



# THE PELICAN POST

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Protecting the Edges for 25 Years



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*The Weeks Bay Foundation is a non-profit organization whose members work to protect the natural resources of coastal Alabama and to provide assistance and support for the Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve's goals and programs.*

Cover: Cottontail Rabbit,  
by Ben Raines

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Kathy Hicks

## From the Executive Director . . .



Lately, I've come to realize that no matter how well I feel like I know this place and the things living in it, I've only begun to scratch the surface of the incredible world around us in coastal Alabama.

It started this summer with a small mushroom, a creamy orange splash of color popping up through the leaf litter on the Weeks Bay Foundation's Wiese Family Nature Preserve.

The sight of the little fungus touched a long ago memory of mushrooms seen in forests far to the north, near the Canadian border, and across the Atlantic in Europe. Under the tutelage of expert pickers, I'd learned to gather chanterelles, considered one of the great delicacies of the natural world. But I'd never heard of chanterelles in south Alabama. And despite the dozens of mushroom species growing in our coastal woods year round, I'd always imagined it was too hot here for the edible delights at home in those cool northern forests.

But that very evening, an email popped up from one of the most knowledgeable woodsmen I know. "Head out in the woods. There are chanterelles everywhere!" it read.

The next morning found me exploring a piece of land the Foundation is considering acquiring along Fish River. I stumbled onto dozens of chanterelles in a stand of hardwoods on the driest part of the property. I began seeing them everywhere I went. A few days ago, I even found some in my yard in Fairhope. This summer has been the season of the chanterelle at my house -- sauteed in olive oil alongside speckled trout, or heaped on a plate of pasta. But if you'd asked me two months ago if chanterelles lived here, I'd have said, "Oh no, much too hot."



Ben Raines

For the last 15 years, I've spent more hours wandering in our southern woods than most people. I tend to notice the little things, always searching for a picture, or a plant I can bring home to eat. How then did I fail to notice what appears to be an exceptionally common part of our natural world for all those years? What else am I missing, living right under my nose?

That's the thing about this place, there is always something surprising lurking nearby. I can think of so many things I'd never have expected to find here, from the electric ray that shocked me while scuba diving in Orange Beach to the thousands of prehistoric shark teeth I've pulled from rivers in the area, to the several native hibiscus species growing in the swamps.

I was out in the woods with **E.O. Wilson** a few years ago when he happened to discover a new species of ant, which might be considered the ultimate surprise! He said something that day about south Alabama that has stayed with me.

"Because it is so important, don't destroy it. Save it. Save the parts especially that are the richest," Wilson said, gesturing to the forest around us. "And this is one of the richest places in the United States."

He's right, of course. We live in one of the richest and most beautiful places in the country. And it is ours to save. Please join with us at the Weeks Bay Foundation as we work to protect as much of this magnificent landscape as possible.

See you on the water,

## Weeks Bay Foundation's Wiese Family Nature Preserve: A hotbed of aquatic diversity!

By Jeff Dute, AL.com

In the public mind, Fish River is fairly shallow, flowing with milky green to tea-stained water, with banks lined with expensive houses sitting on stilts. Those homes are set in well manicured lawns that are kept in place against the river's ravages by concrete or wooden bulkheads.

Those are the things we've done to the lower Fish River and its tributaries. But that's not what the real river and its creeks would look like if left to their own devices.

Fish River, especially on the upper reaches, is a hotbed of surprising aquatic diversity.

Dozens of fish species alone make a living in perpetually cool, crystal-clear water that springs forth from dozens of sources deep underground all along much of its serpentine run through the heart of Baldwin County.

During a sampling trip to Fish River and Corn Branch where they run through the Weeks Bay Foundation's 124-acre Wiese Family Nature Preserve southeast of Daphne, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service personnel assisted **Brian Jones** and his crew from the Dauphin Island Sea Lab Estuarium as they collected nearly two-dozen unique fish species.

Many of those fish will become part of the Estuarium's first-ever display of species from one of Alabama's smaller coastal rivers, Jones said. But first, they must be certified as disease-free after the Sea Lab's 30-day quarantine protocol.

"The thing that excited me is that from just standing on the shore and looking at the river, I never expected that kind of diversity," Jones said. "It was also surprising that the smaller tributary of Corn Branch had more species diversity than Fish River."

Once unveiled, Jones said the new 250-gallon tank display will give people a snapshot of the creatures living in the upper reaches of the well-known coastal rivers, as well as the gin-clear, spring-fed streams that feed them.

Using shocking techniques to briefly stun the fish so they could be collected in a seine or dip net, the group collected a long list of species.

Some of the fish names are well-known, while quite a few seldom cross the lips since they live in the relative obscurity found in the dwindling sections of small waterways that remain beyond man's immediate touch.

That list includes sailfin shiner, flagfin shiner, weed shiner, golden shiner, mosquitofish, swamp darter, black-banded darter, Alabama bass (formerly spotted bass), speckled madtom, green sunfish, bluegill, warmouth, dollar sunfish, longear sunfish, red-spotted sunfish, redear sunfish, pirate perch, American eel, brook silverside, black-spotted topminnow and redbfin pickerel.

While many of these fish fill simple yet essential roles in their native ecosystems, a couple have unique characteristics that set them apart from all other fish.

Jones pointed to the longear sunfish as the most impressive animal collected because of its otherworldly coloration best suited for the world's tropical locales.

But the pirate perch holds title to being one bizarre and mysterious little fish, Jones said.

Instead of being located behind the caudal fin as it is in 99 percent of other fish species, this 3-inch long fish's urogenital opening is located right behind its gills.

Jones said the location of the opening makes sense in the pirate perch's world since it aids with the species unique spawning ritual that involves the female excreting eggs from the opening, which are immediately sucked



Jeff Dute



Longear Sunfish



through the gills then discharged through the mouth onto mats of tangled hair-like algae growing on submerged tree roots close to the bank.

In a like manner, the male excretes sperm and is then able to blow it onto the eggs with pinpoint accuracy to facilitate greater fertilization rates.

“The only other known fish species to do this are really obscure cave dwellers,” Jones said.

Even the story of how the fish came to be named is bizarre. Jones described how his research revealed how an early ichthyologist branded the fish, which was thought to eat only little aquatic insects of plankton, after witnessing it eating all of his smaller fish.



Jeff Dute

The pirate perch and longear sunfish, along with a musk (stinkpot) turtle and a crawfish that were also collected, have never been on display at the Sea Lab before.

Jones said the biodiversity seen in Fish River and Corn Branch is likely present in every small river or stream here and across the state. That makes it ever more important to protect areas such as the Weeks Bay Foundation’s Wiese Family Nature Preserve.

“It really was amazing how many species we saw in those short stretches of the river and Corn Branch,” Jones said. “It calls attention to the need to protect those habitats that support them.”

## Magnolia the Manatee—Rescue Update

by E. Hieb and R. Carmichael, Dauphin Island Sea Lab

On March 17, 2015, DISL’s Manatee Sighting Network (MSN) and Alabama Marine Mammal Stranding Network (ALMMSN) personnel traveled to Crystal River, Florida to assist with the release of Alabama’s first rescued manatee. Nicknamed “Magnolia” after the river where she was rescued on January 1st of this year, the



young female manatee quickly recovered from symptoms of cold stress and propeller wounds after her rescue. During rehabilitation at Sea World Orlando, Magnolia gained close to 200 lbs, a sign of her improving health. In collaboration with Sea to Shore Alliance, a non-profit based in Florida, the MSN team fitted Magnolia with a satellite tag with GPS capabilities, to continue monitoring her progress.

Magnolia began her migration northward along the Florida coastline in mid-April and settled near Apalachicola in the Florida panhandle in early May. In late June, Magnolia’s GPS satellite tag was recovered by MSN researchers in Lake Wimico, Florida. The MSN team is currently on the lookout for Magnolia, who is still equipped with a belt around the base of her fluke. MSN hopes to relocate and retag Magnolia to continue to monitor her progress and movement patterns.

The MSN and ALMMSN teams thank the Audubon Nature Institute, Sea World Orlando, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and dozens of local volunteers who made Magnolia’s rescue and rehabilitation possible! We are now asking for the public’s help to locate Magnolia. If you see a belted manatee, please report your sighting to MSN immediately at 1-866-493-5803.



## Big News for this Year's BirdFest Bird & Conservation Expo

by D. Fran Morley, "Nestkeeper"

If you have driven around the Faulkner State Community College grounds in downtown Fairhope over the past few months, you've noticed the big construction on the southeast corner of campus, at the intersection of Morphy Avenue and School Street: a large, new amphitheater and stage that will be the site of many community events over the years to come. And one of the first events to be held there will be the Alabama Coastal BirdFest's Bird & Conservation Expo on Saturday, October 3.

"Everyone at Faulkner is very excited about the possibilities the new amphitheater brings to Fairhope, and personally, I'm excited about using it for the BirdFest Expo," said **John Borom**, BirdFest founder and director of the Faulkner's Fairhope campus. "The large grassy area within the enclosure will provide ample space for the Expo, including the big tents from Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources with touch tanks and exhibits from various divisions. The other tents of the Expo—vendors, exhibitors, some artists, and others—will be spaced around the big tents, giving everyone plenty of room to walk around and see everything. The stage will be used for various presentations throughout the day, such as the raptor shows, speakers, and music."

The Bird & Conservation Expo is part of the 12th annual BirdFest, set for the first full weekend in October: September 30–October 3. "As you note, that's four days, but we didn't really add a day to BirdFest," Borom explained. "We are including Wednesday, the day of the Welcome Reception and Presentation, that this year will also have two workshops at 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, one on Hummingbirds, taught by Certified Master Bird Bander **Fred Bassett** and one on Basics of Birding, taught by an educator from Birmingham Audubon.

In addition, we are offering a workshop on Bird & Nature Photography on Friday, October 2, taught by **Jeff Johnston**, who was BirdFest's featured photographer in 2012."

This year's BirdFest—now expanded to be a "birding and nature festival" includes trips to favorite spots, along with many trips to new locations, including the Bon Secour River, Alligator Alley in Summerdale, the Mobile County Environmental Studies Center (a rehabilitation facility), and Splinter Hill Bog Preserve. Registration for all trips, evening events, and workshops is online only, at [www.AlabamaCoastalBirdFest.com](http://www.AlabamaCoastalBirdFest.com). Registration opened August 15 and trips fill quickly, so don't delay.

Once again this year, the Bird & Conservation Expo shares the Faulkner campus with two other events, all part of the "Fall into Fairhope" weekend. The Grand Fest of Books, with author readings and signings, is Saturday, and the Grand Festival of Arts, with fine arts and crafts from around the nation, is Saturday and Sunday. For information on all of that weekend's events, "Like" the Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/FallintoFairhope/](http://www.facebook.com/FallintoFairhope/).



Patsy Russo



Patsy Russo

## American Lotus

by Ben Raines, Foundation Executive Director

Rounding a bend in the Tensaw River, the eye is immediately drawn toward the far bank, where, even at great distance, a broad expanse of gigantic golden flowers can be seen spreading away from the water's edge.

Behold the American lotus!

A thousand lemony yellow flowers -- flowers the size of salad plates -- bob above a lush carpet of green lotus pads that stretches for a quarter mile down the shore. If the word pad conjures an image of the classic lily pad floating on the water's surface, think again, for the leaves of the lotus are almost as remarkable as the magnificent flowers.

The lotus pads stand nearly two feet above the water on stout stalks, which support the leaves, great green bowls of foliage that look velvety to the touch and repel water better than any fabric man has yet invented. The flowers stand a foot taller than the pads, making for a striking display.

**William Bartram**, the famous English naturalist, was taken with the lotus when he encountered the flowers in the Mobile-Tensaw Delta in the late 1700s.

"The surface of the water is overspread with its round floating leaves, whilst these are shadowed by a forest of umbrageous leaves with gay flowers, waving to and fro on flexible stems, three or four feet high," Bartram wrote. "These fine flowers are double as a rose, and when expanded are seven or eight inches in diameter and of a lively lemon color."

These are the plants of "lotus-eater" fame, the new world version of the lotus eaten by the sailors in Homer's *Odyssey*. The only real difference between this American species and those found in Asia and Africa is the color of the flower. Ours are yellow, while theirs are pink.

But the sight of so many arrayed on the riverbank casts the same spell anywhere on the globe.

"They started at once, and went about among the Lotus-eaters," wrote Homer, describing what happened to the sailors who ate the lotus, "which was so delicious that those who ate of it left off caring about home, and did not even want to go back and say what had happened to them, but were for staying and munching lotus with the Lotus-eaters without thinking further of their return."

I feel a similar spell every year when the lotus are blooming in the lower Mobile-Tensaw Delta. I'd stay right there among them watching them nod in the breeze forever and a day. And that's without even eating them. Take a bite, and the spell gets even stronger, for nearly every part of the lotus is edible, from flower, to stem, to root.

"The Mobile-Tensaw Delta is home to many interesting and historic plant treasures, with fascinating stories to tell. American lotus, *Nelumbo lutea*, is one of them," said **Fred Nation**, author of *Where the Wild Illicium Grows*. "American lotus is one of several plants that were apparently carried and planted outside their natural ranges by prehistoric southeastern Indians." Nation said that lotus, along with Chickasaw plum, yaupon, and Osage orange, were commonly planted by local tribes.

The most commonly eaten part is the fleshy root, which is shaped like a banana and buried deep, often exceptionally so, in the mud. In fact, a common Buddhist expression holds that, "the lotus flower blooms most beautifully from the deepest and thickest mud." In the Delta, you'll sink up to your knees in the black goo beneath the stands of lotus. The root can be boiled, fried, or sautéed. For those with a hankering to taste lotus root, visit Dragonfly Foodbar in Fairhope, which usually has a dish containing lotus on the menu.



Ben Raines



Ben Raines

The unrolled pads, when new and fresh, rival many leafy greens for taste and texture. The stalks are hollow and can be used as snorkels or straws. The seeds have a warm and nutty flavor, and, by some accounts, a laxative effect. It is probably the seed pod that would be most recognizable to people, though few would know the distinctive pod came from the lotus plant.

Common in floral arrangements, the dried seed pods are funnel shaped, resembling a shower head, with the flat surface pocked with a dozen holes large enough to stick a finger in. Sometimes spray-painted gold or red, the seed pods are ubiquitous in dried floral arrangements the world over.

But the lotus are more than just lovely. They are an integral part of the wetlands of the American south, common in shallow ponds and clean running streams from Florida to the Rocky Mountains.

“The large, round, water-repellent leaves provide shade and shelter for the riparian community, including fish, frogs, and alligators,” Nation said.

Indeed, the animal community living on, beneath and around the lotus stands in the Delta includes all manner of creatures. Bitterns can be seen clinging to lotus stalks while hunting. Egrets perch on the pads for a better view. Dragons and damselflies hunt beneath the overhanging pads, while snakes and gators ease through the dense stalks. Meanwhile, underwater, golden topminnows and killifish shelter in the shadows hoping to avoid bass and bream stalking the underwater forest created by the tall stalks and flower stems.

Meanwhile, around the world, the lotus has inspired art, from the walls of the Egyptian pyramids, and the crowns of the columns at Luxor, to ancient Chinese, Indian and Japanese paintings.

The chance to see the lotus population in all its glory is fleeting. They bloom for about two months a year, from mid-June to mid-August.

### AmeriCorps VISTA Associate: Yael Girard

**Yael Girard** joins the Weeks Bay Foundation from Asheville, North Carolina. She worked in the non-profit sector there for the last two years with the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy (SAHC) and the Western North Carolina Alliance (WNCA). With SAHC, she was instrumental in the creation of their Community Farm and Food program, which was formed to provide assistance to beginning farmers, protect valuable farmland, and promote best agricultural management practices. While at WNCA, she assisted the French Broad Riverkeeper with water quality monitoring and managed the logistics for a nine-day paddle trip.

Ms. Girard graduated from Warren Wilson College in 2006 with a degree in Latin American Studies and a minor in Spanish. Since then, she has worked a variety of jobs, including serving as a National Park Ranger in New Mexico at Carlsbad Caverns. She also guided whitewater trips for rafting companies in Georgia, California, and Montana. In addition, she assisted in instructing whitewater safety courses and acted as an EMT for the Whitewater Rescue Institute.

Obviously, Yael loves the water. In addition, she is an avid traveler and has visited 20 different countries. Her favorites are Croatia, New Zealand, Nepal, and Chile. She also enjoys hiking and camping and through-hiked the Appalachian Trail in 2006. Being new to the Gulf Coast, she is excited to learn more of the native and endemic plant and animal species that live in this unique area.



## 2015 Pelican Paddle Canoe and Kayak Race



With almost 200 participants, the third annual Weeks Bay Foundation Pelican Paddle Canoe and Kayak Race was a tremendous success. Attendance was nearly double from last year's race and was, by far, the largest crowd we've ever had for the event. In addition, over 50 loaner boats were donated for the event by the **Fairhope Boat Company** and **17 Turtles Outfitters**. This meant that more than 50 people who otherwise would not have been able to participate, had the chance to get on the water.

Medals were given to the top three finishers in each division. The seven-mile Pro Solo category was taken by **Jeb Berry** again this year. The Men's Solo Kayak division was won by **Chris Arnoult**. For the second year in a row, the Women's Solo Kayak was won by **Maureen Fitzgerald**. The Canoe division was won by **David and Patricia Johnson**. In the Stand-Up Paddleboard category, **Lane Cox** came in first. **Doug Dinardo** and **Bryan Jones** took the gold in the Non-traditional division. Those two were also the first finishers overall, zooming through the course in a tandem kayak.

For the relaxed floaters, a non-competitive Eco-Tour explored the marsh grasses and flowering banks along the shores of Weeks Bay. The Eco-Tour was led by **Jimbo Meador**, from 17 Turtles Outfitters, with **Dr. Ellis Allen** and **Yael Girard** from the Weeks Bay Foundation assisting. Jimbo shared his vast knowledge of estuarine ecology with the crowd of over 50 paddlers. In addition, he brought a cast net and showed the group some of the small aquatic critters that inhabit the bay.

With so many participants, an energetic group of volunteers was needed to keep everything running smoothly. We appreciate everyone who donated their time to help with setup, registration, boat unloading, merchandise sales, and all the other behind-the-scenes activities that made this event such a success. We would like to give a special thanks to **Daphne Utilities** for cooking hundreds of hot dogs to feed our hungry

paddlers and **Inshore Realty** for cooling everyone off with Sno-kones. The prizes for our drawing were generously donated by **Salty Dog Paddlesports**, **Allen Engineering and Science**, and **Fairhope Boat Company**.

We here at the Weeks Bay Foundation thank everyone who came out to compete, float with the Eco-tour, or watch their friends and loved ones. All proceeds from the Pelican Paddle go towards our continued mission of "protecting the edges." We strive to preserve the valuable wetlands along our coastline, and we would not be able to do it without you. We hope to see everyone back next year for an even bigger and better Pelican Paddle!



### Men's Kayak

1. **Chris Arnoult (42:30)**
2. **Jason Gillikin (42:34)**
3. **Wayne Berry (43:00)**

### Women's Kayak

1. **Maureen Fitzgerald (52:28)**
2. **Ryan Gillikin (54:33)**
3. **Kristy Kiernan (54:34)**

### Non-Traditional

1. **Doug Dinardo & Bryan Jones (38:20)**
2. **Mike Abeln (42:30)**
3. **Dave Hale & Jim Frederick (45:48)**

### Stand Up Paddle

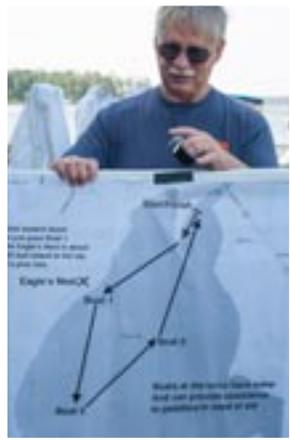
1. **Lane Cox (1:03:38)**
2. **Brian Hedges (1:04:07)**
3. **Jon Sansom (1:08:00)**

### Pro Kayak - 7 mile course

1. **Jeb Berry (1:10:50)**
2. **Steve Harris (1:25:32)**
3. **Muril Robertson (1:27:50)**

### Canoe

1. **David Johnson & Patricia Johnson (1:01:29)**
2. **Kevin Anderson (1:07:37)**
3. **Jeff Beasley & Stacey Beasley (1:12:12)**



Photos by Sherry Stimpson Frost and Kathy Hicks



## A River Less Traveled

by Chase Diard, ExxonMobil Community Summer Jobs Program Intern

In early June, we decided to go on a scouting trip on upper Magnolia River in order to see if it was easily navigable by kayak. The plan was to put in three kayaks at a bridge that crosses the Magnolia River on Highway 24, approximately 6 miles from the Cold Hole in Magnolia Springs where we would have a car waiting for us. We expected to cover about a mile an hour due to the fact that water travel is slow and we thought there would be some obstacles on our route. We were skeptical that we would see much wildlife due to the fact that much of the trip would be near people's backyards and even through the Foley Airport property.

Six hours after our journey started, we drug our kayaks out of the woods onto the side of Highway 65, not even a mile and a half from where we had started. Our expectations had been shattered. As it turns out, the upper stretch of the Magnolia is not nearly as straight as Google Maps suggests. It is a labyrinth, doubling back on itself countless times. It took only 15 minutes before we determined the upper Magnolia River was in no way easily navigable by kayak. Every 20 or so yards, the three of us were getting out of our kayaks, pushing the front ends over a downed tree, then the back end, then climbing over the tree. We performed that awkward dance countless times. When we reached the point of exhaustion an hour in, we joked that we could've walked the river faster than the "kayaking" that we were doing.



The major plus of the trip turned out to be the up close and personal interaction with the abundant wildlife. Despite the fact that the river cut through backyards and the airport, Magnolia was rich with life. We expected to see very few fish, but the bream by the airport were much larger than anticipated, approaching the size of your hand. Good-sized crayfish were also present upstream. After much chasing, we caught one for a photo op. Another surprise was a leech. Growing up here, I had never actually seen a leech until one suctioned onto one of our boats.

Yael Girard



The river proved to be "snakey" in more ways than one. After kayaking within 3 inches of a cottonmouth before anyone noticed it, our vigilance level increased dramatically. With eyes peeled, we saw three more cottonmouths, a copperhead, and a timber rattlesnake before we were finished. Those are just the ones we were able to spot. There's no telling how many we missed.

We learned a lot from our little 1.4 mile, 6 hour ordeal. We definitely learned not to bank on a river that hasn't been paddled in years to be easily navigable. There's a reason people aren't boating on it all the time. We learned that there are plenty of things in our backyards that can kill us. So it's always good to be on the lookout, keeping in mind that the snakes on the trip had no intention of biting us even though we were inches away.

My favorite thing we learned was how wild our backyards are. The scenery on this seldom-visited river was amazing. The surrounding trees, mushrooms, vines and grasses made it seem like you were in a complete wilderness even though we were half a mile from a road. All around our area are places people rarely see or visit. Lots of these areas can be found right by roads or houses. It's great to know that there are many local adventures to be found, we just have to look around for them.

*The Weeks Bay Foundation focuses on protecting the wild and rare places that surround us, places like the section of river Chase paddled. We are grateful to the ExxonMobil Foundation for providing the grant that funds our summer intern program.*

## Buttonbush, *Cephalanthus occidentalis*

by Fred Nation

Buttonbush is a large deciduous shrub, to about 15 feet tall, with a broad, open, irregular habit. It is native to a variety of wetlands in the eastern United States, from east Texas to Florida, north to Maine, and it is frequently seen in the swamps and on creek and river banks at Weeks Bay Reserve. The foliage is arranged in "whorls," which is somewhat unusual, with three or four leaves often growing from the same point on the stems. The leaves are elliptical, to about 6 inches long, often with reddish stalks and depressed veins which give them an attractive quilted appearance. A couple of other common names are "honey-bells" and "button willow."

The small, creamy-white, fragrant flowers are arranged in spherical heads to about 2 inches across. When in full bloom during the hot part of the summer, their resemblance to fancy Christmas ornaments is a pleasant surprise to boaters and nature lovers who walk along the wooded shores of Mobile Bay. Hummingbirds and especially butterflies are fond of the nectar, and it is an important summer nectar plant for honeybees. When the spherical fruits ripen in the fall, the seeds are eagerly foraged by many bird species, including waterfowl and shore birds. The leaves are a favorite browse for white-tailed deer.



Though it is considered toxic, Buttonbush has been widely used as a medicinal plant, to treat a variety of maladies, including fever, dysentery and toothaches. It was widely used during the Civil War, apparently with some success, as a treatment for “the ague,” or “intermittent fever,” which are two old names for malaria. In fact, *Cephalanthus occidentalis* is a close relative of the South American Cinchona tree, which is the source of quinine, an effective standard treatment for malaria. Buttonbush has some other distinguished family relations, including Bluet, a pretty native wildflower, Gardenia, and, most important of all, one of the world’s most valuable - and necessary - commodities: coffee!

## Fishing for a Living

by Shelagh Van Anglen, ExxonMobil Community Summer Jobs Program Intern

It was 7:15 in the morning and I was standing on the wooden pier by the Dauphin Island Marina. I was barely awake and feeling like I could easily crawl back into bed, but how often do you get to go out snapper fishing for work? In late June, researchers from the University of South Alabama recruited volunteers from area organizations, including a crew from the Weeks Bay Foundation, to go on a fishing trip to aid in a snapper research effort. The study looks at the populations of red snapper around man-made reefs. Over the course of the trip, we went out about 20 miles into the Gulf, saw a dozen species of aquatic creatures, and caught a hundred red snapper.



Yael Girard

At each reef structure, a large underwater camera was lowered to the sea floor. The video feed showed up on a monitor on the boat and allowed us to get a better look at the reefs below. You could clearly see all the red snapper circling around each reef, as well as many other species of fish and other sea critters. Besides red snapper, we were lucky enough to view a couple pods of dolphins, lionfish and even bull and tiger sharks. The purpose of this first step was to look at the red snapper population around each reef and how big the snapper were growing.

During the day, we took footage at eight underwater, man-made reefs. Each structure varied in size and appearance. After getting a good look at each reef, the volunteers began the fun part: fishing. We fished each reef for 15 minute intervals, with 10 lines in the water at one time. As soon as a fish was caught, it was measured and weighed. The results of each fish were written down. The fish were kept so that the otoliths could be examined back at the Sea Lab. Otoliths are basically fish ear bones and can be used to determine a fish’s age.

Although everyone caught quite a few fish, the largest catch of the day was actually one that got away, sort of. One of the volunteers was pulling hard on a monster snapper. At a certain point he gave an extra hard tug and pulled up his line. Unfortunately, all that came up was the fish’s head. A shark had claimed the other half while the snapper was helpless on the hook.

After ten hours on the water, we glided back into the marina sunburned, salty, and stocked with snapper. The fish we kept from the trip were cut into filets and distributed amongst those who went on the trip as a reward for a long days’ worth of fishing. The rest of the carcasses were put on ice to be further dissected at the Sea Lab. This trip was a wonderful experience and I would gladly go again in a heartbeat.



S. VanAnglen / C. Diard

*Thank you to Shelagh from the Weeks Bay Foundation for great work during her internship. Look for our 2015 Christmas ornament, designed by Shelagh. Thanks to the ExxonMobil Foundation for providing the grant that funds our summer intern program.*



## Thanks to Our Donors May to July, 2015

Georgia Ackerman  
Alabama Coastal Heritage Trust  
Dr. Ellis & Katherine Allen  
Kristin & Joe Babington  
Owen & Genie Bailey  
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Wayne Berry  
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## Become a part of the Weeks Bay Foundation!

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Sustainer	\$1,000 - \$4,999
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Friend	\$ 100 - \$249
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Join us by returning the enclosed  
envelope  
or look for the link on  
our home page at  
[www.weeksbay.org](http://www.weeksbay.org).

Donate to the Foundation through the  
Combined Federal Campaign, Code 37621

## Hello Lubber!

by Yael Girard, Foundation AmeriCorps VISTA Associate

We've just passed the American lotus season here on the Mobile-Tensaw Delta. The giant fragrant yellow blooms climb up from the mucky marsh floors and burst vibrantly out into the sea breeze. Along with these impressive flowers, comes an equally impressive eating machine: the lubber.

In March, lubbers hatch out at the size of a grain of rice. They then spend the following five months procreating, stuffing themselves with any available plant matter, and growing to tremendous sizes. Adult lubbers can be up to 4 inches long. This is a situation where the name truly fits the creature. The word "lubber" was often used for those folks who were inordinately lazy and clumsy. With their tiny wings and huge bodies, the lubber grasshopper could be seen as both those things. They cannot fly efficiently, and they barely react when you get close to them.



Ben Raines

With such limited mobility, you might think the lubbers would be easy pickings for birds, fish, and small mammals. And they probably would be, if they weren't toxic. The toxins cause vomiting and prevent the lubbers from having too many natural predators. In fact, the loggerhead shrike is one of the only animals that bother with them, and the birds had to develop a few unique tactics to make their poisonous prey palatable. The shrikes often impale the lubbers on barbwire or thorns and wait up to three days for the toxins to break down before consuming them. If the birds can't wait that long, the shrikes will also dissect the hoppers and remove the poison filled thorax before eating them.



Yael Girard

Aside from being mostly inedible, the lubber's other defenses include loudly hissing when handled, secreting a foamy irritant spray from their abdomen, and regurgitating up partially digested plant material. So, although they won't bite or sting you, it's probably best not to be grabbing them up by the handful.

By August, the lubbers will all but disappear for the year. This is caused, in part, by parasitic flies that lay eggs inside the lubbers and use them as a host. When the flies hatch, the grasshoppers are killed. Luckily, by then the female lubbers have already deposited foamy egg bundles in shallow holes underground. These eggs will remain dormant until the following spring, when the cycle will start again.

## Ollinger Tract

After years of negotiations, the Weeks Bay Foundation closed on a wetland parcel known as the Ollinger tract. The 143-acre property butts up to Mary Ann Beach Road, and stretches north into the 800-plus acre Meadows complex, which is jointly owned by the State of Alabama and Baldwin County.

The Meadows is one of the largest and most important chunks of maritime forest along Mobile Bay between the mouth of Weeks Bay and the Mobile-Tensaw Delta. Consisting of cypress swamp, pitcher plant bogs, and sawgrass meadows, the Meadows area is home to bobcats, alligators, and dozens upon dozens of species of birds. The whole wetland complex drains into Weeks Bay via Muddy Bayou, which begins in the Ollinger Tract.



The Foundation previously protected the north end of the Meadows through a 160-acre conservation easement and the purchase of a 73-acre parcel of pitcher plant bog known as the Stelzenmuller tract. Now, we have protected the south end of the Meadows with the Ollinger land.



Ultimately, the Ollinger tract connects the wetlands of the Meadows complex to Weeks Bay. The acquisition permanently protects the connection between the Meadows and its wetlands with Weeks Bay and Mobile Bay.

For our members, the acquisition of this tract is a perfect example of the Foundation's mission of "protecting the edges." Ollinger is the key piece of the puzzle to ensure that the Meadows complex is able to function as a vital, flowing wetland forever. To all our members, new and old, your investment in the Foundation made this acquisition possible.



## What's in a Name? - Our Wetlands

The term “wetlands” actually encompasses numerous different ecosystems, all with characteristics, plants, and animals that are unique to that place. Here are few that are common in our area.



### *Bogs*

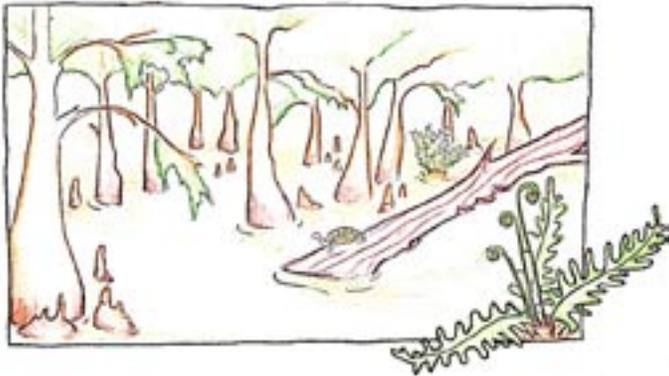
These lands are formed by the accumulation of both water and peat in a depression. Peat is partially decomposed bits of other plants. The result is a spongy open meadow, sometimes with small pockets of standing water. Bogs are typically acidic, which means it is difficult for most plants to grow there. However, certain plants have adapted to these conditions and can be found in the bogs just outside your back door.

#### **Notable bogs in our area:**

- Weeks Bay Reserve Pitcher Plant Bog, Fairhope
- Splinter Hill Bog Preserve, Bay Minette

#### **Plants you might see in our bogs:**

- Pitcher plants
- Sundews
- Huckleberries
- Slash Pines



### *Swamps*

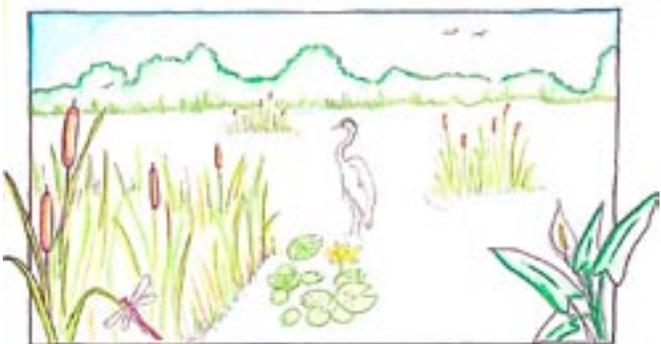
If you have ever explored the upper Mobile-Tensaw Delta you have probably come across a swamp. Swamps are characterized by slow or stagnant water from neighboring rivers that has settled into low lying areas. Trees have also grown up in these areas and provide habitat for the animals living there. Around our area, Cypress swamps are very common.

#### **Notable swamps in our area:**

- Gum Swamp, Point Clear
- Byrnes Lake, Spanish Fort

#### **Plants you might see in our swamps:**

- Cypress trees
- Spanish Moss
- Ferns
- St John's Wort



### *Marshes*

Unlike swamps, marshes are predominantly covered in grasses. There are both freshwater and saltwater marshes. This ecosystem tends to form at the mouths of rivers, in the deltas. With so much grass, marshes are great at slowing down floodwaters and filtering out debris. Marshes also act as a nursery for much of the seafood we like to eat, including shrimp, oysters, and certain fish.

#### **Notable marshes in our area:**

- Mobile-Tensaw Delta
- The undeveloped edges of Weeks Bay

#### **Plants you might see in our marshes:**

- Cattails
- Water lilies and lotuses
- Arrow leaf arum
- Cordgrass, sawgrass, and rushes

### *Why do these wetlands matter?*

- These wetlands provide habitat for species that aren't found anywhere else.
- They filter pollutants and sediment out of the water.

- They are breeding grounds for most of our seafood.
- They lessen the impact of maritime storms as they make landfall.
- They are an important stopover for migrating birds.
- They are beautiful and unique!

# FALL 2015 CALENDAR

## September

- 7 **Labor Day Holiday.\***
- 8 **Guest Lecture Series. "Tales from Down Under"** presented by **Gaye Lindsey**. 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7:00 p.m. Bring a friend.
- 9 **Weeks Bay Advisory Committee Meeting.** Tonsmeire Weeks Bay Resource Center, 2:00 p.m.
- 9 **Public Meeting – Federal Evaluation of the Weeks Bay Reserve.** Weeks Bay Auditorium, 6:00 p.m.
- 19 **28th Annual Alabama Coastal Cleanup.** Fish River Marina, 8:00 a.m. to noon. For more information, contact the Reserve, (251) 928-9792.
- 19 **National Estuaries Day.** Learn more at [estuaries.noaa.gov](http://estuaries.noaa.gov).
- 19-26 **National Estuaries Week.** Learn more at [estuaries.noaa.gov](http://estuaries.noaa.gov).
- 26 **Kids Fishing Day.** A joint project of the Foundation, the Reserve, and ADCNR State Lands Division, Coastal Section and Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division. Safe Harbor pond, across U.S. Highway 98 from the Reserve Visitor Center, 8:00 a.m. to noon. For more information, contact the Foundation office at (251) 990-5004.
- 30 **Alabama Coastal BirdFest Orientation and Welcome Reception.** 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 6:00 p.m., register online at [www.AlabamaCoastalBirdFest.com](http://www.AlabamaCoastalBirdFest.com).

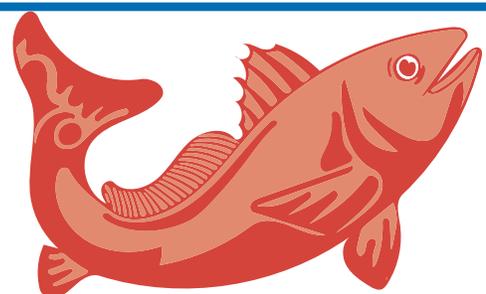
*\*The Visitor Center will be closed. All trails and boardwalks will remain open for your walking and sightseeing pleasure.*

## October

- 1-3 **12th Annual John L. Borom Alabama Coastal BirdFest.** For more information about tours and events, go to [www.weeksbay.org](http://www.weeksbay.org) and click on Alabama Coastal BirdFest or go to [www.AlabamaCoastalBirdFest.com](http://www.AlabamaCoastalBirdFest.com).
- 3 **Alabama Coastal BirdFest Bird & Conservation Expo.** Faulkner State Community College Fairhope Campus, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Free admission.
- 9-11 **Weeks Bay Native Plant Sale.** Safe Harbor at Weeks Bay, across U.S. Highway 98 from the Reserve Visitor Center, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- 12 **Columbus Day Holiday.\***
- 13 **Guest Lecture Series. "Project Puffin"** presented by **Emma Rhodes**. 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7:00 p.m. Bring a friend.
- 19 **Weeks Bay Photography Contest.** Entry and submission of photos will be online only this year, at [www.WeeksBay.org](http://www.WeeksBay.org). For more information, call (251) 990-5004.
- 26-30 **NERRS National Meeting.** Coordination meeting of 28 Reserves co-hosted by the Weeks Bay and Grand Bay Reserves, in Mobile, Alabama.

## November

- 11 **Veteran's Day Holiday.\***
- 10 **Guest Lecture Series. "The Galapagos Islands"** presented by **John Borom**. 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7:00 p.m. Bring a friend.
- 26 **Thanksgiving Holiday.\***



### 28TH ANNUAL ALABAMA COASTAL CLEANUP

*Get the Trash Out of the Splash*

**Saturday, September 19, 2015 | 8AM – Noon**

### 23rd Annual WEEKS BAY NATIVE PLANT SALE

Friday, Saturday, & Sunday  
October 9th-11th - 9am to 4pm

Shrubs - Perennials - Butterfly Plants - Trees  
- Hummingbird Plants - Wetland Plants -  
Dune Plants - More

Safe Harbor at Weeks Bay  
Across U.S. Hwy 98 from Weeks Bay Reserve

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"If you can't be in awe of Mother Nature, there's something wrong with you." - Alex Trebek

## KIDS FISHING DAY FREE!



Sponsored by the Weeks Bay Foundation

**Saturday, Sept. 26, 2015**

8am to 12pm

Weeks Bay Reserve's Safe Harbor Pond  
US 98, just west of the Fish River bridge

Join us for a day of **free fishing**  
**just for kids.** The pond is stocked full!

For more information, call 990-5004 or  
see us at [www.weeksbay.org](http://www.weeksbay.org).



photo by Sherry Stimpson Frost

## 16th Annual Weeks Bay Photo Contest



2014 Weeks Bay  
Photo Contest  
*Best of Show* by  
Stephanie Pluscht

This year's entry deadline is  
**Monday, Oct. 19, 2015 at 4:00 p.m.**  
Entry and submission of photos will be online  
only this year, at [www.WeeksBay.org](http://www.WeeksBay.org).

For more information, please call (251) 990-5004 or  
visit [www.weeksbay.org](http://www.weeksbay.org).

