

Apalachee Audubon

The Newsletter Of The Apalachee Audubon Society, Inc.

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President's Column

Counting Birds for Conservation

For one day a year, thousands of Americans throughout the entire country become marathon birders, flocking to fields, ponds and forests to count as many species of birds as possible in the Audubon Birdathon. National Audubon Society's fund-raising bird count is the world's largest competitive birdwatching event. Audubon chapters, corporations and individual competitors will hold Birdathons throughout the United States during April and May to coincide with peak migration periods in their region.

Participants sign-up pledges from their sponsors for donations of 10¢ to \$10 or more for each bird species. Then from dawn to late in the evening on the appointed day, they tally every bird species identified for their favorite conservation cause. Since the expectation is to find between 100 and 200 species, the birders raise thousands of dollars for local conservation projects. Funds raised by your chapter will support our local Audubon Adventures Classrooms and other environmental education projects. Birdathon proceeds also support our efforts to protect birds, other wildlife and their habitats.

For more information on the Apalachee Chapter Birdathon please contact Larry Thompson or Bill Lowrie at 222-2473 or

lthompson@earthlink.net

Larry Thompson, President

MEMBERSHIP AND HOSPITALITY REPORT

Karen Wensing – Membership Chair

This year we are handing out name badges at our membership meetings. Most of us need an occasional memory boost and newcomers really appreciate a written aid to reinforce an introduction. Help us recycle by remembering to deposit your badge at the end of the meeting in the box at the sign-in table and you will find it there at the next meeting.

WE WELCOME new members: Ann Biddlingmaier, Julia Bunting, Kathy Seay, Jennifer Dalmas, Joanne Dolloff, Mr. & Mrs. Kelton Farris, Caroline Ferguson, Travis E. Hoffman, Julie & Jack Kane, Cynthia Killingsworth, Cliff Leonard, Tracey & Richard Sickler, Thelma F. Stewart, Deena Wells, and E.L. White. We also welcome some transfers into the chapter: R.M. Brantley, Patricia Crum, Geoffrey Lardiere and Cheryl Miller.

Program Highlight

Thursday, March 27

The Return of the Red Wolf

Thom Lewis, Director of the St. Vincent National Wildlife Refuge, will discuss the status of ongoing efforts to reestablish a population of Red Wolves on St. Vincent Island. This is a topic of interest for most of us as it involves the potential restoration of a top predator long absent from the area and a beautiful animal to boot. Remember our new meeting date and location.

Our new location is at The Fringe Benefits Management Company building is at 31101 Sessions Road. Traveling north out of Tallahassee on North Monroe, turn left at the second stoplight beyond I-10 onto Sessions Road, directly across from Sam's Club. Follow Sessions Road to its end in the parking lot. Informal social at 7 p.m., program at 7:30.

Red Hills Horse Trials and Phipps Park: Where Birdwatchers and Equestrians Share a Park

By Eric Draper – Conservation Chair

The oak hammock on the center hill of Elinor Klapp-Phipps Park may be the most peaceful place in Tallahassee. On a late winter day a breeze moves through the giant canopy and the slanting sun bathes the spot in golden light. Bluebirds work the open fields while raptors soar above. The bluff above Lake Jackson is about as far away as you can get from the economic development clatter that seems to dominate Tallahassee politics. Yet this 500-acre parcel of public land is the center of an enterprise that brings millions of dollars to the local economy. Even more remarkable, that economic benefit would not occur if the State had not financed purchase of this land a decade ago.

Now, during the first weekend in March, the Park's turkeys, quail and yellow-rumped warblers will share their home with world-class equestrian competitors at the Red Hills Horse Trials. For three days hundreds of riders and horses and nearly twenty thousand people will convene for cross country jumping, show jumping and dressage. The winners will qualify for the World Cup events in France.

For those who think Tallahassee is only Seminole and Rattler country, think again! The Red Hills Horse Trials gives our community exposure to people all over the world. And what is the message that is being sent by this nature-based event? As organizer Sallie Ausley puts it, "The Horse Trials showcase the community. Competitors are amazed at the beauty of the place and the friendliness

See Red Hills, page Three

Visit our remodeled Bird Shop & Bird Window.
We carry a complete line of wild bird supplies and quality bird seeds.

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Mission
Protection

Statement
of the environment through education, appreciation and conservation.

Red Hills, from Page Two

and support. There are not a lot of places that combine multiple use of park land."

Some users of Phipps Park, including this writer, nervously watched the growing presence of the Red Hills Horse Trials over the past six years. I like to cycle through the many miles of old hunting roads and see only deer, coyotes and bobcat sign. My wife and I have our favorite winter picnic hike through the trillium and fern laced swamp forest trail. That Phipps is usually only accessible by foot, bike or horse makes the place very special. Its diversity of life makes it more so. "Who needs horses in paradise," I selfishly wondered.

Then reality overcame skepticism. Two weeks after last year's competition, with its 25,000 spectators, 240 contestants and acres of parking and horse trailers, you could not tell the site had been used. The hammock was restored to its charming serenity. As Sally put it, "In one week we build a little city and remove it, as though nothing had ever happened."

Spectators are treated to world-class competition, but that is not all. Gopher tortoise habitat is fenced off and education information helps teach people about the area's special ecological features. Chuck Goodheart, who helped transform Phipps Park from old farmland notes

that the Red Hills Horse Trials introduce people to the area. It has even led to creation of a riding camp for kids from low-income areas of the city. The trials raise money, some of which goes back to improving the park's other uses. Chuck has an eloquently expressed vision for the park: Twenty years from now, when Tallahassee has doubled in size, you can have the same experience of seeing diverse wildlife in a quiet setting.

Most significant is the impact of competitors and their families and crews along with judges, veterinarians and horse brokers from all over the continent. Reinforcing the culture of the Red Hills area with its emphasis on the genteel use of land for hunting and horseback riding, the horse trials bring people with significant incomes to spend on lodging, food and supplies. The impact from competitors and visitors is several million dollars.

The reader may ask at this point why the Conservation Chair for Apalachee Audubon has become another Red Hills booster. The answer is immediate and removed. Northwest Florida is experiencing a huge population increase. Florida has moved from managing growth to promoting growth. One way to offset the conversion of hundreds of thousands of acres of forest and farmland to new development is to get the government to purchase

land for preservation. Phipps was bought by the Northwest Florida Water Management District through Preservation 2000/Save Our Rivers funds to protect the Lake Jackson watershed from development. Competition for scarce public funds makes it hard to get decision-makers to spend money for Florida Forever, the successor program to Preservation 2000 and Save Our Rivers. Buying power for Florida Forever is shrinking as land prices go up and legislators are considering cutting back on land management and acquisition funds.

Elinor Klapp-Phipps Park is an excellent example of saving land and securing economic benefits. As Sally Ausley explained, "If it was not for that land, the Red Hills Horse Trial would not be."

For more information on Red Hills Horse trials visit www.rhht.org. For information on Northwest Water Management District Lands visit www.state.fl.us/nwfwmd. For information about Florida Forever visit www.dpe.state.fl.us/lands/carl_ff. To help support more funding for public lands visit www.audubonofflorida.org and enroll in the Florida Conservation Network.

Monthly meetings, field trips, conservation activities and bird walks

Audubon Calendar

Monthly meetings are free and open to the public. They are held at the Fringe Benefits Management Company at 3101 Sessions Road. Most evenings begin with an informal social at 7:00 p.m., followed by the program at 7:30.

Unless otherwise stated, field trips will depart from the Wachovia Bank at 3400 S. Monroe Street (opposite the Fairgrounds). Note the time of departure in the description for each trip. For more info check out our web site at <http://www.apalachee.org/calendar.html>.

Saturday, March 22 — Birdwalk. Meet at 8:00 AM at the Wachovia Bank on N. Monroe (across from the fairgrounds). Maybe this time we can bird the Black Swamp Nature Preserve without getting totally inundated by storm events.

Thursday, March 27 – Membership Meeting. Thom Lewis, Wildlife Biologist with the St. Vincent National Wildlife Refuge, will present a program on Red Wolf restoration on St. Vincent. See front page.

April, Birdathon! - First 3 Saturdays of the month. The Annual Birdathon is coming in April and your help is needed! This is the height of the spring migration and a high point of the year for Apalachee Audubon. You can participate in two ways:

1. Join us. Get pledges from friends, family, and associates and join one of the three field trips.
2. Pledge a donation of so much per species identified or a fixed amount, depending on your capacity for risk.

We will raise dollars for environmental education and habitat restoration and have a lot of fun in the process. Details will be forthcoming, but flag a Saturday in April, put aside a few bucks for the cause, and join with other members of your Audubon Chapter for this annual event.

Thursday, April 24 - Membership Meeting. George Willson, Vice President for Conservation Lands for the St. Joe Company. St. Joe is conveying tens of thousands of acres into public ownership. See the maps and hear the story!

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