FLICKER FLASHES
The quarterly guide to Alabama Audubon

75 YEARS OF CONSERVATION
Celebrating an important milestone in our history

Through the hard work of countless volunteers, our organization has grown and thrived over the last century, becoming one of Alabama’s oldest conservation nonprofits.
For three-quarters of a century, Alabama Audubon has been working on behalf of Alabama’s birds and bird lovers, and we’re excited to share some stories with you from our members in the coming issues as we celebrate this important milestone throughout the year.

As I researched our history, I discovered the first hints of an Alabama organization devoted to birds actually came about at a meeting held by George Ward in 1927 at his Shades Mountain estate in Vestavia. The group wanted to expose the communities of Birmingham and Jefferson County to nature and birds. They sponsored field work to collect specimens, had them taxidermized, and presented them to the public in an exhibit. The collection was donated to the Birmingham Public Library, and the mounted specimens now live at the McWane Science Center in Birmingham, including the presumed extinct ivory-billed woodpecker.

Stay tuned for announcements about the Birmingham Historical Society’s new book The City Beautiful: Compliments of George Ward—out this fall! Ward, the investment banker, statesman, and consummate advocate for conservation and for birds, founded a Birmingham bird club. He also included in his will for his Vestavia property to be a bird sanctuary.

Unfortunately, the Great Depression and WWII halted life in those times. After the war’s end, people had time to pursue hobbies and enjoy the outdoors again. Fast forward nearly two decades later to 1946. A news clipping in our archives details, “It began with three men’s interest in wings over Birmingham and Jefferson County. Morton Perry, geologist with Tennessee Coal Iron and Railroad Co., Millard Prather, also with T.C.I., and Bill Caruthers, scoutmaster and sales-engineer for Birmingham Slag Co., were the three pioneers. They went birding together. They talked about birds, they were enthusiastic about birds. And December 1946, they joined the nationwide Christmas Bird Count (CBC).”

Flying high
Protecting birds and their habitats for seventy-five years and counting
by Sarah Randolph, Outreach & Communications Director

“In the end, we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught.”
—Baba Dioum
Not too long after the predominantly masculine Bird Club started having meetings, Blanche Evans Dean, science teacher at Woodlawn High, saw a notice of the meeting and gathered four friends to join the club with her—Elizabeth Eddy, Mary Todd, Mary Hafling, and Mrs. Bill Powell. They crashed the meeting, and there was no looking back! Two years later, Mrs. Dean was made chair of field trips and organized annual trips to Gulf Shores, Wheeler NWR, and Cheaha Park.

Early in 1947, the Club voted to affiliate with the National Audubon Society and became officially the Birmingham Audubon Society (BAS). Membership grew from 25 in 1948, to 51 in 1950, then 74 in August of 1951, which jumped to 97 by December 1951. In the constitution was written, “The club ‘encourages the conservation of all wildlife, but especially the protection of birds by providing food and shelter and by conserving all natural resources.’” Dues were $1.25.

In April 1947, BAS sponsored a lecture at BSC by Charles M. Broley, a bird bander specializing in the study of the bald eagle—the first in a very long line of distinguished speakers. 1948 was a memorable year in which Allan Cruickshank, National Audubon Society staff member and photography wizard, presented Youth Along the Suwanee motion picture to 1,200 attendees. The lecture and film series continued for many years to follow.

By 1960, things were really starting to take flight. The Audubon Screen Tour, as the Wildlife Films were first called, were held at Ramsay High School under the direction of Fred Carney. Membership dues rose to $2 with $1 covering a subscription to Flicker Flashes, with 127 members. The first Outdoor Nature Camp was held that year at DeSoto Park, a precursor to our Audubon Mountain Workshop, which then travelled around the state in the years that followed before the Alpine Camp in Mentone began hosting the workshop in 1977.

The ‘60s saw our organization add several more programs and events, becoming a more formal group with specific committees, three new bird counts (spring, summer, fall), and a camp out in spring and fall. A few of the speakers for our film series were superb videographers, ornithologists, and passionate nature lovers who had audiences around the world and virtually every state. The Wildlife Film Series was one of our success stories plus the springboard to greater involvement in our other programs.

The Audubon Wildlife Film Series was a huge draw in the 1960s and 1970s. Bill McGowen was in charge for ten years in the ‘60s, and I was in charge for ten years in the 1970s and ‘80s. Greg Harber took over from me. By the early ‘80s, television preempted the live shows, and the film series was phased out. During its heyday, the Audubon Film Series featured the best nature cinema photographers in the country with Roger Tory Peterson being the most celebrated.

Knowing how extraordinary the photographers were as educators and the way they narrated their films and answered questions, I wanted to take these spectacular nature films to the Birmingham City Schools for the kids who often never get to leave their neighborhood to see the magic of nature. To employ one of the best of these photographers, Rich Kern, for two weeks giving three shows a day in the Birmingham School District, we had to raise $3,000. We raised the money the first year in quick order asking for donations of $100. Several donors like Minnie and Tom Rast, Elberta and Bob Reid, Ann and Bob Tate, and Harriet Wright were particularly generous. But the sustaining benefactor whose support assured a continuation of the Audubon outreach was George Barber, today known for his Barber Motorsports Park and Museum. George sent a check for the whole amount requested with an offer to help more as needed in the future. That pledge allowed us to have another photographer the next year for three weeks with visits to schools in Birmingham, Homewood, and Mountain Brook, and to sustain the project for several years.

Overall, this educational outreach was a huge success enabling hundreds of students to learn about birds and see nature at its best.
Robert Greye “Bob” Tate, in memoriam

Remembering those who left a lasting legacy with Audubon

by Greg Harber, VP Field Trips

It is with great sadness that we note the passing of Robert G. “Bob” Tate. Bob was a well-loved and long-time member of Alabama Audubon, having served our organization in multiple capacities over the years. In addition to serving a term as president, he also served several terms as treasurer and was active on the Conservation, Constitution and by-laws, and Sessions Sanctuary committees as well as the speaker’s bureau, among others. Bob was our liaison to the Diane and Tram Sessions Foundation, which exists to further Audubon’s goals in Alabama.

As active as Bob was in our organization, he also served terms as the president of the Blanche Dean chapter of the Alabama Wildflower Society and Cahaba River Society. Bob was instrumental in the founding of the Freshwater Land Trust and played a role in the creation of Alabama’s Forever Wild program. He was ever so diligent about ensuring that the conservation community maintained a presence on their board of directors.

As I write this, it is hard for me to imagine any aspect of the conservation community in Alabama that was not influenced in some way by the work that Bob, along with his wife, Ann, so diligently and tirelessly pursued through the years I have known them. Ann also had a long-term role as chair of our Conservation committee, which Bob always supported in every way. Bob and Ann so beautifully exemplified what attracted me to Alabama Audubon over thirty years ago: the joy to be found in birds and nature, a passion to protect it, and a beautiful example to follow. I cannot possibly thank them enough for their tireless and dedicated efforts to our chapter and on behalf of conservation in Alabama.

My condolences to Ann and their family. R.I.P., Bob.
Black Birders and the Deep South
Diversity and inclusion in the birding world

by Meg Ford, Black Belt Coordinator

Have you ever felt you understood a subject, one that you’re passionate about, only to discover that there’s still so much left for you to explore? That push to keep working? This, coupled with a deep appreciation for having shared an hour and a half with a group of icons in birding, is how I felt by the end of our Fall Audubon Talk: Black Birders and the Deep South. Even now, the message of urgency around diversity in all corners of outdoor recreation still hits me the same. This experience was invaluable to have early on in my time with Alabama Audubon, and one that I’ll cherish for a very long time.

Our discussion began with an introduction of our speakers and their regional identities. In topics relating to Black representation in any field, this is important to share—though all of the panelists are Black birders, Black culture encompasses a dynamic range of interests and self-identification that make each individual’s perspectives unique. This was immediately evident in our panelists, who come from both rural and urban backgrounds in the South and Northeast and have found joy in birding through education, research, outreach, ecotourism, and more.

There are many reasons why a Black person that hasn’t visited the deep South may be hesitant to do so, and many are rooted in valid concerns about the history of Black oppression in places like rural Alabama. Corina Newsome, Community Engagement Manager at Georgia Audubon, opened up about her experience moving to the Southeast coast for research work and having to occupy institutions that were built by enslaved people. However, as many of our southern panelists were quick to add, the unfortunate truth is that many of these concerns are reflective of the US at large and not exclusive to the South. Dr. Rashidah Farid, Assistant Professor of Wildlife Ecology at Tuskegee University, pointed out that although the monuments of slavery have been removed from many areas in the North, the stain of slavery is still there. Christian Cooper, a NYC Audubon board member, added that his experiences of racism in New York prove that these issues are not exclusive to the South, noting that Central Park, one of his favorite places to go birding, was built on top of a former Black community.

The good news is that birding anywhere is simply a matter of finding a community that welcomes you, and we have plenty of those to spare here in Alabama. Dr. Drew Lanham, Alumni Distinguished Professor of Wildlife Ecology at Clemson University, compared the search for a safe birding communities to range maps that mark “unsuitable habitat,” and in agreement with Cooper, called for anyone that recreates outside to consider the troubled history of the lands that they bird on. Christopher Joe, owner of Connecting with Birds and Nature Tours (a shining example of an inclusive birding community), shared that his desire to start an ecotourism business stemmed from experiencing microaggressions and outright racism in his time learning, working, and recreating outside.

This is just one of the challenges for all birding communities to consider if we are to make our circles more inclusive. For example, hiring from the BIPOC community is a way organizations such as ours can reach those audiences. Dr. Farid added that we should also consult experts that have studied equity issues, as nonprofessional Black citizens can’t take on the task alone. Dr. Lanham stressed the need for large institutions to reach out to young people in an intentional way, as getting students into birding early on can help them become better stewards of the environment and light multiple paths to a number of fields of study and work.

The process of inviting underrepresented communities to the world of birding only becomes easier as it goes along, given that many Black non-birders may not see themselves currently represented in the birding community at large. But one of the many wonderful outcomes of #BlackBirdersWeek last year is that it connected and elevated Black birders across the US, showing that, as always, Black excellence truly exists in all corners of society. Joe credits the hashtag to not only increasing the visibility of his ecotourism business, but also with connecting him to many of the participating panelists.

In the end, if there’s one thing that Alabama is known for outside of the flawed history of our state, we’re known for our unwavering culture of southern hospitality. This is a fact that wasn’t lost on any of our panelists, who deeply love their southern homes or are otherwise planning to visit at the nearest opportunity. I consider this to be one of our greatest advantages; our community has the incredible gift to be kind, honest, offer a smile, and meet people where they are. Our work won’t stop here, or with this panel talk—but with iron-clad intention, specific actions, and the culture that we’re so proud of, we can increase our birding circle and make the deep South more welcoming of all birders.

Miss the talk? You can now watch the recording on our Vimeo page at vimeo.com/alaudubon.

SAVE THE DATE!
BLACK BELT BIRDING FESTIVAL
AUGUST 6–8, 2021
We’ll continue to monitor the ongoing situation with the pandemic and will make the festival virtual if necessary.
Honoring those who made an impact
A special “thank you” to all who gave memorial contributions this season

GUSSIE ARNETT, memorials by Michele Hawk, Pelham Rowan, and Lisa Bailey
MERRILL BAKER, memorial by Glenn Greathouse, in honor of her son Tony Baker
CHERYL BARANANO, memorial by Caroline Durham
DOUG BAULOS, honored by Kathe Thompson
DR. MIRIAM COLLINS, honored by Linda Cicero
CLAIRE DATNOW, honored by Robyn Usdan
MEG FORD, honored by Jessica Germany
RUBY REDDICK GIBSON, memorial by Marion and Craig Baab
HEATHER and WINSTON MCCALLEY, honored by Tina Hatch
ETHEL NORTON OWEN, memorials by Penny Baker, Sally Chesrown, Jane Day, Maura Keefe, Peggy King, Sharon and Harry Nelson, and Pamela Tatge
ELBERTA REID, honored by Charles Scribner
KATHY WAGNER, memorial by Deborah Gates

COASTAL NEWS

Eyes on the coast
by Sabrina Cobb and Olivia Morpeth, Coastal Biologists

The Audubon Coastal Bird Survey (ACBS) program was developed in response to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010, which resulted in over 200 million gallons of oil spilling into the gulf. ACBS is a gulf-wide, community science program that largely relies on volunteers to conduct surveys during fall, winter, and spring each year. We began conducting these surveys in 2017 as a component of our Alabama Coastal Bird Stewardship Program. The data collected are used to better understand how birds are using coastal habitats locally and across the northern Gulf of Mexico, and to identify potential threats and conservation needs of coastal species experiencing population declines. During these surveys, every bird seen is documented; however, we also collect additional data on eleven focal species: six species nest along the Alabama coast (American oystercatcher, black skimmer, brown pelican, least tern, reddish egret, and snowy plover), and five species use the coast during migration or as wintering grounds (piping plover, red knot, sanderling, short-billed dowitcher, and Wilson’s plover). Monitoring these focal species helps build a picture of how coastal habitat in Alabama is used to meet resource needs of migratory and year-round inhabitants.

Over the last three years, our coastal staff and volunteers surveyed eighteen ACBS routes along the coasts of Baldwin and Mobile counties. These routes are located along bayfront, barrier islands, and nearshore islands with habitats ranging from marshlands to highly developed beaches. During the fall 2019 to spring 2020 survey year, a total of 162 bird species were recorded! These included 26 shorebird species, 5 gull species, 8 tern species, 18 wading bird species, 10 raptor species, 1 pelagic species, 15 waterfowl species, and 79 landbird species. We recorded at least two of the eleven focal species at each survey site. Pelican Island, on Dauphin Island, was a particularly important site for loafing and foraging birds; all of the focal species were observed at that site. Cat Island, the smallest of our nearshore islands, is also an important winter roosting location for a variety of species. We want to thank our incredible volunteers, who contributed nearly 1,200 hours to these surveys during 2017–2020.

“Because of the wonderful ‘on the job’ training during the Alabama Coastal Bird Surveys, I was prepared to monitor the bird activity during the nine-month, forty-six acre marsh restoration project at Lightning Point, Bayou La Batre, Alabama. As the project progressed and more land appeared in the shallow waters, the birds moved in. A typical month saw counts of over 1,000 individual birds and thirty-plus species.”

Mike Hardy, Dauphin Island

Funding for this program was provided by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation’s Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund with additional support from the Alabama State Lands Division of DCNR. We’d also like to acknowledge additional funding from the USFWS Northern Gulf Coastal Program.
**Our flock is growing!**

Welcome our new Programs Assistant

Meet Theresa Rumore, our new Programs Assistant! Theresa will be coordinating our online and in-person courses and events. Working closely with our Outreach & Communications Director, she’ll serve as liaison whenever you have questions about our programs or need help registering for our events. A Birmingham native, Theresa graduated from the University of Alabama’s New College program with a depth study in interdisciplinary culture and social change with a concentration in ethnographic photography. She has a love for traveling and exploring new places and ideas. In 2020, she had a baby and graduated from the University of Alabama with a master’s of social work degree. Theresa is excited to bring her passion for environmental conservation to Audubon and this position.

**STAFF NEWS**

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**MEMBERSHIP**

**Birds of a feather**

Join us welcoming our new and returning local members:

- CAROL ADAMS-DAVIS
- DAVID ANDERSON
- GAIL AUSBORN
- PENNY BAKER
- ELIZABETH BALDWIN
- JUDITH BALLARD
- REBECCA BALLARD
- ANNE BARANANO
- VALENTINA BARRIOS-FANAEI
- JACQUELINE BEAN
- JILLIAN BELL
- DENNIS BODEWITS
- MICHAEL BRENNER
- LAURA BREYFOGLE
- DAVID LLOYD BRICKEN
- JANE BROCK
- TODD BROWN
- FAYE BROWNING
- JENNIFER CALKINS
- JENNIFER CASHMORE
- SALLY CHESROWN
- JENNIFER COOPER
- GWEN COX
- JUDY CRITTENDEN
- BARBARA CROSBIE
- MARGARET D’SILVA
- JOHN DABBs
- JANE DAY
- GINGER DEASON
- MILDRED DEASON
- PHYLLIS DEINLIN
- CAROLINE DURHAM
- CLAIRE LEWIS EVANS
- LISA EVEY
- CHARLES FAULKNER
- PAUL FORDE
- KEITH FRAVERT
- ALAN FREELAND
- BILL FULLER
- DEBORAH GATES
- ANDREA GRAHAM
- ALLISON GRAVES
- CHARLIE GRAY
- SHAWNIE GREEN
- CHRISTINA GREER
- GLORIA GUAY
- MICHAEL HANNA
- SHANNON HARNEY
- TINA HATCH
- MICHELE HAWK
- ANITA HAYWORTH
- LETA HERRING
- DOUG HOFFMAN
- KEN HORST
- GLORIA HUFF
- LELIE HUGHES
- MATT HUNTER
- ARTHUR HUNTER
- KATIE JACKSON
- NORMA JOHNSON
- MAURA KEEFE
- MEGAN KIEDROWSKI
- VANESSA KOELLING
- KEVIN KOZAK
- TYLER KRUL
- MALLORY LAMBERT
- ELIZABETH LEININGER
- CHRISTY LEMAK
- CHRIS LEMLEY
- HERB & TERRY LEWIS
- KELLY LOVE
- JANE MCBRIDE
- LESLIE MILLER
- LINDA MIZZELL
- SUZANNE OBERHOLSTER
- LARA PATTERSON
- CARLEEN PHILLIPS
- DAVID PLEAK
- REBECCA POORE
- SUSAN POSEY
- RAGSDALE LLC
- MATTHEW REETZ
- DIANE REYNOLDS
- MEL ROBINSON
- PATRICIA ROYAL
- VINCE SCHILLCI
- VIRGINIA SCRUGGS
- ALEXANDRA SCURO
- DAVID SHEPHERD
- LANETTE SHERRILL
- LISA SIMUNACI
- JILL SINGLETON
- ANN SMITH
- CHARLES SMITH
- PAMELA TATGE
- CLIFTON TAYLOR
- RENEE TAYLOR
- ANNA THEOKTISTO
- ROBERT & PEGGY THOMPSON
- KATIE THOMPSON
- ROBYN USDAN
- PIETER VISSCHER
- KATHERINE WALCOTT
- PENNY WEAVER
- SUSAN EZELL WILLIAMS
- JAMES R. WILLIAMS
- SCOTTIE WILLIAMS
- JODI WOMACK
- DEE WOODHAM
- BUTCH WORLEY
Sign up today for our Protect Our Birds license plates, and we’ll cover the $50 fee!
We have until 31 October 2021 to get 1,000 pre-commitments from supporters like you. Fill out and return the form at alaudubon.org/sponsored-tag or visit alaudubon.org/tag to learn more. You don’t have to wait for your renewal! Artwork by UAB Bloom Studio.