breakfast, lunch and dinner).

Birmingham Audubon members must be on our member roll. A good indicator of whether you are a member is if you get our Flicker Flashes publication. Please email the registrar if you are unsure of your membership status.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Registration is fully refundable less a $25 administrative fee through April 15. Half of the registration fee will be returned for cancellations made between April 16-22, 2016. No refunds after April 22, 2016.
Join and Support Birmingham Audubon

Are birds, wildlife and our natural habitat of interest to you? If so, we invite you to be a part of a community that enjoys, values and protects birds and our natural world.

Founded in 1946, the Birmingham Audubon Society is Alabama’s leading non-profit organization engaging people in the enjoyment and conservation of birds, their habitats and the natural world. With your support, we involve people through recreational birding, by extending their horizons with education programs, and by engaging them in conservation actions such as planting trees, counting birds, and working with local, state, and national policy makers.

There are many ways you can support Birmingham Audubon
Please join us and make a difference for birds and your quality of life, right here in Alabama!

Membership
Take the first step and become a Member of Birmingham Audubon. Get connected with our *Flicker Flashes* newsletter. See birds by participating in one of our free field trips, and learn something at one of our free monthly programs.

Make a Donation
We rely on your support and are proud to work on your behalf to restore wildlife habitat, conserve areas that are important to birds, and inspire appreciation and understanding of our natural world. Your generous donation, above and beyond the basic membership dues, is an important source of funding which allows Birmingham Audubon to facilitate our vital mission of connecting people with birds and the places they live.

Your memberships and donations support:
• Free monthly programs on natural science topics
• Free field trips led by expert birders to great birding/cultural locations
• Opportunity to attend Annual Banquet and Birmingham Audubon Mountain Workshop
• Introduction to great locations to see and observe birds
• Exposure to knowledgeable birders
• Travel opportunities to regional, national and international birding locations
• Graduate student research grants
• Local and statewide conservation initiatives
• Adult and student education initiatives
• Local, state and national conservation initiatives
• Alabama Birding Trails support

Birmingham Audubon Society Membership Application

☐ Join ☐ Renew Annual Membership: $ 20.00

Donation to support the programs & projects of Birmingham Audubon: $___________

Total: $___________

☐ Please make check payable to: Birmingham Audubon Society

☐ Please charge my credit card [ ] Visa [ ] MasterCard

Card Number ____________________________ Expiration Date ____________________________

Name: ____________________________

Address: ____________________________

City ____________________________ State ________ Zip ________

Email ____________________________

Phone ____________________________

Birmingham Audubon Society is an independent non-profit 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization. Your donations are tax deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law.

Please keep my donation anonymous ☐ Yes ☐ No

I want to receive communications electronically ☐ Yes ☐ No

If you are interested in joining National Audubon Society, visit: www.audubon.org

Birmingham Audubon’s policy is to not share or sell our mailing list. Your privacy is of the utmost importance to us.

Birmingham Audubon Society
3720 Fourth Avenue S, Second Floor
Birmingham, AL 35222
Phone: 205-719-3678
www.birminghamaudubon.org
Please check your mailing label for your membership expiration date.

Consider gifting a membership to Birmingham Audubon
www.birminghamaudubon.org
or 205-719-3678

May 2016
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June, July, August 2016
June 18  Paint Rock River, Larkin Fork and Jackson County, AL (See page 2)
July 30  Autaugaville and Prattville (See page 3)
August 6  Lakeland Farms and Greensboro Area
          (See page 3)

Copies of Flicker Flashes can be viewed and downloaded from the Birmingham Audubon web site: www.birminghamaudubon.org