



THE PELICAN POST

A quarterly publication - Weeks Bay Foundation
Winter 2015
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Protecting the Edges for 25 Years



2015 Weeks Bay Photo Contest
Great Egrets by Susan Rouillier

2015 Weeks Bay Photo Contest: *Great White Egrets* by Susan Rouillier

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25 Years of Conservation

As the 25th year of the Weeks Bay Foundation comes to a close, it is important to honor all that we have accomplished and look forward to our future opportunities. After a quarter of a century working to protect the beautiful and unique parts of coastal Alabama, the Foundation recognizes the importance of our members, partners, and community collaborators.

It is with the help of all these groups that we have achieved another milestone. This year, after a lengthy negotiation process, we have protected a 143-acre priority property. This tract of land has never been developed and – as such – contains cypress swamps, bog conditions, and pine forests. Hidden among the



Swamp Azalea (Yael Girard)

trees are small rare plants such as the swamp azalea and carnivorous sundew. It is home to numerous birds, reptiles, and amphibians. The headwaters to Muddy Bayou are also protected within this parcel, providing important habitat for fish. Perhaps most importantly, it is adjacent to the 835-acre Meadows tract. With this addition to the Meadows – along with other tracts previously protected by the Foundation – we have helped to create a protected zone of 1,200 wetland acres.



Sundew (Yael Girard)

The Foundation knows that these large tracts of undisturbed sensitive wetland habitats in coastal Alabama are important to our health, security, and standard of living. We also know that our members care deeply for these areas.

Without everyone who volunteers their time, renews their memberships, attends our events, and shares the mission of the Weeks Bay Foundation with their friends and families, we would not have been successful these 25 years. In order for us to continue this invaluable work, we ask our friends and neighbors to consider contributing to the **Weeks Bay Foundation Annual Fund**. This donation will further our conservation efforts and allow us to pursue other properties such as the one above. With your help, we look forward to all the possibilities the next 25 years will bring!



Cypress Swamp (Yael Girard)

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.

Layout & Design by
Kathy Hicks

Cover:
2015 Weeks Bay
Photo Contest winner:
Great White Egrets
by Susan Roullier



Join the Weeks Bay Foundation Legacy Society

Make a Planned Gift to the Weeks Bay Foundation

by Leslie Weeks, Foundation Board Member

Members of the Weeks Bay Foundation understand the importance of permanent land conservation. Our staff works diligently to care for and monitor our existing properties while focusing on new conservation opportunities. Annual giving from our members will always be important to our work – ***it is critical and greatly appreciated.*** To expand our conservation efforts, we need members willing to support the future of the Foundation by joining the Weeks Bay Foundation Legacy Society. By making a planned gift, you can help ensure that the Foundation remains a strong and successful advocate for coastal conservation.

What is Planned Giving? Planned giving refers to any charitable gift that requires more thought and planning to execute than the average donation. Planned giving has traditionally been defined as the gift that an individual creates during his or her lifetime that will take effect at or after their passing. There are many kinds of planned gifts, including, but not limited to: gifts of appreciated securities, simple devises in a will or trust or within an estate plan, charitable gift annuities, charitable remainder trusts, charitable lead trusts, non-cash assets, and assets transferred using pay-on-death or transfer-on-death documents.



Gifts of Securities

Making a gift of securities - *stocks, mutual funds, or bonds* - is easy and can provide a double tax benefit. When you give appreciated securities to the Foundation you avoid paying capital gains taxes and you receive a tax deduction for the full fair market value of the gift. Because of these tax benefits, gifts of appreciated securities to 501(c)(3) organizations like the Foundation often provide the donor with more tax benefits than gifts of cash. In sum, a gift of appreciated securities will yield two tax benefits:

- Any long-term appreciated securities with unrealized gains (meaning they were purchased over a year ago, and have a current value greater than their original cost) may be donated to the Foundation and a tax deduction taken for *the full fair market value of the securities* — up to 30% of the donor's adjusted gross income.
- Since the securities are donated rather than sold, *capital gains taxes from selling the securities no longer apply.* The more appreciation the securities have, the greater the tax savings will be.

If you are considering a gift of appreciated securities, consult your tax advisor about your particular tax situation.

Given the many options available, this series will span multiple issues of *The Pelican Post*. In the spring publication, learn how to make the Weeks Bay Foundation a beneficiary under your will or trust.

Foundation Lands Provide Haven for Migrating Birds - You Can Help!

by John Borom, Foundation Vice President

Imagine you are a tiny songbird weighing a matter of ounces and you have been flying north against the wind at an altitude of 6,000 feet over the Gulf of Mexico at a rate of 30 miles per hour for 18 hours. You are navigating simply by an inherent ability to map the sky and are approaching the northern Gulf Coast. You are hungry, thirsty, your flight muscles and tendons are tired, and you need to stop soon for a break. Suppose you have made this migration before and you are counting on that certain coastal forest to supply insects, spiders, fruits, and a rest area that has come to your rescue in the past. You know you are getting close - you recognize the outline of the shore - and you breathe a sigh of relief as the land comes into view. You are cutting it close this time; for the rapid heartbeat and metabolism that have kept your powerful wing muscles flexing rhythmically hour after hour have taken a heavy toll on body fuel! Suddenly, you notice that the coastal forest is gone! It has been replaced by condominiums, tennis courts, golf courses, roads, and parking lots. No food is available. You are miles from the next available source of food! What are you going to do?



Migration naturally involves risks and has its costs. Birds migrate because the benefits outweigh the costs whether by virtue of greater reproductive success in the insect-rich temperate zone or increased survival rates over the winter in the warm tropics. However, death during migration takes a heavy toll. Predation and bad weather are two natural causes of mortality during migration. Collisions with tall buildings, windows, and other structures, and getting struck by automobiles are a few of the numerous man-made dangers. However, the continued loss and degradation of stopover habitat is potentially the greatest threat of all. If appropriate habitat is not available for a needed stopover, birds must either fly farther, even if a weakened condition makes it unlikely that they will survive, or remain in poor habitat and risk starving or becoming easy prey for a predator. Populations of many songbirds migrating across the Gulf have decreased by half since the 1960s. Some have declined by more than 75% in the past 25 years.



Kathy Hicks

With increased pressures of development along coastal areas of the Gulf, the preservation of forested wetlands has never been more important. Coastal lands preserved by the Weeks Bay Foundation provide important stopover refueling sites for trans-Gulf migratory birds. You can help by supporting the Foundation and enabling us to preserve even more habitat. Your involvement and support is vital and is appreciated. You can make a difference!

The Smiling Spider

by Yael Girard, Foundation Stewardship and Outreach Coordinator

Nearly walking into the small lemon-shaped orb floating about face level was a bit of a shock, but noticing that it appeared to be smiling at me was even weirder. What I was looking at was actually the back of a female *Gasteracantha cancriformis*, commonly called a crab spider or star spider. These diminutive arachnids range across the southern United States and down into the northern part of Argentina.

The *Gasteracantha* genus has numerous species and can be found throughout the world, from the Americas to Africa to Australia. The cool thing about these common spiders is the variety of color and spike combinations. The *Gasteracantha westringii* (Westring's Spiny Spider) in Australia is particularly beautiful, with burgundy spines and a sage green and yellow back. Likewise, *Gasteracantha versicolor* (long-winged kite spider) can range from a rusty orange and cream banded abdomen to a sunshine yellow and blood red pattern.

The crab spiders that we have here in Alabama are usually tiny, ranging from 10-13 millimeters wide. Even being so small and so common, these spiders are exceedingly interesting. Each adult female constructs her own large web that she lives on alone. An interesting note about *Gasteracantha* webs is that they are decorated with small tufts of silk. Current research hypothesizes that these clumps are to deter birds from flying into the webs and ruining the spider's hard work, and possibly killing the spider in the process. Crab spiders feed on many pest insects that destroy crops and are considered a beneficial presence in gardens and orchards. So, try not to squash them!

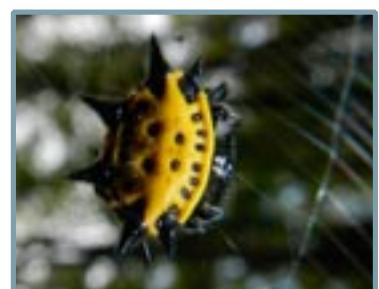
Once mating season arrives, the male suitors visit the web and give one of the outlying strands of silk a couple of taps (sort of like knocking on the front door of your date's house). When the female hears the tap, she rushes to the edge of the web, grabs the male, and straps him down to the web with silk strands Fifty-Shades-of-Grey style. Apparently, the whole process can take anywhere from 35 minutes to several hours. Once the mating has been successful, the female lays an egg sack with 100-260 eggs. She attaches this bundle to the underside of a leaf near the web and camouflages it with green and yellow silk strands. After the eggs are secure, both the male and female die leaving the hatchlings to survive on their own.



Gasteracantha westringii
(www.arachne.org)



Gasteracantha versicolor
(wikipedia.org)



Gasteracantha cancriformis
(Yael Girard)



2015 John L. Borom Alabama Coastal BirdFest

by D. Fran Morley, BirdFest Nestkeeper

The 2015 Alabama Coastal BirdFest - now officially a “birding and nature festival” - brought together several hundred birders and nature lovers from 18 states and Canada to enjoy prime bird watching along with trips designed to educate visitors and locals about the wonderful abundance of our natural world. In addition to popular trips from previous years, this year’s schedule included new boat trips and paddles on the Bon Secour River, Fly Creek, Weeks Bay, Mobile Bay, and in the Delta; and trips to new destinations, including Splinter Hill Bog, Mobile Botanical Gardens, the Environmental Studies Center, and Alligator Alley, a gator education facility in Summerville. The weather cooperated for this year’s event and according to the guides, more than 140 species of birds were noted during the four days of BirdFest!

This year, the Bird & Conservation Expo had raptors on the big stage, thanks to a move to the new amphitheater on the Faulkner State Community College campus in downtown Fairhope. Once again, the Expo shared the campus with two other events, the Grand Fest of Art and Festival of Books, bringing a large and more diverse crowd to enjoy the Expo.

BirdFest would like to thank the following for sponsorship and support of the 2015 event: Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources: State Lands, Wildlife & Freshwater Fisheries, Marine Resources, and State Parks divisions; 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center; NOAA: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve; Faulkner State Community College; Mobile Bay Audubon Society; Birmingham Audubon Society; Mobile Bay National Estuary Program; Alabama Coastal Heritage Trust; Phillips 66; Louis Mapp; Gulf Shores Convention and Visitors Bureau; Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce; North Baldwin Chamber of Commerce; The Hampton Inn Daphne; Dauphin Island Sea Lab; the cities of Fairhope and Spanish Fort; Fairhope Boy Scouts Troop 47; Fairhope Single Tax Corporation; and TRS: The Registration System.

Ready for next year? Put it on your calendar: the 13th annual Alabama Coastal BirdFest is October 5-8, 2016. Registration will open about August 15. Visit AlabamaCoastalBirdFest.com or [Facebook.com/groups/AlabamaCoastalBirdFest](https://www.facebook.com/groups/AlabamaCoastalBirdFest) for more information as plans develop.



Photos by Kathy Hicks

2015 WEEKS BAY

The winning photos of the Weeks Bay Foundation's annual photo contest were presented to the public along with the winning photographers celebrated at a reception. All of the photos are now part of the permanent collection, which is available for use by conservation groups and individuals.

Thanks and congratulations to all of our contestants. Keep you

FAUNA



Open - 1st:
Susan Rouillier



Junior - 1st:
Sophia Haines



Open - 2nd:
Tonda Dickerson



Junior - 2nd:
Sophia Haines



Open - 3rd:
Angie Carn



Junior - 3rd:
Cameron Herzog

FLORA



Open - 1st:
Lisa Comer



Junior - 1st: Sophia Haines



Open - 2nd:
Stephanie Pluscht



Junior - 2nd: Cameron Herzog



Open - 3rd:
Ray Baker

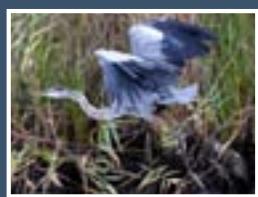


Junior - 3rd:
Cameron Herzog

Honorable Mentions



Open Fauna:
Ray Baker



Open Fauna:
Susan Rouillier



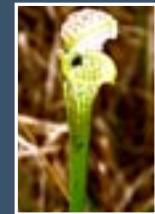
Junior Fauna:
Cameron Herzog



Open Flora:
Duane Miller



Open Flora:
Tonda Dickerson



Junior Flora:
Sophia Haines

PHOTO CONTEST

est will be on display at the 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center in December, photos entered in the contest become part of the Weeks Bay Foundation's groups and other entities looking for great images of our area. Your cameras handy. Next year's contest is just around the corner!

HABITAT



Open - 1st: Harry Surline



Junior - 1st:
Sophia Haines



Junior - 2nd:
Cameron Herzog



Open - 2nd: Ray Baker



Open - 3rd:
Stephanie Pluscht



Junior - 3rd:
Cameron Herzog

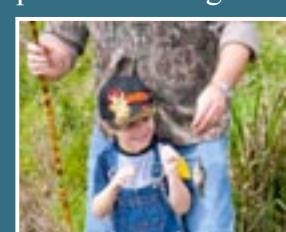
PEOPLE IN NATURE



Junior:
Sophia Haines



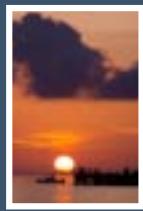
Open - 2nd: Angie Carn



Open - 3rd: Ray Baker



Open Habitat:
Beth Tattersall



Open Habitat:
Stephanie Pluscht



Junior Habitat:
Sophia Haines



Open People in Nature:
Roger Ahrens



Open People in Nature:
Laurie Schaefer



2015 Kids Fishing Day

by Yael Girard, Foundation Stewardship and Outreach Coordinator

Before the sun had even cleared the tops of the live oaks around the Safe Harbor pond, eager children were wandering through the dew covered grass to find the perfect place to cast their first lines at the Weeks Bay Foundation's annual Kids Fishing Day. As the clock struck 8, there was a whir of reels spooling out over the water and bait hitting the glassy surface. Then, hopeful silence as young anglers waited for the fish to start biting.

This year, they waited longer than usual. In past years, it took mere seconds for the first catches to be pulled in. This time, the sleepy catfish seemed reluctant to sample the veritable buffet set out before them: chicken livers, hot dogs, meal worms, crickets, and shiny lures bobbed through the water untouched. Finally, as the sun warmed the waters, rods around the pond were seen bending under the weight of monstrous fish.

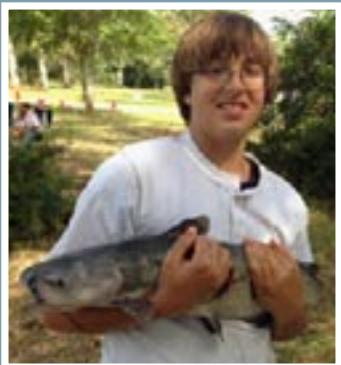


Yael Girard

Children no more than six or seven years old grappled with five pound catfish as the line in their small rods twisted under the pressure. Parents and siblings shouted encouragement and praise. After the epic battles, photos of the victors were taken with their slimy prizes. Some of the fish were nearly the length of their captors. These were added to coolers to be taken home and prepared for dinner.

As the morning progressed, our fisher folks took breaks to restore their energy with hot dogs, veggie dogs, snow-cones, and assorted snacks. Volunteers manned the food stations and made sure everyone had a chance to grab some food. Meanwhile, **Dave Armstrong** and the guys from the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources cut up pounds of bait to resupply the anglers.

At the end of the day, 159 children attended the 2015 Kids Fishing Day. Many went home with their limit of fish and everyone had the chance to enjoy an awesome day on the water. For many of these children, this was their first time fishing and it was an experience they will never forget.



Yael Girard



Sherry Frost



Sherry Frost



Sherry Frost



Rodney Kilgore

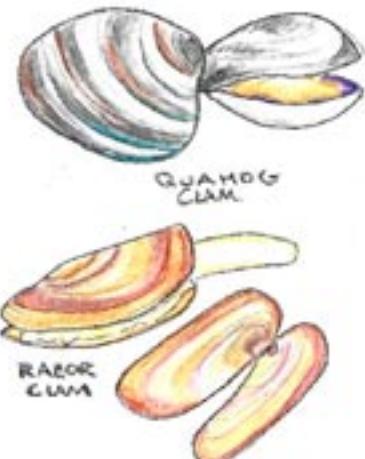
What's in a Name? Clams, Mussels, Oysters

by Yael Girard, Foundation Stewardship and Outreach Coordinator

These slimy, but delicious critters are an important part of our aquatic world. All three of these shelled animals are bivalve mollusks. That means they are invertebrates enclosed in two shells connected together by a hinge. So, what makes them different from one another?

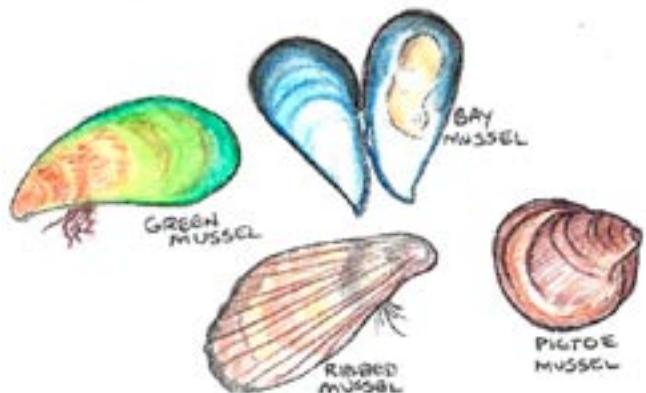
CLAMS

- Clams can live in both freshwater and saltwater environments and can be both soft shelled and hard shelled
- There are over 2,000 varieties of clams
- Clams have a fleshy muscle “foot” that allows them to move and burrow into sandy sea floors
- Some species have been recorded to live up to 500 years
- One of the largest clam fossils ever found was more than 70 inches tall, while modern day littleneck clams are less than two inches



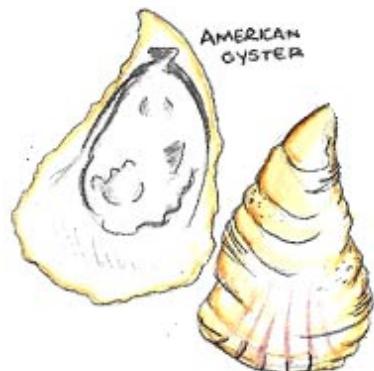
MUSSELS

- Different varieties of mussels can be found in freshwater and saltwater
- Alabama is home to over 180 mussel varieties
- They tend to live on pilings and rocks in the intertidal zone. Once they have attached themselves, they do not move
- Zebra mussels are an invasive species of mussel from Eastern Europe. These creatures are so resilient and fast-growing that over 700,000 zebra mussels have been counted on one square yard of boat surface



OYSTERS

- Oysters are a type of clam that lives in salty or brackish waters
- Oysters start their lives floating along the ocean current as larva. Once their shell starts to harden they sink to the sea floor and have a limited amount of time to find a suitable location. Once they become part of an oyster bed, they will not move again
- Pearl oysters are actually from a different family than the oysters we see in restaurants. However, it is possible for almost all mollusks to produce some kind of pearl



Perhaps the most important thing about all mollusks is their service to our waterways. They can filter excess nutrients and pollutants out of the water in our rivers and bays. Oysters can filter between 20 and 30 gallons of water a day. In addition, these mollusks can help to stabilize shorelines and river banks, thereby increasing our ability to successfully weather storms. So, next time you have a delicious plate of clams, oysters, or mussels remember all the strange and interesting things about these mollusks.

WINTER 2015-16 CALENDAR

December

- 8** Guest Lecture Series “Hiking the Himalayas-2.5 months spent exploring the mountainous regions of India and Nepal” presented by **Yael Girard**, Foundation Stewardship and Outreach Coordinator. 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7:00 p.m. Bring a friend.
- 9** **Weeks Bay Holiday Open House.** Light snacks and drinks will be served at the Tonsmeire Weeks Bay Resource Center, 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.
- 9** **Weeks Bay Advisory Committee Meeting.** Tonsmeire Weeks Bay Resource Center, 2:00 p.m.

24-25 **Christmas Holiday.***



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

January

- 1** **New Year’s Day Holiday.***
- 12** **Weeks Bay Volunteers Annual Meeting.** Lunch to follow. Tonsmeire Weeks Bay Resource Center, 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon.
- 12** Guest Lecture Series “Parks, Petroglyphs, and Beasties of Utah, Colorado, and Wyoming” presented by **Tom Siegwald**. 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7:00 p.m. Bring a friend.
- 18** **Martin Luther King, Jr. / Robert E. Lee Birthday.***

February

- 9** Guest Lecture Series “Trinidad” presented by **Kathy Hicks**. 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7:00 p.m. Bring a friend.
- 9** **Mardi Gras Day.***
- 15** **George Washington / Thomas Jefferson Birthday.***

Estuary Conservation Begins With You

by John Borom, Foundation Vice President



Estuaries are brackish-water areas influenced by tides, where the mouths of rivers come to the sea. Freshwater run-off brings food and other nutrients, which tend to be trapped and concentrated. Aquatic plants use the nutrients to grow and add to the productivity. Aquatic animals use estuaries as nurseries. As a result, estuaries are among the most productive ecosystems on Earth.

For the northern Gulf Coast, estuarine productivity means wide open waters and narrow, quiet tidal creeks. It means bottomland hardwood swamps, deltas, fringing marshes, sandbars, and mudflats. It means Great Blue Herons, Brown Pelicans, Black Terns, Red-breasted Mergansers, and Green-winged Teal. It means blue crabs, white and brown shrimp, oysters, spotted sea trout, red drum, striped mullet, and southern flounders, harvested for fun and profit. It means spawning and nursery grounds for these same creatures. It means a whole host of others — phytoplankton, zooplankton, worms, jellyfishes, barnacles, snails, and the like — that make up the estuarine food web.

Estuaries are worth seeing because they are beautiful and they are worth understanding and protecting because we need them. *It is our pleasure to enjoy nature and utilize the living resources, but it is our responsibility to be good stewards and to leave as much intact for future generations as possible.*

If you are an advocate of habitat protection, environmental science education, and the improvement of water quality, or if you enjoy fishing, crabbing, birdwatching, natural history, and photography, *membership in the Weeks Bay Foundation is for you*. Your membership helps preserve critical habitat and helps fund educational and research efforts that increase our understanding of estuaries. When you join, we all win! We thank you. And, in their own way, so do the creatures who inhabit the beautiful and important coastal environment.

Thanks to Our Donors August to October, 2015

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John Wright

SPECIAL GIFTS

In memory of Hattie Smith
Richard McBroom

In memory of William E. and Florence Schmidt and Lon D. and Lucille Barton
Sherri & Randy Williams

In memory of Sonny Cox
Emmett & Suzanne Carden

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Mobile Bay National Estuary Program
National Estuarine Research Reserve Association
NOAA Coastal Services Center
The Curtis and Edith Munson Foundation
The Nature Conservancy
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve
Weeks Bay Volunteers

Become a part of the Weeks Bay Foundation!

Giving Levels

Legacy Circle	\$5,000 and up
Sustainer	\$1,000 - \$4,999
Steward	\$ 500 - \$999
Supporter	\$ 250 - \$499
Friend	\$ 100 - \$249
Member	\$ 35 - \$99

Join us by returning the enclosed envelope or look for the link on our home page at www.weeksbay.org.

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



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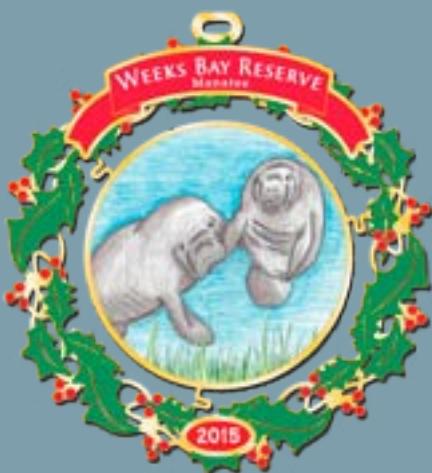


John Borom

"Nature holds the key to our aesthetic, intellectual, cognitive and even spiritual satisfaction."

- E.O. Wilson

2015 Christmas Ornament



With the holidays approaching quickly, it is time to purchase your Weeks Bay Christmas ornament! This year's design is very special. The manatees within the center of the holly wreath were illustrated by one of our own ExxonMobil Community Summer Jobs Program interns, **Shelagh Van Anglen**. Shelagh is an aspiring artist who is also pursuing a degree in environmental studies at the University of Maine in Fort Kent. When asked if she would like to design the ornament, she immediately chose manatees as the subject. Manatees have been spotted in Mobile Bay and in Magnolia River. These gentle giants are listed as an endangered species and are often the victim of motorboat injuries. This impressive ornament showcases Shelagh's considerable artistic talent and reminds us of one of our most loveable aquatic neighbors.

The ornament can be purchased at the Foundation office, the Reserve Visitor Center, and Fairhope Pharmacy's Christmas 'Round the Corner. It can also be purchased – as well as other Foundation gift items – on the Foundation's website, www.weeksbay.org, by clicking on Gift Shop. Look for the option to give a one-year membership in the Foundation and an ornament for \$50. It's a wonderful way to introduce the Weeks Bay Foundation to your friends and family!