

find one which is smooth on the underside so it doesn't stick my stomach during the opening process"?

My personal experience in this matter occurred several years ago when we were living in downtown Annandale, Virginia. A single American Crow which frequented the neighborhood had become so familiar with the area that it would come near folk sitting in the yard, land, and seem to ask for a handout. I suspect it may have been captured as a baby and thus became "humanized" (my word). We could even call it up. "COME ON CROW! COME GET IT!" One weekend I made homemade biscuits for breakfast. Not very tasty. Did not rise properly. Few takers. Sat on the back of the counter unnoticed 'til next weekend. "Crow food," I thought. I took the remaining biscuits out back, called up Crow and pitched them out into the yard. Crow came down, pecked on one a bit and then CARRIED IT OVER AND DROPPED IT INTO THE BIRD BATH!

After a few moments of being softened, the biscuit was retrieved and consumed with gusto. Smart Crow.

Which brings me to my book report. *The Parrot's Lament* is a short paperback by Eugene Linden who has been writing on science, nature and the environment for a number of years. The book relates a series of situations he, and others, have experienced with both wild and captured animals in which the parties interact in ways which suggest that animals demonstrate, at some level, consciousness. The parrot of the title, Jimbo is reported to have spoken to a wild roadrunner outside the window IN ENGLISH, "Hi bird, are you hungry? Peekaboo (the owner) cooks chicken and corn." I found the book interesting and entertaining and will bring it as a door prize. Should I also bring some home made biscuits and jelly for refreshments?

Bird Sightings

Wed., Oct. 16. Approx. 30 American White Pelicans out from West Bank Park. Okatibbee Lake just down from the office. –Van McWhorter

Same date. Palm Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warblers 4-6, Pine Warblers 6-10. East Bank Park. –Van McWhorter

Sat., Oct. 19. White-throated Sparrow. Howard Malone's home.

OCAS meets every second
Monday of the month at 7:00
p.m. in the EMEPA Building on
Highway 39 North in Meridian.
Next meeting will be November
11. See you there!

Helpful Tips For a Successful Christmas Bird Count

By Van McWhorter

- 1) All birds must be seen within one calendar day, and counting must cover at least eight hours.
- 2) Please record all birds that you see and hear. If you are uncertain of a particular species, do not list it.
- 3) Be sure and check your watch and auto odometer before you start your count. Start as early as you wish.
- 4) Once you drive through an area or walk an area, try not to drive or walk the same route and count the area a second time.
- 5) If you observe an extremely large flock of a species fly over, just stand and study the species and make sure you are counting a flock of a “single” species, or is the flock a multi-species flock? Make a good estimate of the numbers.
- 6) If you observe an “uncommon” or rare species, try to make mental notes while you are studying it such as size, color, habitat, flying or perched, or even feeding habits.
- 7) Feel free to take a break from your assigned count area, but try and remember to deduct the miles on any side trips.
- 8) Remember! Every bird counts.
- 9) Yes! The data that we compile is of utmost importance to bird conservation for all of us and future generations.

One of the most numerous and conspicuous of the winter residents is the Dark-eyed Junco, a small, gray, sparrowlike bird that is sometimes called the “snowbird” because it winters throughout most of the United States. Juncos are permanent residents in some of the lower forty-eight states and breeding birds may also be found in Alaska and most of Canada.

The Dark-eyed Junco can be divided into five groups of subspecies: “Slate-colored”, “Oregon”, “White-winged”, “Pink-sided”, and “Gray-headed”. As you can tell from these names, the groups look distinctively different from each other. However, they share certain plumage characteristics, such as white outer tail feathers and very pale pinkish bills. They also all make sharp *dit* calls.

The junco that occurs in Mississippi is the “Slate-colored”. The upperparts on this attractive bird are slate gray and the belly is white. Females are browner in coloration than males, but otherwise they look similar. The white outer tail feathers are a good field mark, especially when a flock suddenly flies up in front of you. Flocks have social hierarchies and individual birds can be very aggressive toward each other. If you see juncos fighting, it’s probably over rank.

Juncos are familiar visitors at feeders and consume lots of seeds and grain. When they are nesting, they also feed on insects.

Don’t feel depressed because of November’s dreary surroundings. Enjoy the antics of tough little wintering birds like the Dark-eyed Junco as they liven up even the chilliest winter day.

If you would prefer receiving the OCAS newsletter by e-mail, contact me at sthead@mississippi.net

Items for the newsletter should be e-mailed to this address or to lauthe87@hotmail.com (or snail-mailed to 10303 Wildcat Road, Collinsville, MS 39325) by no later than the Tuesday before a regular meeting.

Obituary for a Falcon

By Joseph McGee

I am never prepared for these things when they happen. Caring for injured or orphaned birds or other wildlife is a dicey proposition at best. Most of us are ill-prepared to take on the rehabilitation of injured or sick critters we may occasionally encounter. (One is also required to have an official permit from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to have any of our native birds in captivity.)

All of this was brought home to me on Sunday, October 20, as I was loading the car in preparation for my return to the Earth Lab near Canton.

The phone rang. The voice on the other end identified himself, then related how he'd found "some kind of small hawk" with an apparent broken wing while walking in the woods. Could I "do something with it"?

As I said, I am never ready for these things.

Nevertheless, I agreed to drive over and take a look since the caller lived not too far away. When I arrived at the scene, several adults were congregated in a rural dooryard, their center of (too much) attention being the aforementioned "little hawk"—an adult male American Kestrel.

The best part of this tale (if there is one)—at least from my point of view—were the best, close-up looks at an American Kestrel I've ever had. Never had I been so close to one before. The understated, but vibrant, rusty red of the back and tail in combination with the wedgwood blue of the wings and crown, plus the pattern of small, black ovals overall reminded me that the male American Kestrel is one of our most colorful birds of prey. The black "sideburn" markings on its white face gave the little falcon a smart, "military" look. All in all, I found the kestrel every bit as colorful as an Eastern Bluebird! And oh, so much smaller in the hand than on the wire! It appeared to be a tad smaller than a Blue Jay.

I was anxious to remove the kestrel from the stressful situation (so many hands wanting to hold) in which I found it. After the requisite small talk, I whisked the bird home and into a dark box for the ride to Canton. (I was unable to reach a wildlife rehabilitator by phone that Sunday afternoon.) The falcon had been described to me as feisty and, after I'd met him, I

tended to agree. He didn't hesitate to nip one's finger. He seemed to make the trip to Canton O.K.

Early Monday morning I made arrangements to drop the bird off right after lunch with Pat, a birds of prey rehabilitator in Jackson. She told me not to attempt to feed the kestrel and that she'd have it examined by a vet connected with the Jackson Zoo. As I hung up the phone, I already had visions of a release in the field behind the house on a crisp, sunny late fall afternoon.

But it was not to be. When I went to pick up the injured bird, I found that it had died. The long ordeal had proven to be too much for the spunky little falcon. More often than not, this is the outcome when one attempts to rescue an injured bird. Now, "my" kestrel will be a specimen in the Museum of National Science in Jackson.

From now on I intend to at least keep a sturdy box on hand with dry wood shavings on the bottom and a few ventilation holes punched in the sides and one or more wildlife rehabilitators' phone numbers in bold numbers on the top, so maybe I'll be ready next time. And I'm planning to read and familiarize myself with parts of *Care of the Wild Feathered and Furred* by Mae Hickman and Maxine Guy. I want to do better next time.

Remember, articles, bird sightings and items of interest are requested for the newsletter!

A Weekend at the Refuge

By Lauren Thead

There we were on the edge of the woods on Friday, October 11 at 6:15 p.m. The sun was beginning to set, and we were in complete wilderness listening to the Eastern Screech-Owls on a tape played by Andrea Dunstan, Public Use Specialist.

It was an "Owl Prowl" at Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge, and we were with a small group of nature lovers. Everyone was somewhat fidgety, since we weren't having much luck calling up any owls. No matter how many times Andrea played the tape, nothing made its presence known in the forest.

Suddenly we all got quiet. Andrea stopped the tape and we all listened. We could hear a faint whinny in the forest; a screech-owl had answered the calls.

Unfortunately, the owl soon stopped calling, so we headed to another, swampier location to see if any owls were in the mood to communicate. As we got out of the cars, we could hear Barred Owls making monkey-like hoots off in the woods. The screech-owl tape went back on, and we listened and waited. A large, dark shape flew soundlessly into a tall tree. If we hadn't been looking at those trees, we wouldn't have noticed it at all. We continued to play the tape until the Barred Owl flapped silently out of the tree and out of sight.

Andrea then told us about a pool of water where a seven-foot-long alligator and her babies lived. We arrived at the place with flashlights that we immediately began using, hoping to see one of the quiet, sneaky reptiles. One of our group members was Ken, an exhausted junior at Mississippi State taking a break from studying for his electrical engineering classes. He suddenly announced that he could see an alligator moving slowly through the water. As he shined the flashlight on its eye, we caught a glimpse of red. We noticed more little flashes of red around the larger alligator...the babies! Everyone marveled at the way they navigated the water so well even at night.

We made one last stop at a stand of pines near the rest area of the refuge. Like the other stops, this one was relatively quiet. We looked out at Bluff Lake, not noticing any more alligators. A piercing shriek startled us. We stopped our search and waited to hear the sound again.

“EeYIIICKKK!”

It was coming from mixed forest on the other side of the road.

“EeYIIICKKK!” --this time from the parking lot! We turned around and looked at Ken, who had just imitated this crazy Great Horned Owl almost perfectly.

“EeYIIICKKK!” the owl answered. Ken kept it up, and the owl moved closer and closer. Soon we could hear it ‘way up in a pine tree over our heads. ***“EeYIIICKKK!”*** Another owl was calling—no, maybe two! The screaming continued as a car pulled into the lot and stopped at the rest room.

The (illegally-present after dark) driver got out and made a quick telephone call with all this racket going on in the background.

“EeYIIICKKK!”

We stifled laughs as the driver leaped back into his car and hurried on.

We used other Great Horned Owl calls to try to lure these birds in, but Ken’s version of their screaming was what kept them shrieking back, calling to their “friend” who was stranded below them on the ground. Eventually, we got tired of screaming near the stand of pines and prepared to leave, but the owls continued their calling even as we were leaving. Maybe they were asking the other “owl” to hang around for a while longer.

The next day we spent some of the later morning hours on Goose Overlook with Margaret Copeland and a small group of birders who were there for a “bird walk.” There was plenty to see: a Great Blue Heron was carefully stepping through the mud near the shore of the lake; Killdeer were calling from the fields; and Red-winged Blackbirds rose in a noisy flock from some cattails. In the woods Margaret pointed out Pine Warblers and Tufted Titmice, while a Carolina Wren sang from a cypress tree. I noticed Black-throated Green and Magnolia Warblers, which most of the visitors had never seen before, and a White-breasted Nuthatch working its way down the trunk of a sycamore.

A rolling “*Churr—churr*” caught our attention, and we turned to see a male Red-bellied Woodpecker perched on a dead snag. Margaret made sure everyone could see this colorful bird that had gulped down a plump berry from a vine wrapped around the snag. The Eastern Wood-Pewee that I had spotted near the woodpecker also interested the birders, especially when it darted out to catch a flying insect.

After leaving Goose Overlook, we were informed that the canoe trip would take place next. Feeling really excited, we arrived at the nearest boat launch and spent a few minutes looking at the Double-crested Cormorants perched in the tops of the tallest cypress trees, and the Belted Kingfisher we had disturbed earlier when we drove in. When I saw a large grayish-brown bird flying into one of the trees, I started yelling for everyone to come over and see it. Margaret and I looked all over for that bird, which had probably been

a Barred Owl, now perfectly camouflaged against the rough trunk of this old tree.

Finally we were ready to begin the canoe adventure. We slipped into life jackets, got into the canoes and pushed off. I was with my sister Karen and Andrea Dunstan, and my mom was paddling with Ken (who had showed back up this morning) and my youngest sister Deanna. All together, there were about 12 canoes. It was a cool, overcast morning—a good thing, as it turned out, for a bunch of people out on a lake in boats.

As we paddled away, we soon noticed that we were getting into very natural cypress swamp. Most of the trees looked as if they had been growing there for a really long time, and I noticed some huge jagged stumps from extremely old cypress trees that had died and slowly decayed in the standing water. The loud calls of “*Wucka-wucka-wucka*” came from the Pileated Woodpeckers that flew back and forth between the more open part of the swamp and the thick forest on the other side. Many other species of woodpeckers, including Northern Flickers, Red-headed and Red-bellied Woodpeckers, were also present and very noisy. As our canoe floated by small trees that still held plenty of leaves, I got some very close looks at Magnolia, Black-throated Green, Black-and-white and Yellow-rumped Warblers. As quiet as we were, we still managed to accidentally flush Great Blue Herons and Great Egrets from their roosts. Near the end of the trip, Andrea spotted two medium-sized alligators swimming several yards away from us. We were disappointed to leave the tranquility of the swamp, but a butterfly walk was scheduled next and we didn’t want to miss it.

The Morgan Hill Overlook Trail is an excellent place for all kinds of insects when the vegetation is thick, and many types of birds can also be seen. After we arrived, Margaret announced that there was an adult Osprey perched in a tall, dead snag near the edge of the lake and set her scope on it. Everyone got a chance to watch the bird as it tore apart and devoured a fish. A beautiful male American Kestrel was below it on the waving stalk of a flower. WOW!

As we made our way down the narrow path bordered on both sides by late-blooming wildflowers, we noticed a variety of butterflies and other insects: Monarchs, Gulf Fritillaries, Pipevine Swallowtails, Assassin Bugs, and several different types of grasshoppers and dragonflies. A Maypop vine along the trail had at least seven Gulf Fritillary caterpillars chewing on its

leaves. We viewed Red-winged Blackbirds, Great Egrets and Canada Geese from the Overlook and a pair of Red-tailed Hawks that had just flushed from an oak. Their sunlit tails shone bright red against the now clear blue sky.

We reluctantly tore ourselves away from these sightings and started heading back to the cars. Along the way we saw some Variegated Fritillaries, which are smaller and plainer relatives of the Gulf Fritillary and are much less common.

What a day!

What was my favorite Noxubee activity? Was it the “Owl Prowl” through the darkening woods and fields of the refuge, the butterfly walk through the sunny prairie, the fast-paced but interesting “bird walk”? Maybe it was the soothing canoe trip through the quiet cypress swamp. Noxubee is one place where you can find something to do for everyone to enjoy and get a little bit closer to nature.