



# THE PELICAN POST

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The Mouth of Weeks Bay  
Photo by Kathy Hicks

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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.*

Layout & Design by  
Kathy Hicks

## *From the Executive Director . . .*

The leaves are falling, the nights are (finally!) cooling down, and it's time for pumpkin spice everything! As we head into the final month of 2016, it is the perfect time to review all of our successes throughout 2016.

We have protected three new properties this year, including the 4.5 acre marsh at **Crescent Point**. This property at the mouth of Weeks Bay provides protected habitat for birds, small fish, and other aquatic critters. Read more about it on the following page.

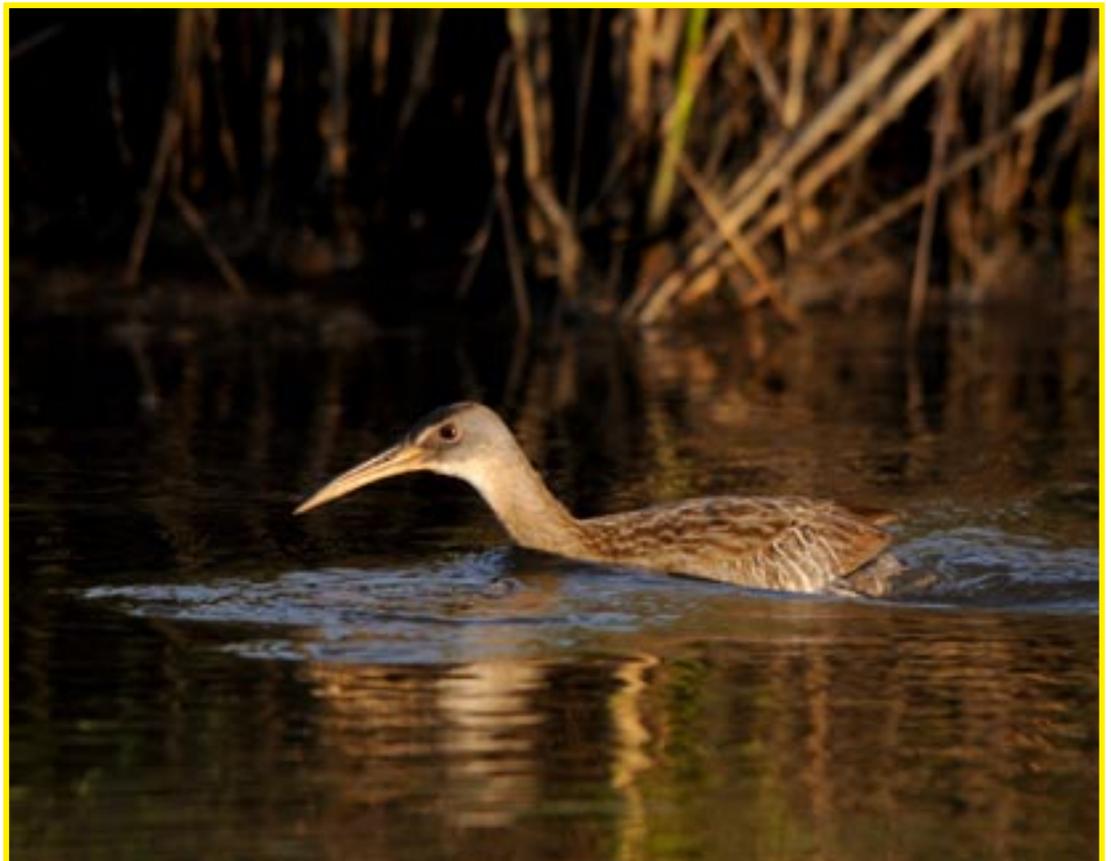
Our 2016 events were some of our best yet, from a record-breaking **Bald Eagle Bash** to the recent **Alabama Coastal BirdFest**. We also had a fantastic time at this year's **Kids Fishing Day**, with 130 area children getting a chance to cast a line.

Celebrate with us by commemorating the past year with a **Weeks Bay Ornament**. Or, give us a Christmas present we won't forget by making a contribution to the Foundation's **Annual Fund**. (In fact, with your donation of \$250 or more to the Annual Fund, we'll send you an ornament!) Your support is what makes our work possible and your investment furthers our mission to protect the woods, wetlands, and waterways of coastal Alabama.

Thank you for being a part of the Weeks Bay Family.

Happy Holidays to you and yours!

Yael



Kathy Hicks

A Clapper Rail swims in the newly-protected Crescent Point marsh



## Crescent Point: A Slice of Serenity

by Yael Girard, Foundation Executive Director



As you come to the end of County Road 1, at the mouth of Weeks Bay, you encounter some lovely houses, a busy boat ramp, and a quiet slice of undisturbed marsh. Tucked on the West side of the mouth of Weeks Bay, this 4.5 acre parcel is a protected haven in the rush of motorboat traffic, fishing lines, and shoreline development.

Monarch Butterfly  
(Yael Girard)



Overflowing with black needle rush (*Juncus roemerianus*) and smooth cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*), crisscrossed with small brackish channels, and tucked into the protective lee of Pelican Point this property provides a haven for numerous birds and small aquatic critters. Crabs, small fish, snails, and snakes can be found in the adjacent canal. Monarchs, Gulf Fritillaries, and Swallowtails congregate on the blooms of the Groundsel Tree (*Baccharis halimifolia*). Meanwhile, visitors to the area have noted shy Clapper Rails and Soras taking shelter and feeding in the marsh.

We are pleased to announce that on September 29, after years of working with various owners who had partial interests in the property, 100% of this parcel was acquired by the Weeks Bay Foundation. The purchase of this property was made possible, in part, by a generous \$10,000 donation from the Alabama Coastal BirdFest. This community support means that this little wedge of wetlands will remain protected forever. It will continue to be a spot for birdwatchers and nature lovers to visit and view.

The Foundation is working on plans to put up informational signs about the importance of our marsh habitats at the property. If you would like to contribute to the installation of these educational displays, please contact the Foundation at (251) 990-5004.



## Outdoor Classroom: Jacksonville State Class Visits Weeks Bay

by Yael Girard, Foundation Executive Director

For most students, local field trips are the best part of any class. Now, imagine if you had the chance to go on a field trip all the way across the state and learn about ecosystems that were completely different from anything you were studying locally? That is exactly what the Freshwater Biology class from Jacksonville State University did.



In early October, five students accompanied **Professor Lori Tolley-Jordan** on an educational visit to the Weeks Bay area. Some of these students had never visited the coast and were unfamiliar with the things we take for granted living in Baldwin and Mobile Counties. Plus, the students were lucky enough to be some of the first researchers to stay in the newly-completed Reserve dormitory.

The class had the opportunity to experience numerous regional features such as salt marshes, tidally influenced estuaries, and coastal stream corridors.



They also had the chance to visit the Foundation's Juniper Bog. Although the peak season for pitcher plants had passed, the students were able to see the carnivorous plants in action and learn about the importance of fire in that sensitive habitat.



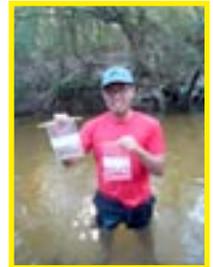
LG Adams discussing water-quality monitoring

On their second day, the students took a ride aboard the *Weeks Bay Explorer* with Reserve Manager **LG Adams** and Reserve Stewardship Coordinator **Eric Brunden**. Moving quickly through the watershed, they were able to measure changes in salinity from upstream in Fish River to the mouth of Weeks Bay at Pelican Point. After getting their land-legs back, the class took a stroll through the Reserve's Ottilie Halstead Visitor Center and extensive boardwalk system. Later, the group followed Foundation Executive Director, **Yael Girard**, to the Foundation's Wiese

property. This 120-plus acre property contains the confluence of Fish River and Corn Branch and is a prime example of coastal headwater streams, rich with aquatic life. The students put on their wading shoes and got out their nets to collect macro invertebrates for studying back in the lab.

With boats provided by 17 Turtles Outfitters, the class spent the last day of their whirlwind tour taking a more leisurely trip around Weeks Bay pulling a plankton trawl. Plankton are the small lifeforms that make up the base of the aquatic food chain and can be great indicators of habitat health. These creatures are often too small to be seen with the naked eye so the samples were brought back to the dorm to be identified and documented.

The Jacksonville State visit was such a success that it is our hope to continue this partnership with them as an annual visit. If you are an educator, the Weeks Bay Reserve boardwalks and visitor center are a great place to visit on your next field trip.



Collecting samples



Measuring salinity

## Sentinel Site Walkway Installed at Reserve

by Eric Brunden, Reserve Stewardship Coordinator

A narrow, elevated walkway has been installed at the Weeks Bay Reserve that allows easier access to the Sentinel Site. The Sentinel Site is a transect through 800 feet of marsh that provides a long-term monitoring site for changes that might occur over time. Funding was provided through a grant with NOAA to purchase materials such as aluminum planks, lumber, bolts and screws. Stewardship Coordinator **Eric Brunden** worked with a State Lands building crew to construct the new walkway.



New walkway to SET tables along Sentinel Site

The Sentinel Site provides monitoring of vegetation and changes in elevation by establishing stations along the walkway. Sediment Elevation Tables, or SET tables, allow measurement of the marsh sediment to see if it remains the same over time or if it is eroding (washing away) or accreting (building up). Such elevation changes may

correlate to changes in vegetation that are also measured. Hydrologic wells installed along the transect allow measurement of ground water. All these measurements along the Sentinel Site provide a reference site of vertical control and environmental parameters at the Reserve. This monitoring will provide valuable data over time and give a better understanding of changes taking place in the Weeks Bay coastal area.



SET table installed on Sentinel Site



Hydrologic well installed on Sentinel Site



## I Am Weeks Bay: An Interview with Frank Laraway

by Yael Girard, Foundation Executive Director

**Frank Laraway** was born on a farm in what is now downtown Fairhope. During these early years, his family would visit Fish River and picnic on the banks. “At the time,” he said, “there was nothing built on the river and the water was crystal clear.” Despite his love of the area and the coastal Alabama waterways, Mr. Laraway left Alabama in 1950 and went out to explore the world.

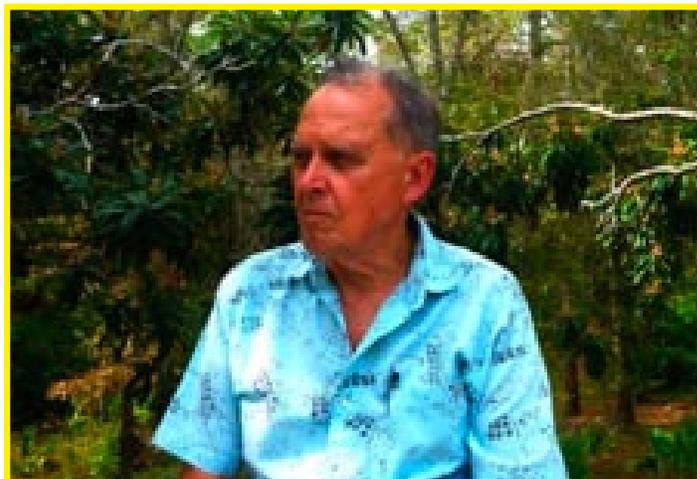
In Arizona, he served as a fellow for the Frank Lloyd Wright Taliesin architecture program. Mr. Laraway recalls living in a wall tent in the desert and sharing the space with both pack rats and Diamond Back Rattlers. He said, “Every night, with the wind howling through the tent, and the rats scurrying along the walls, I would dream about this Fish River, here in Alabama. I would dream about the warm white sand and cool water.” He dreamed about the quiet and solitude of a river without any development. He dreamed about the place of his youth.

When he married in 1963, Mr. Laraway knew it was time to come back to Alabama and the river that he missed. While working with a local realtor, he visited a spot on Fish River that seemed awfully familiar. Looking around, he realized it was the very property where his family had picnicked when he was a boy. And he knew that he had to make his home there. In 1965, his first child was born in the house by the river.

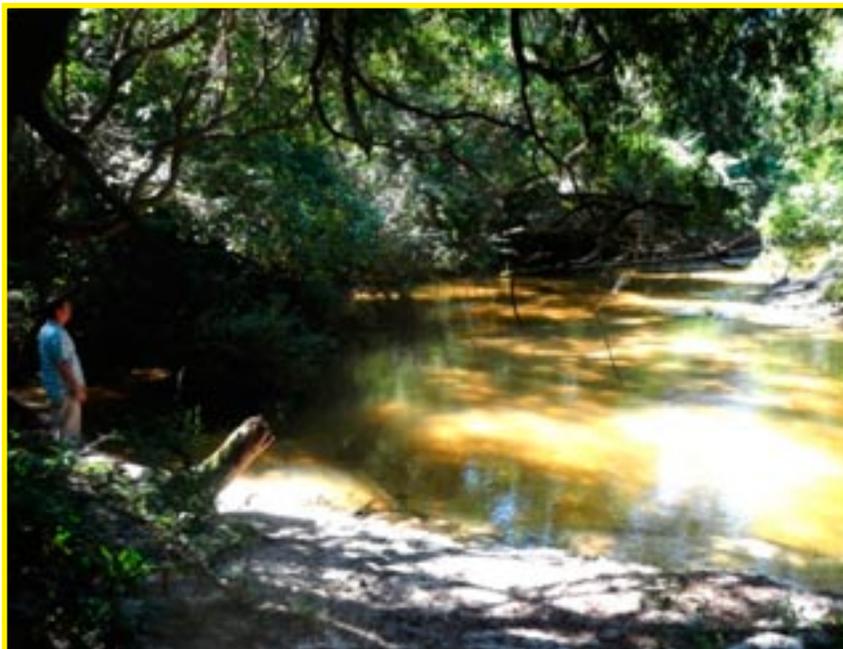
By protecting the 5 acres of his property that borders Fish River, Mr. Laraway has ensured that that area will stay untouched and, as such, will be better able to handle flood events and storm surges. By doing it through a Conservation Easement with the Weeks Bay Foundation, he has ensured his right to live on the land, tend his fruit trees, watch his dog run through the woods, and pass on this piece of property to his children.

Frank Laraway sums up his relationship with the Foundation this way: “I was Weeks Bay 50 years before the Foundation was here. I’ve sailed and camped on that bay since I was a child. I still go in Fish River every day. I try to visit the water as often as I can just to remind myself that it is there and that it should all be protected. I know that I have been the protector of this stretch.”

We would like to thank Mr. Laraway and all of our “protectors” for trusting the Weeks Bay Foundation with their properties and making the choice to ensure that the forests, meadows, swamps, and rivers that they love will be preserved forever.



Mr. Frank Laraway at his home on Fish River



Laraway Conservation Easement on Fish River



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## Slippery Fish and Smiling Families at Kids Fishing Day

*by Yael Girard, Foundation Executive Director*

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There is something special in the anticipation of the first fish of the day. Now imagine you are a child and it is the first catch of your life. The water rippling around a red and white bobber as the minnows explore the hot dog attached to the hook. The unexpected instant when one particularly fearless fish suddenly strikes the bait and runs. The tension of the line and the flex in the rod as you frantically hold on with your tiny hands. Feeling the drag of the fish as it pulls down and you pull up with all your 60 pounds, fighting a fish that might be a sixth of your body weight. Your mom and dad, or grandpa, or sister, cheering as you struggle to wind the reel against the flopping force of nature. And, at last, it breaks the water and you've got it!

This was the scene for many of the children at our 2016 Kids Fishing Day. This free event is open to all children in the area ages 15 and under. We stock the Safe Harbor pond with locally-raised catfish from **Tombigbee Catfish Farm** and they can enjoy a safe, family-friendly day of fishing. The Foundation provides lunch with hotdogs, drinks, snacks, and snow-cones, while the **Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division** provides fishing poles and pre-cut bait.

Many of the children who attend the event would not be able to go fishing otherwise. Either they don't have their own equipment, or they don't have access to a safe place, or their parents do not have experience fishing. Kids Fishing Day is their first chance to land a catch of their own. Even for those children who are experienced anglers, hauling in some of the lunker catfish that lurk at the bottom of the pond is a fun challenge!

You can see more photos from the 2016 Kids Fishing Day on our Facebook page. We hope you can join us for next year's event which will be held in September 2017.





Photos by Yael Girard



## What's in a Name? Falcons vs Hawks

by Yael Girard, Foundation Executive Director

Flying high over the delta, or perched on trees and powerlines, there are numerous raptors that live in our area. Raptors are birds that use their keen eyesight, sharp-hooked beaks, and curved talons to hunt other animals. Hawks and Falcons are two such bird families.

### Falcons – Family *Falconidae*

- The genus *Falco* contains around 40 species.
- Falcons tend to use their beaks for killing or stunning their prey and therefore are more equipped for aerial attacks. They often hunt smaller birds in the air.
- The silhouette of the Falcon shows longer, pointed wings with a narrow tail.
- They can be extremely fast. The Peregrine Falcon is the fastest recorded bird with flight speeds around 60 mph and diving speeds of up to 200 mph!
- Falcons in our area: American Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon, and Merlin.



Peregrine Falcon



### Hawks – Family *Accipitridae*

- There are 17 Hawk species in North America.
- Hawks have incredible eyesight and can fly low through vegetation after small critters like snakes and mice.
- A Hawk silhouette shows shorter wings with less curvature and a more fanned tail.
- Many Hawks are built for soaring and can circle, or “kettle” on an air current without moving their wings, often giving them the appearance of a vulture.
- Hawks in our area: Red-tailed Hawk, Cooper’s Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, and Sharp-shinned Hawk.

With this new information, you might be able to better distinguish a Hawk from a Falcon next time you see one in your neighborhood!

These important birds depend on tall trees for nesting, clean water sources, and undisturbed habitat that provides other birds or small animals for food. The Weeks Bay Foundation works to protect areas that have all of these characteristics.



Cooper's Hawk



# 13th Annual Alabama Coastal BirdFest Is One for the Books

by D. Fran Morley, BirdFest Nestkeeper



BirdFest group at Alligator Alley



Taking advantage of beautiful early-October weather, the 13th annual Alabama Coastal BirdFest took participants on bird- and nature-watching adventures from the Mobile-Tensaw Delta to Dauphin Island, and from Perdido Pass to Grand Bay National Wildlife Refuge. This year, there were nearly 400 registrants from 19 states, and as usual, many were making their first trip to the deep South.

“Serious birders know this is a prime spot to see not just local birds but migrating birds from all over North America, and that’s why we get visitors from as far away as Nevada and Oregon,” said **John Borom**, BirdFest founder. “It’s always important that we make sure that not only do they see birds but that they have a good time when they visit Alabama.” Since 2004, BirdFest has welcomed visitors from nearly 30 states and Canada.

Whether they traveled a great distance or came from just down the road, birders’ reports were positive. **Susan B.**, a first-time visitor from Georgia, reported on Facebook that she saw 69 different species and added five birds to her life list.



Dauphin Island Sea Lab Research Vessel

“We ask the guides to let us know what was seen on their trips, and overall, we had a total of 130 species,” said **Kathy Hicks**. “Several people were excited to see birds they had never seen before, and there were some real standouts, such as Chandeaur Gull and Scaly-breasted Munia (also known as a Nutmeg Mannikin). **Howard Horne** spotted a Masked Booby offshore during the Dauphin Island Shorebirds trip, and that was a really special find! Other birds that were nice to see included Nelson’s Sparrow, Seaside Sparrow, Philadelphia Vireo, and Sedge Wren.”



Bonnethead Shark

The BirdFest group on Facebook is one place birders can find up-to-date information about BirdFest, enjoy the support of other birders, and see hundreds of photos that members post year-round, Borom said. “Birders share information on what you might see right now and where, they ask each other questions, and they help each other with bird identification. It really is a good community.”

This year’s BirdFest featured 2016 poster photographer **Janice Neitzel** at the opening night presentation. **Dr. John Dindo** spoke at the Friday night dinner. More than 2,000 people came to the Bird & Conservation Expo on the Faulkner State Community College campus in Fairhope, which had booths, exhibits, and raptor shows. This year’s Expo also included an expanded kids’ activities area.

BirdFest is the first full weekend in October, so mark your calendar now for the 14th annual Alabama Coastal BirdFest, October 4-7, 2017.



Leucistic or White Morph  
Great Blue Heron

Photos by Sherry Stimpson Frost





## New Teacher at Weeks Bay Reserve: Christine Olsen

**Christine Olsen** has been a science teacher in public schools for 13 years. She has taught biology, marine biology, and most recently AP biology. Her passion has always been for the marine environment and she is very excited to be the new Resource Teacher at the Weeks Bay Reserve. This position is provided by the Baldwin County Public School System.

“My vision is to have a school group visiting the Reserve every day,” said Christine. “Our students should know what a wonderful natural treasure we have right here in their own backyard and become stakeholders in its continued health.” She says that science students, obviously, would obtain immeasurable value from a trip to the Reserve, but she would like to expand this to all academic classes. “I would like to see math classes visit; they could use the data generated by our researchers and make real-world connections to where the data came from. I would also like to see art students visit to explore the beauty of the Reserve. As this is a working Reserve, I believe that our career tech classes can find inspiration with the research that is done here.” She would also like to provide teachers with pre- and post-visit lessons in order to create a depth of knowledge for the students.

Groups have already been signing up for field trips. Christine is currently working on a digital presentation that will be sent to local teachers enticing them to schedule a visit. Many thanks to the Baldwin County Board of Education and Public School System for providing this position for the Weeks Bay Reserve.

## WINTER 2016-17 CALENDAR



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

### December

- 13 **Guest Lecture Series “Nature Photography”** presented by **Spence Harrison**. 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7:00 p.m. Bring a friend.
- 14 **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.
- 14 **Weeks Bay Advisory Committee Meeting**. Tonsmeire Weeks Bay Resource Center, 2:00 p.m.
- 25-26 **Christmas Holiday.\***

### January

- 1-2 **New Year’s Day Holiday.\***
- 10 **Guest Lecture Series “Panama”** presented by **Patsy Russo**. 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7:00 p.m. Bring a friend.
- 16 **Martin Luther King, Jr. / Robert E. Lee Birthday.\***
- 17 **Weeks Bay Volunteers Annual Meeting**. Lunch to follow. Tonsmeire Weeks Bay Resource Center, 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon.

### February

- 14 **Guest Lecture Series “Iceland”** presented by **Rick Wallace and Yael Girard**. 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7:00 p.m. Bring a friend.
- 20 **George Washington / Thomas Jefferson Birthday.\***
- 28 **Mardi Gras Day.\***



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*In memory of Mr. John J. Hewitt*  
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*In honor of Carey & Billie Bentley*  
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Sustainer	\$1,000 - \$4,999
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Supporter	\$250 - \$499
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Member	\$35 - \$99

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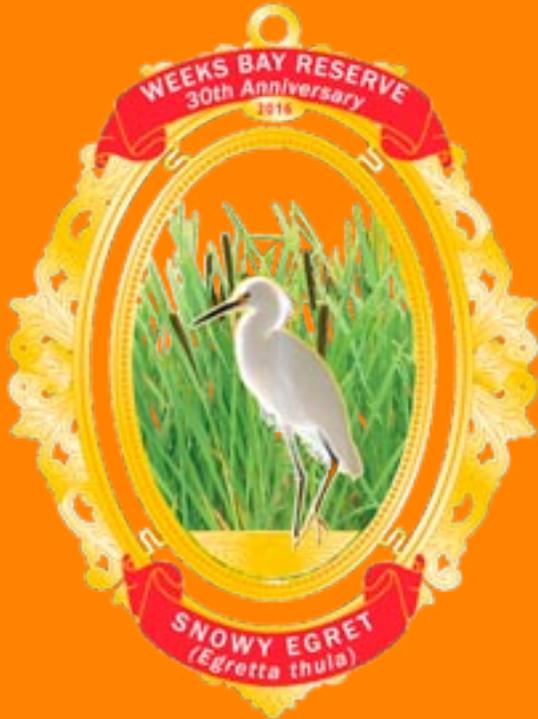


John Borom

Barred Owl (*Strix varia*)

**"If you want to see birds, you must have birds in your heart."**  
- John Burroughs

## 2016 Weeks Bay Ornament



If you are trying to find the perfect gift for that challenging person in your life, look no further than the 2016 Weeks Bay Ornament. This unique keepsake is perfect for any nature lover, birder, or Gulf Coast native.

This year's ornament features a Snowy Egret wading through calm marsh waters surrounded by swaying cattails. This scene perfectly embodies the habitats, flora, and fauna that we have been striving to protect for the last 26 years.

Your purchase of the 2016 ornament helps us to further our mission of protecting the important wetland resources in coastal Alabama. You can purchase your ornament today at [WeeksBay.org](http://WeeksBay.org) or by visiting the Weeks Bay Reserve's Otilie Halstead Visitor Center or Fairhope Pharmacy's Christmas 'Round the Corner.

