

Okatibbee Creek Audubon Society

January-February 2004

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**Mississippi School Children Take Part In Audubon's
Great Backyard Bird Count**

Read OCAS' newsletter online at <http://mywebpages.comcast.net/gl1800/ocas.html>

If you're reading this online or by e-mail and know of someone who'd like to get the newsletter electronically to save postage. sthead@mississippi.net

Note from Rich Richardson: Meetings are held at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Meridian. Trinity is located at 4223 Poplar Springs Drive. Please use the SOUTH driveway on the church property (the one nearer downtown Meridian) and proceed around through the parking lot to the back, where you may enter the building through the double doors. 7:00 p.m. every second Monday of the month...except February. This month we're having a field trip in conjunction with the Jackson Audubon group. We'll meet at Joe and Robin Johnson's blueberry farm around 9:40 a.m. or so on the 14th of February. Coffee and muffins early, and lunch provided after our walk. Robin says if anyone would like to bring some soft drinks, that would be okay, and if people really want to call and offer their culinary services to her, she'll find something for you to do. But she will prepare the meal, otherwise. See you there!

Sightings

Submitted by our members

By **Ed Brown**: 12/15/2003 About 100 White Pelicans diving into the water below the dam at Ross Barnett Reservoir. Several Forster's Terns, Ringed-billed Gulls, and a very small gull that I did not know sitting on the retaining wall of the Flood Gates

Same date: Mallards, Gadwalls, Ring-Necked Ducks, 7 Shovelers. Pearl River Waterfowl Refuge.

1/31/2004 Blue-headed Vireo. Smith County near the Pineville Community in the Leaf River bottoms with a lot of Yellow-Rumped Warblers feeding on Wax-myrtle seed.

2/2/2004 Great Horned Owl. Rankin county on the new Hwy. #18 Bypass around 6:00 p.m.

Banded—by **Martha and Bob Sargent**: Adult Rufous Hummingbird at **Nancy Donald's** house. Last week of December.

By **Nancy Donald**: 1/12/04 Pied-billed Grebes, Ruddy Ducks, (1)Ring-billed Gull, Franklin's Gulls, Bonaparte's Gulls, American Coots. Dalewood Lake.

1/13/04 Lesser Scaup, Ruddy Ducks, Pied-billed Grebe, (2)Western Grebes. Dalewood Lake.

1/16/04 (1) Gray Catbird !! (2) Marsh Wrens. Alamutcha St., Marion, MS.

/21/04 Pair of adult Bald Eagles, Pied-billed Grebe, Ruddy Ducks, Lesser Scaup, Western Grebe (pair), American Coots, pair of Common Loons, Turkey Vulture. Dalewood Lake.

2/1/04 Adult Bald Eagle, Bonaparte's Gulls, (1) American Pipit. West Bank boat ramp, Okatibbee Reservoir.

Same date. 1000+ Common Grackles, (2) adult Bald Eagles, (4) juvenile Bald Eagles. Dam & Tailrace, Okatibbee Reservoir.
Same date. Great Egrets, Great Blue Herons, (1) Yellow-crowned Night Heron. Pine Springs Rd. causeway (Bales Cr.).

By **Van McWhorter**: 1/26/2004. Adult Common Loon swimming maybe 300 feet out from the west end of Okatibbee Dam around 2:00 PM. Rare sighting for Okatibbee.

By **Lauren Thead**: 12/21/2003 Great Horned Owl. VERY close sighting. Hwy 45, north of Brooksville, MS.

1/7/2004 Bald Eagle. Adult not apparently associated with Noxubee Refuge. One mile south of Noxubee-Lowndes County Line, Hwy 45 Alt.

1/11/2004 Many American Coots, American Wigeons, Wood Ducks, Northern Shovelers, Mallards, Gadwalls, Ring-necked Ducks, 1 Immature Bald Eagle, Wilson's Snipe, two American Woodcocks, Fox Sparrow. Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge.

1/15/2004 American Bald Eagle. 1/2 mile over Lowndes County line north of Brooksville.

1/17/2004 Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawks, Barn Owl, Rufous Hummingbird (immature male), Hairy Woodpeckers, Pileated Woodpecker, Eastern Phoebe, White-breasted Nuthatches, Brown Creeper, Winter Wrens, Golden-crowned Kinglets, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Savannah Sparrows, Field Sparrows, Purple Finches. Strawberry Plains Audubon Center, Holly Springs, MS.

2/2/2004 Sharp-shinned Hawk. Magnolia Drive, Macon, MS.

By **Cecilia Gordon**: 2/5/2004 Two Common Snipes in the grassy area out in front of the parking lot of Mossy Oak in West Point, MS, around 7:15 A.M. (grass was full of water puddles).

Please remember--from Strawberry Plains....

Exotic Weed Pull. Come help us rip out exotic or invasive plants, and get lunch and a free T-shirt!

We've still got one day scheduled for targeting pesky species such as Japanese stilt grass, Japanese honeysuckle, privet and kudzu—March 6, 2004. For more information contact Chad Pope at 662-252-1155, or c pope@audubon.org.

Great Backyard Bird Count. February 13-16, 2004. Talk it up again and let's outdo even last year's astounding participation. (See further notes, below.)

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

OCAS OFFICERS

R.L. Richardson....President
Howard Malone....Treasurer
Brant Cunningham...Program Chairperson
Van McWhorter...Conservation Chairperson
Joe McGee....Field Trip Chairperson
Ruth Ann Rosamond...Refreshments Coordinator
Lauren & Sheila Thead....Newsletter

Websites of Interest

<http://morganbrake.fws.gov/>

(Above is a link for a little-known refuge in the state.)

<http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/>

(Great Backyard Bird Count website)

Time Out?

By Sheila Thead

At this exact time of year, when I'd like my hot coffee cup to refill itself in my cold hands all along during the day with no effort on my part; when I seek out the floor vents from which gushes expensive, natural gas-powered

heat that is truly warm and not heat-pump air putting on a pretense of being hot; when I like painting or sketching those outside empty-tree vistas from *inside*—just now is when the birds seem to start moving around again. (If you think there's nothing to see right now, just take a look at this month's sightings. Yeah, a lot of them are "regular"—i.e., not rare—birds, but we appreciate all of them, don't we?) So to track them down, I have to give up all those comforts, layer on the extra pairs of socks and go out.

Of course, we did that back at the beginning of January in a big way for the Christmas Bird Count, though that day wasn't as cold as some have been since then. For anyone who doesn't know yet, OCAS members counted some 9850 birds, give or take a couple score and the dead woodpecker Howard Malone said we ought to include, because it was still warm in the road—94 species, including some new ones (like the Vesper's Sparrows, Merlin, and Gray Catbirds) and short on some familiar ones from the past (like the American Coots and many species of ducks). That number doesn't tell that whole day's story, though—all the barking dogs, tens of granola bar wrappers littering floorboards of cars and trucks, and miles of backroads driven or walked that day. A pretty good total, for only 14 counters, many of whom had to rearrange schedules even to be able to participate.

Recently, one of TV's talking heads cited a study done indicating that, contrary to what we all would swear to be true, we're nowhere near as busy as were our forebears, who had to complete household chores without the time-saving conveniences we all take for granted. This researcher said that workdays were also longer 100 years ago—all of this resulting in much, much less free time for our grandparents than we have. But we *think* we're overburdened these days, he went on, because we now have a smorgasbord of outside activities, events and entertainments available for our choosing, and it just overwhelms us poor souls to have to sort it out. You know: we want to do it *all*. Which ones can we squeeze into the hours?

Two that immediately come to mind overlap (at least for us OCAS members) in the middle of February: the Great Backyard Bird Count, running from February 13-16 (I'll come back to that in a minute), and a long-anticipated field trip at which we host the Jackson Audubon group on the 14th.

And what a nice Valentine's gift for us all! Not the same old romantic paper heart, bought or handmade; not the heavy box of chocolates which everyone

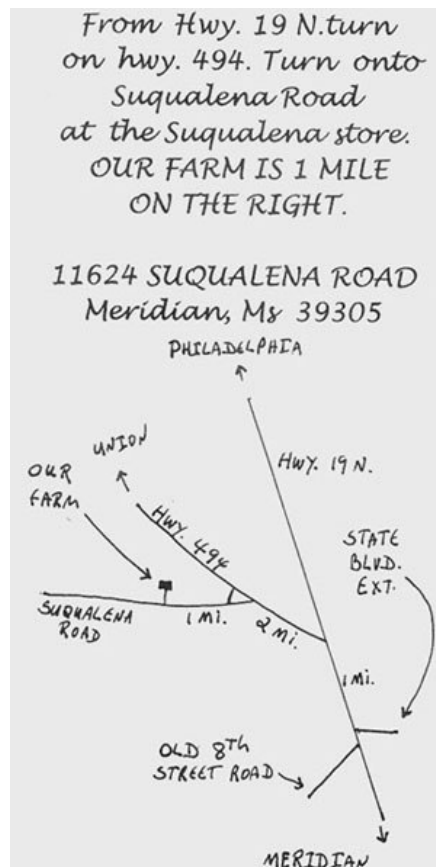
knows we women really don't want; not the dinner at a restaurant when we'd so much rather be cooking at home over the stove—no, none of those, but an opportunity to slog through bogs and thickets, taking the chance of picking up stray ticks (and they *are* around this time of year) and wrapped up like the Michelin Man in two coats, sweat pants and a cap pulled down over our ears. A sight surely to stir the male heart.

And now, all facetiousness aside: If you want to slow down for a few days and enjoy some things you haven't thought of for a long time—things that are completely free, make us remember we really are a part of the natural world, and renew the soul better than chocolate (there! I said it; now, don't test that statement)—then do join us on February 14 around 9:30 or so in the morning at Joe and Robin Johnson's Blueberry Farm at Suqualena, Mississippi. (See the map printed in another part of this newsletter.) Robin says she'll have warm muffins and hot coffee when we arrive; and after we return from seeing what creatures there are for us to see that morning and early afternoon, we'll have lunch.

That day is also one of those set aside for the GBBC. Don't we all remember how Mississippi topped the charts last year nationally in participation? We want to do this again, not just to show off but also to contribute data to a national base about our feathered co-inhabitants of this world. For more information about this, please visit the website included in this newsletter. There are tons of good information and helpful tools there—an online field guide, good hints about identifying hard-to-ID birds, even a printable checklist for those birds we spot. The GBBC doesn't take up a whole lot of our “free” time—that precious commodity—and anyone can do it. You can even file your own results, if you have Internet access; and if you don't, some of us with computers can help out there.

How many of you invested hours of your hard-to-come-by time on Sunday night to watch a much-hyped football game and a seriously culturally-challenged halftime “show”? Surely our own two February events will be much more valuable than that. Come on out. Take a deep breath of fresh air. And when you go home, leave with more than just a relatively unimportant final score and the less-than-edifying memory of a cold stalker in your mind. For us birders saying, “Naked as a Jaybird” *can* mean something else.

Map to Joe & Robin Johnson's Blueberry Farm



Spring Is Not Just for the Birds

By Lauren Thead

Go practically anywhere in Mississippi now, and there will be birds—all kinds of birds to see and identify. Among all this avian life it's tempting for us to get a little too wrapped up in our birding to the extent that we fail to enjoy the other forms of wildlife that we encounter on our expeditions into the field.

Frogs and toads immediately spring to mind, so to speak. If you haven't paid much attention to them before this year, listen carefully and see if you

can identify them by their songs. You may be surprised at how many species choose your back yard as a place to mate and reproduce. If you look in ponds and streams, you may find the jellylike eggs of frogs and toads and maybe some tadpoles feeding. The life cycle of the frog continues!

Around these same wooded streams and ponds, you might also come upon a salamander, a more secretive but no less interesting amphibian than the frog. There are many species of salamanders, and you never know what might be hiding under the leaves.

Reptiles may not be everyone's favorite animals, but as the weather warms up, they will begin to emerge from their winter retreats, and you will be able to observe them at length. Aquatic turtles sunning themselves on logs in the middle of a lake can be challenging to identify, and boldly patterned box turtles are fun to find and easy to catch for closer looks. You may discover several box turtles in one day, if the weather is pleasant and sunny. They usually live in open woods near a water source, which is the preferred habitat for many kinds of snakes as well. Don't worry; in our area only a few kinds are venomous. The vast majority of all snakes are harmless creatures, and all are beautiful and worth watching. Just remember to let snakes have their space, and respect their place in the ecosystem.

This goes also for insects and spiders, many of which will make their appearances this spring. If you like butterflies, be sure to look for the Mourning Cloak, a very early-emerging butterfly that is probably already flying around. You just may have to search a little for it.

Other less desirable insects such as mosquitoes will become even more numerous as the weather warms up, so let's cheer on the re-emergence of the bats. As these tiny mammals zip around our yards consuming pesky insects, they also provide us with an entertaining show of their great aerial skills.

This is just a sampling of the amazing animal life you may find this spring! Keep your field guides and binoculars handy!

MISSISSIPPI SCHOOLCHILDREN TAKE PART IN AUDUBON'S GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT

New Classroom Activity Kit from Audubon Mississippi Provides K-12 Wildlife Lessons; Students Will Help Scientists Monitor State's Birds

Vicksburg, MS January 21, 2004 – Scientists at the National Audubon Society will be getting a hand monitoring bird populations this year from some of the country's brightest young stars – Mississippi schoolchildren. As part of a free classroom activity kit offered to teachers across the state by Audubon Mississippi and its partners, thousands of K-12 pupils across the Magnolia State will have a chance to participate in the 7th Annual Great Backyard Bird Count (February 13-16, 2004), a nationwide "citizen science" survey that keeps tabs on America's winter bird populations.

The Great Backyard Bird Count Mississippi Classroom Activity Kit was developed by area educators, classroom teachers, and Audubon members, and is geared toward helping schoolchildren of all ages learn more about birds and their habitats. A major aspect of the project is participation in Audubon's Great Backyard Bird Count, in which students will identify and tally the types and numbers of birds seen in their backyards or local parks and preserves, and enter the information into an online national database. The students will join nearly 50,000 other Americans participating in the Count, and their results will be used by scientists to chart the location of our winter birds and the health of their populations. Beyond the Count, lesson plans and other information contained in the classroom kit can be used by teachers and students throughout the school year.

The GBBC calls on bird enthusiasts across North America to spend at least a few minutes over the course of the weekend identifying and counting the birds in their backyards and/or local parks. Each participant enters his/her information into online database at www.birdsource.org, and the result is a snapshot in time of North America's winter bird populations. Designed to help even the most novice bird watcher participate, the GBBC website includes a vocabulary section, bird watching and bird feeding tips, and a section on bird identification and vocalizations.

Last year, about 3,000 Mississippians participated in the Great Backyard Bird Count, counting 175 different species of birds throughout the state.

Measured by the number of on-line reports filed, this marked a more than 300 percent increase in participation from 2002. This year, some Mississippi schools are investigating the possibility of exchanging Count data with students in England who are participating in the Big Garden Birdwatch, a similar citizen science project organized by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

“With the participation of thousands of schoolchildren across Mississippi, we have a chance to become the most active state joining in the Great Backyard Bird Count,” said Bruce Reid, Audubon Mississippi’s deputy state director.

To learn how to obtain the Mississippi Classroom Activity Kit, contact Audubon Mississippi's Central State Office in Vicksburg at 601-661-6189 or Dr. Mark LaSalle, Mississippi State University's Coastal Research and Extension Center in Biloxi, at 228-388-4710.

Audubon is dedicated to protecting birds and other wildlife and the habitat that supports them. Our national network of community-based nature centers and chapters, scientific and educational programs, and advocacy on behalf of areas sustaining important bird populations, engage millions of people of all ages and backgrounds in positive conservation experiences.

Great Deal from Karen Thead!!
Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s Guide to Birds of North America, Version 3

“I won this fantastic software last year in the Young Birder of the Year Contest, but I already had it on the computer. It costs about \$70-75 online, plus shipping and handling, but anybody who’d like to buy it can do so from me for \$55. It is completely upgradeable online and has all the songs, range maps, interactive tests, birders’ handbook and many other features, plus a search engine allowing you to sort by several categories. Over 2600 color photos and more than 1200 songs. Go online to this site to check it out

<http://www.thayerbirding.com/>

Just let me know at this address: <mailto:sthead@mississippi.net>.”



We all enjoyed pulling those weeds at Strawberry Plains, ***BUT***....

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