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Okatibbee Creek Audubon Society

November 2009

Meetings are held at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Meridian every second Monday of the month at 7:00 p.m. 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.

Next meeting: November 9, 2009

***Be like the bird, who halting in his flight /
On limb too slight, / Feels it give way
beneath him, yet sings / Knowing he has
wings.***

--Victor Hugo, writer (1802-1885)

--contributed by Nancy Donald

Read OCAS' newsletter online at
<http://home.comcast.net/~ocas/>

Opinions in this newsletter are not necessarily those of Mississippi Audubon or of National Audubon but of individual writers. We view it as important to provide a forum for discussion and therefore we include articles from diverse sources where we can.

Report from the Alabama Coastal Bird Fest

by
Nancy Donald

This was the sixth year for the John L. Borom Alabama Coastal Bird Fest and my first bird festival of any sort. Visitors from 21 states and Canada participated. The Bird Fest was started by John L. Borom's approaching the mayor of Fairhope and proposing the Bird Fest to bring attention to the abundance of bird life in this part of Alabama and to help preserve these wild areas for nature. The proceeds are donated for purchasing bird habitat. The Mobile Bay area is just one great birding habitat from Bon Secour NWR and Fort Morgan on the east up the bay to Weeks Bay Estuarine Reserve, then to Five Rivers Delta Resource Center west across the causeway and Blakely Island, then down to Bayou Le Batre and the birder's paradise that is Dauphin Island, Alabama.

The Bird Fest offered 13 guided trips over 4 days, sunset cruises up the Tensaw River Delta plus other activities and presentations in the evenings. It was well-run and professionally guided by experienced birders. Anyone from the non-birder to the well-seasoned would enjoy these trips.

The first day we boarded the tour bus at the Five Rivers Welcome Center and headed to Dauphin Island. A note here about the weather--it was windy the four days of the Bird Fest and the birds did not like it. I had a great time, would do it again in a second, saw some new species, and learned a lot, but the birds were not abundant. We birded the airport which is marsh habitat with some views of mudflats, the Shell Mound, Ft. Gaines, the boardwalk at the Estuarium, the Audubon Sanctuary, and Cadillac Park. Birds of note were an abundance of Redstarts and a Magnolia warbler at the Shell Mound. For those not familiar with Dauphin Island, there is a Native American mound consisting primarily of shells. It is overgrown with Live oaks draped in Spanish moss and maintained for birding with paths, benches, and feeding stations. At Ft. Gaines, we

identified Caspian, Royal, and Forrester's terns along with Herring & Laughing gulls, Brown pelicans, Ruddy turnstone, and Double-crested cormorants. The most impressive sighting was the many tree swallows and a spectacular show by a Peregrine falcon. The falcon put on a show diving and turning in mid-air to devour migrating butterflies. We finished the day by touring the Five Rivers facility and hearing a presentation by local photographer and birder, Kathy Hicks.

The second day, we had no scheduled trips and decided to follow the Alabama Coastal Bird Trail from Dauphin Island to Bayou Le Batre. Despite the wind, we still managed to add a Willet to our list of birds on Dauphin Island. We headed for Coden, a beautiful spot on the Mississippi Sound with homes on one side of the road and piers and private oyster beds on the other. We id'd more Caspian, Royal, and Forrester terns plus gulls. From Coden we headed to Bayou Le Batre to find Site #50 on the bird trail. It was an adventure! After driving through the shipyard and several miles of dirt roads through the back woods, we finally came to the Corps of Engineers' dredge ponds that make up Site #50. We learned later that the sign had been removed because the dredge ponds were filled in and overgrown. This area is part of the Forever Wild Land Trust, a program to buy and preserve wild areas in Alabama. We added Pine warblers, Swamp sparrow, Red-headed woodpeckers and Eastern bluebird to our list for the day. That evening the reception held in Fairhope included a presentation by Dr. Bill Summerour, ornithologist and expert on the Mobile Bay area. He took us on a trip via photos from the Gulf of Mexico on the east side of the bay up to the delta on the north and down to Dauphin Island on the west. His presentation introduced us to the amazing diversity of habitat that are within a short and easily visited distance of each other. A birder can go from the beach to sod farms in less than an hour.

Day three started at Five Rivers again for a trip to Bon Secour NWR. Bon Secour NWR is located close to Ft. Morgan and is divided into three areas. This trip consisted of a two-mile hike to the beach and back through forest,

lakeside, and dunes. Once through the forest, we began seeing small kettles of Broad-winged hawks soaring overhead. Once on the beach, we saw Merlin and Tree swallows. At the start of the hike, I had never seen a Merlin and by the time we left the beach, I had seen twelve. We added the Merlin, Broad-winged hawks, and Red-breasted merganser to our bird list. Also seen were Osprey, Great blue heron, little blue heron, and Great egret. You would think this would be enough birds for any trip, but we still had another day and the weather was crummy for birding!

Our last day we carpoled to Blakely Island Mud Ponds. These are large dredge disposal ponds and a working industrial site. They are located on the east end of the Bay Bridge and touted as one of the premiere spots for shorebirds in Alabama. Did I mention the weather? We topped the first dike expecting to see Roseate spoonbills but before us was not one shorebird—not even the always dependable Great blue heron. The wind was blowing at a breezy 40 mph (maybe not actually, but that's how it felt). After some hiking and pishing, we managed to call up a few warblers, phoebes and kinglets. But then we hit the good times with a Black-bellied whistling duck with her nine ducklings and proof of nesting in this area for the first time. The next pond up proved even more fruitful with Yellow-crowned night herons by the dozen, Stilt sandpipers, American avocet, Black-neck stilt, Lesser yellow-legs, and a Sora with a broken wing that seemed to manage fine. As we were leaving, overhead were Osprey, Bald eagle, and Northern harrier, and a Red-tailed hawk just to add to the bounty.

This was not enough! On the way back to Five Rivers to pick up our car and head home, we stopped on the causeway to add American white pelicans and a Black-bellied plover to our list for the day. My total species list for the trip was close to eighty species. Before I close, I would like to mention the hotel I stayed at in Daphne was on the bay and from our balcony, we saw Osprey, a Tri-colored heron, White ibis, Great blue herons doing a dance, heard Clapper rails and saw alligators sunning on the banks of

D'Olive Creek while watching the sun set over the bay. Amazing! While I have written mostly about places and birds, I also met some great people: experts who could id at the flick of a feather, non-birders enjoying the outdoors, and people who traveled from California satisfied to hunt down an Eastern towhee just because they've never seen one. Bird festivals are a great way to bird and learn.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

This year's Christmas Bird Count will be Saturday, January 2, 2010. Anyone wishing to participate, please contact me at nmdonald55@att.net or 601-527-1746. Our pre-count meeting will be at the regular meeting November 9, 2009, at 7:00 p.m. Tally meeting will be announced later. Ask your birder friends if they would like to help. I'm predicting a record year!

***There will be no December meeting due to Christmas Bird Count.** Our next meeting will be January 11, 2010, at 7:00 p.m.

SIGHTINGS

11/1 Anhinga, Pie-billed grebe and a Red fox at Lake Tom Bailey
Greater yellow-legs and Ring-necked duck at Bonita Lakes

David Miles and Nancy Donald

11/3 Yellow-rumped warbler and White-throated sparrow at office, Hwy 39--Nancy Donald