

Apalachee Audubon

The Newsletter Of The Apalachee Audubon Society, Inc.

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March, 2004

Misunderstanding Mussels

By Eric Draper, Vice-President

In some zoologist's circles, specialists are labeled with the common terms for the groups of animals they study. So an entomologist might be called a *bugman*. A herpetologist is a *frogman*. Now leaving aside the historic and implicit sexism of attaching male nomenclature to work, the strangest of these translations has to be the terms used for someone who studies mollusks.

Early in my career I heard some scientists derisively refer to a colleague from another institution as "that malacologist!" Not knowing the meaning of the term and not wanting to be inconvenienced by looking it up or exposing my ignorance by asking, I connected the tone with the prefix and root and assumed that a malacologist was a clever negative term for a bad biologist. By bad, I thought wrong-headed, mistaken or even wicked.

Later I heard the same person (by now in my associative mind malicious, malcontented, malodorous) called "that muscle man!" Again the contempt and sarcasm in the co-worker's voice left me with the impression that the scientist

from the competing institution was not only bad, but also a very strong person. Evil and brawny, what a fearsome fellow!

Later I was given the task of organizing a meeting and met the object of scorn - a gentle little man who was introduced as an expert on freshwater mussels and clams. This muscleman or malacologist was urging others to see the important place mollusks occupied in aquatic systems and the terrible threat many species faced as a result of pollution and the alteration of river flows. He moved the room with his passion for and knowledge of these least considered, but in many ways very important soft-bodied creatures.

By the way, the term for the study of mollusks, malacology is derived from a Greek word *malakos* meaning soft-bodied. My earlier misunderstanding made me feel a bit soft-headed. Now I am glad for the opportunity to learn more about the mollusks of the Apalachee region and that there is a field of study focused on these essential components of the ecosystems they occupy.

BIRDATHON 2004

April is not the cruelest month here in the Panhandle because the neo-tropical migrants come swarming up from the south creating a wonderful opportunity for birding. And it's time to play our favorite game, the Birdathon. This is a game you can play with us and have fun doing it as we raise funds to support the important programs of our Chapter. Please plan on joining one of our teams or supporting us with a pledge. You will be hearing more from us soon. To learn how to join a team, call Bill Lowrie at 222-2473.

Program Highlight **Thursday, March 25**

Join us and Holly Blalock-Herod, a biologist with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, as she presents the fascinating and unique life history and ecology of freshwater mussels, their status in the Ochlockonee River, and actions to recover them. Native Americans once feasted on these fascinating creatures but their status is in jeopardy today. See you there!

Programs are open to the public and begin with a social at 7:00 p. m., followed by the program at 7:30. See back page for location and directions.

Making Tallahassee's Important Birding Spots Better

Eric Draper, Conservation Chair

Last year Apalachee Audubon published *Great Birding Spots in Wakulla, Leon and Franklin Counties*. This useful little book has become a regional best-seller. It also has become the organizing nexus for Apalachee Audubon's conservation strategy.

Recently we learned that two of the sites in the book are subject to new City plans. Some of our members worried that the plans would alter the usefulness of the sites for birds. Lake Elberta (originally known as the pond behind Church's Chicken) on Lake Bradford Road is a storm water pond created on FSU property to handle much of the runoff from the campus and nearby areas. The pond, with its unusual little peninsula has attracted many species including ducks, wading birds and shorebirds. It also attracts birdwatchers, some from quite far away.

The City of Tallahassee plans to develop this site with lights and structures, which could change the desirability of the site for the birds that use it.

San Luis Park is another favorite for birdwatchers and is a good spot to see Wilson's warblers and thrushes. We learned that there are plans to remove willow trees along the pond. Birds use these trees for foraging and cover.

A letter to the City brought a quick response, initially from Commissioner Debbie Lightsey and then from Mayor John Marks. City staff contacted Apalachee Audubon inviting our members to participate in decisions about both sites. We are now in a series of discussions with park

official on San Luis and planning officials on the Elberta site.

Birdwatching is the nation's fastest growing outdoor activity (some say NASCAR, but is that an activity or a commercial?). Birders are an extremely desirable segment of the tourism market. As an older and more affluent demographic, they rent more expensive accommodations and frequent more upscale restaurant.

The Audubon family possesses considerable experience in helping municipalities create and enhance wildlife habitat in urban and suburban settings. We would like to bring that knowledge to the table and make Tallahassee parks even more of a community asset. We see an opportunity to make the case that wildlife viewing be continued as a high priority in Tallahassee park management, and to offer Apalachee Audubon's assistance in protecting and enhancing our valuable recreational resources.

We really appreciate Debbie Lightsey and John Marks taking note of our concerns and directing staff to work with us.

Thanks also to members Grayal Farr, Sally Jue, Jim Shelton, Marvin Collins and Larry Thompson for taking on this project.

If you would like to take part in our efforts to keep Lake Elberta and San Luis as great birding spots, leave a message at 222-bird.

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Mission
Protection



Statement
of the environment through education, appreciation and conservation.

Cairo HS Students Making a Difference

Jennifer Hand, High School Science Teacher

This year biology students and science club members at Cairo High School in Cairo, Georgia, are conducting educational outreach programs on local environmental issues. Last fall they hosted a wildlife program featuring animals from Tallahassee's St. Francis Wildlife Shelter and sponsored a Saturday Science Camp for elementary students on America Recycles Day. This spring the students are focusing on the area's water quality issues. Headlines in local papers have accused Cairo's wastewater treatment facility of degrading the water quality of the Ochlockonee River. Since many of these students have grown up fishing, boating, and swimming on the river, they were alarmed to read of the problem.

To understand Cairo's impact on the Ochlockonee River's water quality and develop a community wide outreach program, students have been conducting their own research. They reviewed the past year's newspaper articles from Cairo and Tallahassee, toured the wastewater treatment facility and land application system, attended a city council meeting to see how local government is handling the issue, interviewed experts including the public works director, wastewater treatment superintendent, city attorney, the civil engineer heading the design of the new treatment facility, and hosted a guest speaker, a professor at Florida State University who has been a river management analyst for 25 years.

Students are now collecting and analyzing data at various locations and tributaries of the Ochlockonee with the help of an Environmental Protection Division project participant who actually collected the data that led to the accusations against Cairo. Students will

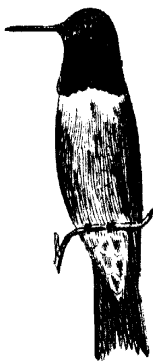
also participate in a workshop conducted by Holly Blalock-Herod of the US Fish and Wildlife Commission in Panama City to learn about the various endangered mussel species of the Ochlockonee River.

Once students complete their research, they will use various strategies to reach and educate the community about the water quality problem and ways they can help. Strategies may include producing brochures, running articles, questionnaire contests, and water facts of the day in the local and school newspapers and on school television, a display at the local library and hosting another Saturday Science Camp. The students believe that the more people understand the problem, the more willing they will be to do what it takes to correct it.

Further information regarding this project can be found at www.green.org by viewing Georgia and opening Grady County's site on the map. Questions or comments can be directed to Jennifer Hand, Cairo High School Science Teacher, at j.hand@grady.k12.ga.us.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

Apalachee Audubon welcomes the following new members: Janet Brady, Karen Clark, Elaine Dennis, Roger S. Fields, Teena Ham, Kristina Holder, Janet Lehmon, Chuck McVoy, J.K. Morrison, Betio Nickloos, Steven Schneider, Tedsan Timberlake, Margaret R. Trammell, Gloria Washington, D. Whitis and Bonnie Wright.



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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. Turn left off N. Monroe 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. 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 21. Field trip. Details to be announced.

Thursday, March 25. Membership Program. "Freshwater Mussels of the Ochlockonee River".

Thursday, April 22. Membership Program. Do you drink that water? Dr. Sean McGlynn, Director of McGlynn Labs, will give us the alarming picture of what is happening to the Ochlockonee River.

Saturday, March 20. Birding around East Lake Jackson. Meet at 7:30 at the Winn Dixie shopping center on North Monroe and Crowder Road. We'll check out Crowder Landing, Faulk Drive, and other points of ornithological interest.

Thursday, April 15 to Saturday, April 17. Wakulla Wildlife Festival at Wakulla Springs State Park. Look for more information coming soon by mail or call the Park.

Saturday, May 1. All day expedition to the Gulf Coast and environs. Meet at 7:00 at the Wachovia Bank on S. Monroe (across from fairgrounds) or at 7:45 in the parking lot at the Panacea Visitor's Center on the left as you enter Panacea on US 98 just beyond Bottoms Rd. We expect to visit Bottoms Road, Mashers Sands, Bald Point, and St. George Island to witness late migration and early breeding. Bring lunch and beverages.

Thursday, May 27. Annual Banquet. Dr. Fran James, Professor Emeritus at FSU, will speak on neotropical migrants. Dr. James, is currently serving as President of the Florida Ornithological Society.

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