

Keynote Speaker: Christopher Joe



Christopher Joe, a native of Greensboro, Alabama, is an accomplished birder and nature enthusiast dedicated to sharing the beauty of the natural world. With a background rooted in agribusiness, he graduated from Alabama A & M University in 2007 with a BS in Agribusiness Management. Christopher's passion for birding and nature led him to establish Connecting with Birds and Nature Tours, LLC on October 31, 2018. This initiative aimed to diversify his family's multigenerational Black Angus cattle farm, a 200-acre property in Newbern, Alabama, featuring pasture, bottomland hardwood, and a creek.

Christopher hosted his first birding tour on February 16, 2019, and gained significant recognition when he hosted Alabama Audubon on July 20, 2019, attracting over 130 participants. His efforts have made a notable impact on promoting birding in Alabama, drawing enthusiasts to experience the unique avian diversity of his family's land.

Christopher resides in Montgomery, Alabama, with his wife Christy Joe and their 4-year-old daughter, Summer Grace. His deep connection to both his family's agricultural heritage and his love for nature continues to inspire and educate others about the importance of conservation and the joys of birding.

Lynne Fitzgerald

A transplanted 'Louisianian' from Shreveport, I came to Dauphin Island birding in the early 2000's as a novice and fell in love with the people and birds of South Alabama. I spent my life as an educator for 35 years with my last 17 as a high school principal. When the Eastern Shore Birders needed someone to coordinate the field trips, I was "elected" or more appropriately, outnumbered. We have almost 300 people in our database, most of whom I have never met but who like keeping up with birding activity. For the last seven years, I have loved working with such a wonderful group of people who share their love of birding.



Courtney Weatherby

I am the Community Outreach Manager for Alabama Audubon. I've spent time as an educator and naturalist with environmental organizations in the Florida Keys, South Carolina, Alaska, and Virginia before making the move to Alabama. My interest in birds started thanks to a coworker while spending time in the low country of South Carolina and I have since become intertwined with my passion for education and stewardship of coastal ecosystems.

Donald Dehm

I live in Foley AL and have for the last few years, before that I resided in North Alabama. I enjoy various outdoor activities including taking photos of birds and wildlife, but I don't know if I would call myself a wildlife or bird photographer, just a person with a camera who likes to take photos of birds and such. I began slowly enjoying the birds in our backyard, it didn't take long before I fell in love with the birds and the fun and excitement of identifying the various species. A bit of an awakening into the birding world was when we had an unknown bird appear at our feeders. It was a medium sized bird, kind of brownish black with blue-ish hues and bright red eyes, after some research we found out it was a Bronzed Cowbird. Then the many visitors came to see the bird and I began to see the passion and the love that others had for birds of all kinds, I knew then that I wanted to do more with birds and so began the buying of books, learning online, etc.



Ann Mclaurin

Dauphin Island seduced me into becoming a serial birding addict: the birds, the people and the inimitable setting overpowered me. Although I grew up in the "best in everything" state of Texas, I readily and seamlessly assimilated into Alabama culture. I received my Ph.D from the University of Oklahoma and taught political and diplomatic history at LSU-S for 30 years. After retiring I moved to Rock Creek in Fairhope but continued to look for more elbow room which ended in the acquisition of a 6 ½ acre site in Daphne. Thus, I became a novice gardener and inveterate, though not always successful, creator of bird and butterfly habitat. Although I remain an aficionado of opera, classical music, art history, mysteries, and football, learning about gardening continues to be an elusory art.



Becky Lee Humphries

Foley is where I call home, while the Shoals area holds a special place in my heart as my hometown. Our move to Foley led to an unexpected discovery - a birding paradise right in our backyard. It was a delightful surprise when the 19th bird I logged on eBird turned out to be a state rarity, and that's when we got a warm welcome into the vibrant birding community. What started as a hobby quickly turned into a cherished pastime, and I found myself exploring the diverse bird species of Alabama. Along the way, I also discovered the joy of nature journaling—an enriching practice that enhances my understanding of birds and their identification. As a relatively new birder, I feel honored to have been asked to guide during Bird Fest 2023. This will be my first time guiding, and I'm thrilled to meet more of the birding community during these guided trips.



Michael Sandoz

I am 24 and from the Mississippi gulf coast where I started birding when I was 10. I have guided at the Birdfest since 2017. In high school I worked for the Audubon Coastal Bird Stewardship program and the Pascagoula River Audubon Center. I got my Bachelors in Polymer Science and Engineering from The University of Southern Mississippi and I got my MBA and a Masters of Industrial and Systems Engineering from Auburn University. Some of my favorite places I've gotten to bird and photograph are Colombia, the Galapagos, Alaska, and south Texas.

Michael Jordan

I am a Retired Environmental Scientist from 25 years with the Alabama Department of Environmental Management. I was born in Mobile, Alabama. My interest in Dauphin Island began over 50 years ago with visits to the shell mounds with my great aunt. I am the top birder on eBird for Fort Morgan State Historic Site with 249 species observed. I am a local naturalist with a special interest in birds and plants. Since my retirement, I have been traveling the world (20 countries) observing birds.



Terri Withee

I have been involved with birding for about 10 years now. My baby brother Andrew, an Ornithologist and an Environmental Scientist, took me on a field trip where he was netting and tagging birds in the California wilderness. It was so magical that I was hooked after that and sought out a local birding group called the Eastern Shore Birders. They then put me in touch with the Mobile Bay Audubon Society. I volunteered with Birdfest, went on many field trips with the Eastern Shore Birders, and joined the Alabama Ornithological Society (AOS). I am a Navy Veteran with 20 years of service retiring as a Chief Warrant Officer in the Supply Corps. I have been married to my wonderful husband Jerry for 49 years and we have three children and six grandchildren. My latest adventures took me to Panama, Belize, and Guatemala finding all kinds of new birds on my life list.

Cory Powell

Cory is the Education Coordinator at Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve in Fairhope. She provides estuary focused education for pK through college students and adults, as well as teacher education. An Alabama native, Cory grew up exploring in Alabama, and visited the Gulf Coast frequently. She graduated from Auburn University with a bachelor of science degree in Natural Resources Management. She moved to the Gulf Coast after graduation to begin her career in conservation, and has been with the State of Alabama for 3 years, with the Reserve for a little over a year. This year, she became an ACA L2 certified kayak instructor, and is excited to incorporate paddling in her education activities.



John Michael Chappelle

John Michael Chappelle, 43, hails from the Eastern Shore, where he grew up surrounded by the rustic charm of Point Clear's bay houses. He fondly recalls childhood adventures on piers, swimming, and learning to water ski. His family home, built by his father and featured in Southern Living, was a hub of activity. John Michael shares memories of fishing, sailing, and birdwatching with his family, particularly his grandmother, who ignited his passion for birding. This passion led to impactful experiences with bird banders Bob and Martha Sargent at Fort Morgan. Today, John Michael continues to embrace the natural world, advocating for the beauty and wonder of the outdoors and encouraging others to engage with it fully.

Lindsey Lawrence

Lindsey is the Community Outreach Director of the Eastern Shore Art Center, where she leads initiatives to bring art and creativity to the community. In her current role, Lindsey is planning outreach programs for 2024/2025, including a collaboration with USA Health. She recently spearheaded a children's art project at USA Women's and Children's Hospital, helping young patients create colorful paper beetles to brighten their rooms and spirits. With a Bachelor's in Fine Arts specializing in Painting and Metalsmithing from Murray State University, Lindsey also instructs Summer Art Bash camps at ESAC. Her previous experience includes seven years as Gallery Manager at Lyons Share Custom Frames and Gallery and a decade of volunteer work with the Fairhope Arts and Crafts Festival. In 2025, she will serve as the festival's Administrator, continuing her commitment to fostering art and creativity in the community.



Johanna Gertsch

Johanna is the Coastal Training Program Coordinator at Weeks Bay NERR in Fairhope where she provides training and technical assistance to improve coastal resource management decision making in Alabama. Despite growing up in Wisconsin, Johanna has loved marine ecosystems since she was a child. So much so, that she ventured to Anchorage, Alaska to get her Bachelor of Science degree in Marine Biology. After her time in "the Great Frontier," she ventured to sunny Lower Alabama to lead kayak and pontoon eco-tour trips where she fell in love with Alabama's biodiversity. She has worked in conservation for the State of Alabama for the last five and a half years and been at the Reserve for a year and a half. Johanna is an ACA L2 certified Kayak Instructor.

