



# Audubon MISSISSIPPI

SUMMER 2009

[ *The Newsletter from the Mississippi State Office of the National Audubon Society* ]

## Save the Dates!



### Youth Entomology Camp

Pascagoula River Audubon Center: June 15-19 & June 22-26  
Strawberry Plains Audubon Center: July 13-17

### Audubon Teacher Master Naturalist Training

Audubon Teacher Master Naturalist Training Pascagoula Audubon Center: July 13-17

### Mississippi River Nature Festival

Tara Wildlife in Vicksburg: August 22

### Hummingbird Migration Celebration

Strawberry Plains Audubon Center: Sept. 11-13. Outdoor festival, hummingbird banding, great speakers, crafts, native plant sale

### Slow Foods "Fall Feast"

Pascagoula River Audubon Center: November 14

### Audubon Mississippi Chapter Retreat

Roosevelt State Park: March 26-28, 2010

### Join in the Paperless Newsletter Campaign

See page 10 for information.

## CONSERVATION

# Mississippi Birds in Decline

## Eastern Meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*)

AS A KID, I REMEMBER LARGE NUMBERS of meadowlarks in the fields of central Mississippi, mostly because of their distinct yellow bellies and awkward flight motion, seemingly doomed for a crash landing," said Bubba Hubbard, Director of Strawberry Plains Audubon Center in Holly Springs, MS. His dad helped him remember its clear, melodious whistle by likening it to the phrase, "I'm-a-Meadow-lark." That song accompanied him on many fishing and hunting outings throughout his childhood.

These days identifying an Eastern Meadowlark by call or sight is definitely more of a challenge. When the National Audubon Society released its groundbreaking *State of the Birds* report and included the Eastern Meadowlark on its list of 20 Most Common Species in Decline, it was no big surprise. "These are not rare or exotic birds we're talking about... these are the birds that visit our feeders and congregate at nearby lakes and seashores and yet they are disappearing day by day," Audubon chairwoman and former EPA Administrator Carol Browner said about the alarming decline of many well-known bird species. Is it possible that the numbers of our most common and most loved birds have dropped so dramatically without our notice?

As reported in Audubon's *State of the Birds* report, Eastern Meadowlark numbers have decreased by approximately 72% in the last forty years. This report and Audubon's *Common Birds in Decline* list were based on 40 years of data collected by citizen scientists for



BILL STRIPLING

Audubon's Christmas Bird Counts and the U.S. Geological Survey's Breeding Bird Surveys. "This is a powerful example of how tens of thousands of volunteer birders, pooling their observations, can make an enormous difference for the creatures they care the most about," natural history writer Scott Weidensaul said in a prepared statement. "Thanks to their efforts, we have the information. Now all of us — from birders to policy makers — need to take action to keep these species from declining even further," Weidensaul said.

Audubon's efforts reflect a new movement underway — by scientists and (Go to page 12)

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**MISSION STATEMENT**

Audubon's mission is to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity.

This newsletter is printed on recycled paper with soy base ink.

*Audubon Mississippi* is published periodically to report on the activities of the Mississippi State Office of the National Audubon Society, a not-for-profit, 501(c)(3) corporation founded in 1905 and supported by 500,000 members in nearly 500 chapters throughout the Americas.

**DIRECTOR'S CORNER**

# Conservation Connections

**G**IVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO WRITE THIS, I WAS TEMPTED TO WRITE ABOUT GREAT THINGS HAPPENING at Strawberry Plains Audubon Center. Instead, I'll talk about the bigger picture, not because it might make my boss happy, but because it has motivated us in our conservation efforts. This inspiration came during recent conservation planning for the Coldwater River Watershed and as we saw the connections with Audubon's new vision for the entire Mississippi River region.



Walter "Bubba" Hubbard

All of us like to think we can make a difference. When it comes to conservation, the cold hard truth is, very little can be accomplished by yourself. Partners working together can accomplish more than any one entity. Why is this so? Anyone familiar with ecology or watershed work understands the importance of connectivity. Spatial connectivity of habitats within and among ecosystems is critical for sustainable animal populations. Human entities that are trying to conserve ecosystems must also be connected and unified in their efforts.

People are critical components of ecosystems, mainly because of the impacts we instigate. Big or small, your place in an ecosystem or a watershed matters. Like it or not, we're all connected and what we do to our environment has a ripple effect on the places of others. The need for cooperative conservation is clear. Doug Tallamy states in his book, *Bringing Nature Home, How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants*, "as far as our wildlife is concerned, we have shrunk the continental U.S. to 1/20 of its original size." He also makes a great case that biodiversity (native species, mind you) is needed for stability, and even for the existence of most ecosystems.

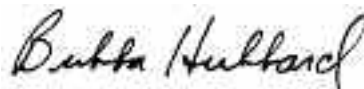
Conservation requires a community that cares enough to think well into the future. As we seek cooperation to minimize the impacts of land-use practices and urban development in the Coldwater River Watershed, Audubon has a vision for even larger connections. This vision, the Mississippi River Initiative, has conservation goals to protect birds and their habitats, reduce excess nutrients tied to the Gulf of Mexico Dead Zone and restore natural hydrology to reduce loss of coastal wetlands.

Habitat work at our Center is connected to a larger effort. Scales of influence following a downstream progression include: habitat at our Center, contiguous land, Coldwater River Watershed, Yazoo River Basin, Lower Mississippi River, and the Gulf of Mexico. Our healthy forests and grasslands, albeit relatively small, help improve hypoxic conditions in the Gulf of Mexico.

So, we are connected in conservation, as is Audubon's work out of Vicksburg, Pascagoula, above Mississippi and below. It has to start somewhere, and the message to all of us is that it begins in our own backyards.



Mississippi River Conservation Action Sites



WALTER "BUBBA" HUBBARD

Director, STRAWBERRY PLAINS AUDUBON CENTER

# Donors Support Audubon Conservation Education

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## Make a Gift to Audubon From Your IRA

**T**HE EMERGENCY ECONOMIC STABILIZATION ACT OF 2008, PASSED BY CONGRESS AND signed by President Bush on October 3, 2008, renews the provisions of the Pension Protection Act allowing donors to make charitable gifts from their IRAs. If you are 70½ years old or older, you can make a gift (up to \$100,000) from your traditional or Roth IRA. The distribution will not be subject to income tax as would a non-charitable distribution. Since the distribution is not taxable, there is no charitable deduction for the gift.

Background: At 70½ owners of IRAs must begin taking taxable distributions from their plans. (Remember that IRAs were never intended to avoid taxes, only to defer them.) At 70½ it is time to pay the piper. If you don't need to start taking distributions, or if you don't need the entire amount mandated by minimum distribution formulas, you may find it more advantageous to use your IRA as a source of funds to make charitable gifts.

To make a gift to Audubon from your IRA instruct your plan sponsor to make a charitable distribution of up to \$100,000 and to make a check payable to Audubon Mississippi. The plan sponsor should send the check to you for forwarding to our office.

If you have any questions, please call Mary Lynn Riley in our office at 662-252-1155. Or call Audubon Vice President, Wayne Mones at 212-979-3033. Please also consider naming Audubon as a beneficiary of a portion of the amount left in your IRA at the time of your death. Generally, it is better to leave IRA assets to charity and cash and stocks to family.

BILL STRIPLING



# No Excuses for Not Composting

IN THE UNITED STATES ALONE, MILLIONS OF POUNDS OF FOOD SCRAPS AND COMMON YARD debris get tossed in the garbage every single day! Why not do your part for conservation, and “reuse” all of this organic material to make compost? Compost is a wonderful, free “homemade” organic fertilizer, and it can be used to condition your vegetable or landscaping soil. Compost application can help conserve soil moisture, lower soil temperatures in hot weather, help control weeds and add valuable nutrients to your soil for maximum organic plant production. By making compost, we reduce the amount of material that ends up in the landfill, and we help in the reduction of dangerous greenhouse gases such as methane and nitric oxide that build up in landfills and are released into the atmosphere.

Food scraps, grass clippings, leaves and weeds from your flower bed can easily be used to make “black gold.” Passive, active, sheet layering, vermi and pitting are all common techniques for creating compost. Regardless of which style you choose, they are all relatively easy, and the initial time it takes to get started is well worth the effort. When we create compost, we want to make sure that we follow certain guidelines to achieve success. There are many complex formulas and suggested practices, but there are four ingredients and a few guidelines to follow to be successful.

The contents of your compost pile should contain equal parts of green material (Ingredient A — food scraps, grass clippings, etc.) that contain nitrogen, and equal parts of brown material (Ingredient B — leaves, wilted vegetation,) that contains carbon. Make sure that the pile is well aerated (Ingredient C), and that it is at least three feet wide, by three feet tall. Aeration can be achieved by using materials that allow air to enter the pile from underneath and the sides, or actively turning the pile with a pitch fork every 3 to 4 days. There are many commercial bins available to make this “active” process easier and faster than a “passive pile.”

Passive piles are simply alternating layers of brown and green material. This style breaks down slower without actively turning the pile to speed the process. Both techniques require the presence of moisture (Ingredient D) that makes the internal environment of the materials conducive for decomposition. Usually, natural rain is sufficient, but you may need to add water to the center of the pile. Try not to locate your pile in the shade so it will not retain too much water, and never place a pile directly underneath a tree as the roots will absorb or steal the valuable nutrients from your compost.

Food scraps or kitchen waste is a large percentage of the refuse in a common household. A fantastic way to recycle food scraps alone is by creating a vermicomposting bin. Vermi is Latin for “worms.” A vermicomposting setup is the combination of red worms, recycled paper scraps and food scraps to produce a nutrient rich fertilizer called “casting.” When properly executed, this form of composting can be done inside your home using small plastic bins without foul odors or pests.

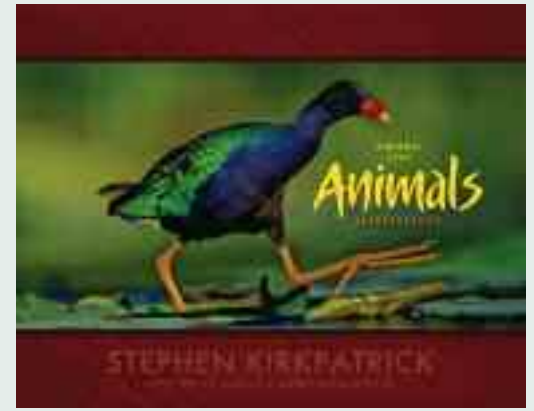
Audubon Mississippi encourages everyone to do research and gather the information needed to start recycling your organic material. Making compost reduces the need to purchase chemical fertilizers that harm our soil and water resources, and decreases harmful gases that are released into the atmosphere. There is indeed no excuse not to compost! Contact our educators to learn more or visit our website at [www.pascagoula.river.audubon.org](http://www.pascagoula.river.audubon.org).



A “Passive” Compost Pile

MOZART DEDEAUX

## BOOK REVIEW



### Among the Animals: Mississippi

A photographic adventure for children, by Stephen Kirkpatrick with text by Marlo Carter Kirkpatrick

This wonderful collection of photographs by renowned wildlife photographer, Stephen Kirkpatrick, was sponsored by Chevron's Pascagoula Refinery: a champion of environmental education and early childhood development programs, including a number of programs offered through the Pascagoula River Audubon Center and Audubon Mississippi. This engaging book was designed to connect young Mississippians to the wonders of nature in their home state, with the hopes of inspiring lifelong appreciation and awareness. Marlo Kirkpatrick's text begins with a call for readers to leave the house and television behind and embark on a journey of discovery of the state's “other” residents, many in their own backyards. She weaves a wonderful tale of possible encounters with big and small creatures from the coastal waters to the deepest forests, flavoring the text with neat details about their biology and behaviors, many of which are clearly illustrated in the superb photos. A clear theme of this book is a call for youngsters to be patient and look carefully around them in order to discover the wonders of nature. There is much to be learned and enjoyed by parents and children alike as they journey through this book.

Chevron's generosity to Audubon includes the donation of a large number of copies of this wonderful book, to be used as gifts to donors contributing to the upcoming Capital Campaign for a new Pascagoula River Audubon Center.

## VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHTS

### Ray Emmons

RAY FIRST BECAME ACQUAINTED WITH STRAWBERRY PLAINS WHILE ATTENDING A NATURAL Resource Initiative meeting here a few years ago. He participated in our first Audubon Naturalist session in 2006 to learn more about how he could create a more wildlife friendly environment on his 80 acres. He has since increased the size of one of his bottomland ponds from one to five acres, where he and his wife Jeanette enjoy watching water-loving birds. They have been working to remove the exotic invasive plants from their property and replacing them with native plants. They are also converting what once were formal gardens into natural settings as their perspective of what “garden” is has shifted to a more relaxed landscape which invites more wildlife and requires less maintenance, allowing them more time to enjoy their place!

Ray is our official Chimney Swift Tower maker! He built our first tower in the summer of 2006. In July of that year, while placing the top section of the tower onto the lower section he said that Chimney Swifts were flying close, inspecting this possible new nesting site. During that first summer after installation, that tower did host a pair of breeding Chimney Swifts who parented a successful brood. This past spring Ray built another tower at the Center. He is dedicated to building the towers properly and, therefore, communicates with the tower designers (Paul & Georgan Kyle) when he has an installation or design idea.



Ray Emmons with chimney swift tower

Ray also helps us every year during our Hummingbird Migration Celebration. Last year he worked the parking lot...the toughest job of the festival. We are grateful for the work and time that Ray continues to donate and we appreciate the continuing work that he and Jeanette are doing on their property to benefit the natural world. Who knows, maybe we'll see tower number three in 2010!

### Lisa Wesson

THE PASCAGOULA RIVER AUDUBON CENTER HAS NOT been the same since Lisa began volunteering a year ago this April...it has become a better place. What began as an offer of time to help answer the phone and keep the feeders full, has evolved to tracking visitors and helping with the uncountable details of running an Audubon Center. In the process, Lisa has added a great deal of capacity and charm to what many refer to as Mark and Mozart's “quaint” little Center. But, Lisa did not stop there. Soon after beginning as a volunteer, she became a trained Audubon Master Naturalist and recently completed training to



Lisa Wesson

assist with a statewide frog monitoring program, sponsored through the Mississippi Museum of Natural Sciences: having to “pass” a rigorous “frog call” recognition test before being qualified to accept responsibility for a monitoring route. Lisa also completed an “Oiled Bird Recovery Training” program this spring and was the designated “Planning Czar” for the annual Pascagoula River Nature Festival, juggling a myriad of details from invoices to registration to scheduling volunteers across four communities. Her latest “mission” is to guide the Center in its process of becoming an “Eco-Certified” attraction and to encourage other volunteers to join the Audubon team. Oh, and she also “feeds the fish” and makes a pretty good pot of coffee to boot! The vexing question we now ask ourselves is this: how did Mark and Mozart manage before Lisa got here?



MARK LASALLE

Sheri Glowinski instructing Chapter volunteers on IBA bird monitoring protocols.

## Important Bird Area Monitoring

**A**UDUBON MISSISSIPPI RECENTLY advanced its efforts toward the development and implementation of an active monitoring and assessment plan for its Important Bird Area (IBA) program. Working with its affiliate Chapters and supported by a National Fish & Wildlife Foundation grant, the initial program calls for seasonal monitoring of birds within five IBA sites across the state. Bird populations will be tracked during the spring to track breeding populations and in the fall and winter to track migrants. Training on the methods for monitoring bird populations was a key element of the annual Chapter Retreat held in March 2009 at the Gray Conference Center near Canton. Sheri Glowinski of the University of Southern Mississippi's Department of Biological Sciences led a team of state and regional ornithologists and biologists to develop the monitoring protocols and conducted the training for chapter volunteers that will begin monitoring this spring. Key objectives of Audubon's IBA program include the identification and designation of areas that support significant populations of birds and the implementation of programs that monitor bird and wildlife populations, as well as assess habitat conditions that can inform conservation planning by Audubon and its partners. More information on Mississippi's IBA program is available at <http://pascagoula.river.audubon.org/birds-science-education/important-bird-area-research>.

# Coldwater River Watershed Stewardship Cooperative

**C**ONSERVATION PLANNING HAS led to a strategy to organize landowners and other partners for cooperative conservation over a landscape of multiple landowners. After our first year, we are pleased with the success of the Coldwater River Watershed Stewardship Cooperative (CRWSC). The key has been strong partnerships with our state wildlife agency and several landowners with a particular interest in grassland habitat.

By leveraging available funds and programs, we were able to minimize costs to landowners which could have prevented work from getting done. Nine landowners are scheduled to begin management, enhancement or full restoration on a total of 611 acres of early successional grassland habitat. Activities include prescribed burning, herbicide treatments of exotic species and planting of native grasses and forbs. Hardwood forest restoration and protection has also been a focus, particularly along the banks of the Coldwater River and tributaries.

A shared interest in Northern Bobwhite Quail enabled the MS Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks to assist with field work and provide technical guidance to landowners. We jointly hosted, along with the Mississippi State Extension Service, a quail informational meeting. Many of the attendees were potential CRWSC participants and all were interested in the regional declines in quail populations.

Other important partners have been the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Farm Services Agency. Their conservation programs supplement funds secured by Audubon through the TogetherGreen Grant program by Toyota. Landowner incentives are important to initiate projects that take multiple years to successfully plan and complete.

A particularly exciting project is a 242-acre grassland restoration where multiple landowners now see their property as an integral part of a landscape project. Managing these lands as a single unit makes for more meaningful conservation for grassland species such as Northern Bobwhite, Eastern Meadowlark, Loggerheaded Shrike, Grasshopper Sparrow and Field Sparrow. These are grassland species occurring in our area and at the top of Audubon's list of common species in decline.



Miss. Dept. of Wildlife, Fisheries & Parks Biologist helps calibrate a specialty drill purchased with TogetherGreen grant funds to plant and improve successful establishment of native warm season grasses.



Prescribed burning on Coldwater River Watershed private lands for grassland management.

SEINE MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

## North Mississippi Land Trust

**W**hen conservation planning for the Coldwater River Watershed (CRW) began in 2007, the need for a land trust was quickly identified as a strategy to advance the plan's vision: in a watershed facing rapid development, future generations will inherit sufficient amounts of clean water, native wildlife populations and a legacy of stewardship focused on the importance of nature. Major threats to overcome in the CRW are commercial/residential development and incompatible land use.

Through efforts of the Desoto County Greenways (Coordinator Larry Jarrett is a Strawberry Plains Audubon Center Board Member), the North Mississippi Land Trust ([www.nmslandtrust.org](http://www.nmslandtrust.org)) now has authority to acquire, maintain and improve lands for the purpose of greenways, parks, sanctuaries, cultural heritage, or other such purposes. Landowners can use this tool to ensure their conservation wishes for perpetuity and also reduce their tax burden. Guidelines under the National Land Trust Alliance Land Trust Standards and Practices will be used to serve an area of 34 counties in north Mississippi, basically above Hwy 82.

Audubon is working with Desoto County Greenways to develop a system to connect public and private green spaces in the lower part of the CRW. Protecting and linking natural features and their functions will help improve the environment and biodiversity. This work is an important effort in the more urbanized part of the watershed.

Projects made possible by the new land trust will provide recreational, economic and educational benefits. Proposed projects by the Desoto County Greenways such as the Johnson Creek Greenway near Horn Lake, Miss., and the Arkabutla Lake Wildlife Rehabilitation Center will utilize existing utility easements and lands owned by the government or private sector: Outdoor classrooms and trails will also be included in these projects. Native plant habitats and natural wetlands will be important elements as well. Interpretative signage along the trails will note the cultural, historical, environmental and recreational features.





## Hummingbird Migration Celebration

**T**HIS YEAR'S EVENT FEATURES MANY OF THE PAST FAVORITES SUCH AS Bob and Martha Sargent of the Hummer Bird/Study Group, Rob Mies from the Organization of Bat Conservation, Terry Vandeventer and others. Some great new guests will include Doug Tallamy, author of *Bringing Nature Home; How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife in Our Gardens* and Miyoko Chu, author of *Songbird Journeys, Four Seasons in the Lives of Migratory Birds*. Kids will also enjoy live animal demonstrations by the Natural History Education Company.

Each fall thousands of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds migrate from Canada through Mississippi to their winter home in Mexico and Central America. Like a river, these birds are on the move daily through the fields and woods of Strawberry Plains Audubon Center in Holly Springs. The native gardens at Strawberry Plains are thick with the tiny birds sipping from flowers and feeders to fatten up for their long journey south. Strawberry Plains hosts one of the largest nature festivals in the nation each September at the height of the birds' spectacular fall migration. The event also features bird viewing in the historic Davis House sunroom, a nature trade show, tours of native plant gardens, food and much more. Let the Hummingbird Migration Celebration be your introduction to Strawberry Plains Audubon Center. You can return throughout the year and learn, become a volunteer, or become a supporter of our educational programs and our habitat restoration.

Mark your Calendars! The 2009 Annual Hummingbird Migration Celebration at Strawberry Plains will be September 11-13! To become a sponsor, call 662-252-1155.

## Strawberry Plains Audubon Center Native Plant Sale

**T**his year's plant sale offered a large selection of native plant species — many difficult to find at local nurseries. The Center's nursery sells plants throughout the growing season by appointment. In the coming months, the nursery will become more customer-friendly, which will include descriptive signs for all of the available plants. Guests will be able to include this area into their visitor experience...bypassing the need for appointment only purchases!



Visitors enjoy the Native Plant Sale.

## Summer Programs at Strawberry Plains

**T**o mark the arrival of summer this year, Kathy Shelton of the Museum of Natural Science presented an **ear**-opening program about the Frogs and Toads of North Mississippi. After listening to a variety of recorded frog calls, participants tested their new skills around the

ponds and vernal pools of Strawberry Plains Audubon Center. A congregation of cricket frogs was singing — Kathy likened their calls to the sound made by mar-



Families enjoy a day at Strawberry Plains.

bles being rubbed together. A green frog also made its presence known, with its trademark call that sounds like a note from an out of tune banjo.

This is just one of many programs that will be happening this summer at Strawberry Plains. Most of the programs are geared for the family. In addition to educational opportunities, like Beginning Bird Watching classes, many of our scheduled interpretive hikes are designed to provide families with a fun and unique way to socialize and exercise together.

Please check, <http://strawberryplains.audubon.org>, for information about upcoming events and programs at Strawberry Plains! We look forward to seeing you soon.

**T**here was no “rest for the weary” at the Pascagoula River Audubon Center this winter and spring. In addition to co-sponsoring and coordinating the annual Pascagoula River Nature Festival held in April, the Center also hosted a variety of volunteer training programs and events that engaged a wide range of folks both at the Center and across local communities. The summer season also promises to keep the staff and volunteers busy with summer camp in June and the Audubon Teacher Master Naturalist course and WetKids Academy in July. The Center is also closing in on the launch of a capital campaign to raise funds for a new facility and may start construction on selected site components as early as summer. Stay tuned!

## Pascagoula River Nature Festival

**T**his year’s festival highlighted major groups of organisms that will be the target of the upcoming Pascagoula River All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory: a proposed long-term effort to document all living organisms in the watershed. Participants in community events held in Moss Point, Gautier, Ocean Springs and Lucedale learned from experts on frogs, snakes, raptors, fishes and plants, as well as gained first-hand experiences in the river through boat rides and nature tours. This annual event helps to focus attention on the need to protect the “largest, free-flowing river in the lower 48 states” as well as promote the growing nature tourism industry that will provide environmentally-sensitive, economic development for the state.



Audubon Master Naturalists Noel Lamey shows off a common rat snake to festival goers.



Summer campers learn to collect data as “Citizen Scientists.”

## 2009 Summer Camp

**E**VERY SUMMER THE PASCAGOULA RIVER AUDUBON CENTER hosts children from all over the Mississippi coast for its youth ecology camp. Teachers and student volunteers converge on the site to educate local and regional students about ecological, environmental, and science-based topics. In the past sessions, we have focused our activities on the study of wetlands, the Pascagoula watershed and its associated organisms while emphasizing the collection of field data. All of our activities are based on Mississippi Frameworks for K-5 Math and Science with a “hands on approach” to learning.

The 2009 theme will be entomology, or the study of insects. Activities will include basic identification of insect orders, population density exercises, concepts of complete and incomplete metamorphosis, aquatic insect identification, tree hole ecosystems, butterfly and dragonfly identification, spider natural history and many more activities designed to acquaint students with the concepts of observing and collecting data. The underlying goal of our program is to allow students to experience the joy and fun of discovery and observation, while hopefully sparking their interest in the processes of science.

## Frog Calling

**K**ATHY SHELTON OF THE MISSISSIPPI MUSEUM OF Natural Sciences conducted a “Frog Monitoring” training session at the Center in January, training 18 volunteers, many of which are Audubon Master Naturalists. This effort is part of a state-wide monitoring effort that also supports the planned Pascagoula River All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory. Volunteers have to pass a rigorous online frog call recognition test before being qualified for a designated monitoring route.

## Oiled Bird Recovery Training

**T**WO DAYS OF OILED BIRD RECOVERY TRAINING, SPONSORED BY THE Chevron Rascagoula Refinery, were conducted in March by the Wildlife Rehab and Education Center. Thirty-four volunteers became qualified to assist should a spill occur after learning about the impacts of oil on wildlife and methods for cleaning oiled waterfowl. They also learned that ducks are not easy to hold onto wet or dry.



MOZART DEDEAUX

Oiled Bird Trainees Learn to "Wash" a Duck.



MARK LASALLE

Dominique Upshaw (left) gets help planting Trees from parents and teachers at Orange Lake Elementary

## TogetherGreen Volunteers

**O**NE OF THE CENTER'S TOGETHER Green volunteer day programs improving wildlife habitat at local schools, as part of the National Wildlife Federation's Certified Backyard program. The process was assisted through the efforts of Dominique Upshaw, a Moss Point High School senior, who adopted the project as his "senior" project. The volunteers shown here helped plant native shrubs and establish a bird feeding and watering station.

## Audubon Junior Naturalist To Attend Math & Science School

**T**WO AUDUBON JUNIOR NATURALISTS WERE ACCEPTED INTO THE MISSISSIPPI High School for Math and Science for the upcoming academic year. Charlotte Murnan and Bobby Glenn will "migrate" north this fall to complete their last two years of high school, but not before spending the summer at the Center as Interns. Charlotte and Bobby will assist with the upcoming summer camp programs and serve as on-site "Naturalists" for the Center. Director Mark LaSalle is working with the Math and Science School to find ways to use this opportunity to cultivate a partnership that will allow these students to spread our message and mission through the school and surrounding communities, much as they currently do on the coast.



MARK LASALLE

Charlotte Murnan (left) and Bobby Glenn as Youth Counselors at Summer Camp.



MARK LASALLE

Mozart Dedeaux

## Mozart Dedeaux Recognized as "New Star Ace Award Winner"

**A**UDUBON MISSISSIPPI IS PROUD TO recognize one of its own as a recipient of last year's New Star Ace Awards. The Ace Award program recognizes and celebrates the efforts and truly impressive accomplishments of individuals and teams, including the New Star category for employees that have been with Audubon less than two years. As the Education Coordinator for the Pascagoula River Audubon Center, Mozart sinks all of his energy into his role with Audubon and exemplifies the kind of drive and commitment that we seek in any employee. In the short eleven month period prior to the point of his nomination for this award last year, Mozart developed an impressive array of on-site educational programs that have been the foundation of the work of Audubon on the Pascagoula River. Mozart can get down and muddy with a preschooler and rise to greet a high level state, national, or international figure in a smooth even flow of movement, leaving both of them enchanted and better informed on the topic at hand.

## Audubon MS Tests New Web Site

**A**UDUBON MISSISSIPPI WAS ONE OF THREE STATE PROGRAMS PARTICIPATING in a recent pilot project to test and implement an exciting new webpage management system within Audubon. The result is a system of independent websites that highlight each of the key components of Audubon Mississippi's growing family of facilities. The new system allows direct management of any given site by local staff, thus allowing for wide latitude in keeping each site fresh and exciting, while maintaining Audubon's basic branding. The system will soon allow us to add new capabilities such as video and live cams from any location. Please visit these sites and let us know what you think.

## Need Your Help with Newsletter Distribution

**A**N ADDED BENEFIT OF A MORE FLEXIBLE AND ROBUST WEBSITE IS THE ability to post and store the many fact sheets and other documents that we want to share with our members and users, particularly this biannual newsletter. We currently print and mail nearly 6,500 copies of the newsletter and would love to do our part in saving trees, postage, and reducing our "carbon footprint." Please help us by volunteering to be removed from the mailing list for newsletters and opting to read the online version. Please sign up for the "online" newsletter by emailing Mary Lynn Riley (mriley@audubon.org) and pledging to help Audubon with its "Paperless Newsletter Campaign." We will track the number of paperless subscribers and report on the number of trees saved in the process. This is one other way that Audubon Mississippi can "Lead by Example."

## New Outreach Director Added

**K**ATIE BOYLE JOINED AUDUBON IN JANUARY TO OVERSEE THE OUTREACH AND education programs at Strawberry Plains. Katie resides in Oxford, Miss., where her husband is pursuing a Ph.D. in literature. We welcome Katie as she helps us raise awareness of the impending habitat threats to the Coldwater River Watershed.



Katie Boyle

Environmental education, conservation service and a desire to help others discover the beauty and importance of the outdoors have been her passions from her first AmeriCorps experience in Austin, Tex., through her years of work in schools across the South Bronx. As Field Crew Supervisor with the GreenApple Corps and Program Coordinator with the Student Conservation Association in New York, she created new ways for interns to gain the tools and skills necessary to secure employment in the environmental field. Her experience and passion for environmental education and service will help us contribute more to the community.

## Audubon Who?

**H**ave you seen the word "Audubon" used by organizations other than Audubon Mississippi or the National Audubon Society? Read further for an important distinction between Audubon and one such organization with a similar and confusing name.

The National Audubon Society (Audubon) was founded in 1905 to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds and other wildlife, and their habitats. Audubon is supported by over 400,000 members with state offices, programs, and 500 chapters throughout the country.

Audubon International, funded in part by the U.S. Golf Association, charges an annual fee to certify golf courses as "Audubon Cooperative Sanctuaries." They also offer similar certifications for cemeteries, parks, campgrounds, resorts, stores, industrial facilities, marinas, residential communities and schools.

The Martel Resorts company is using Audubon International as part of a proposed \$300 million resort on Bay Springs Lake in Tishomingo County. Distinction between Audubon MS and Audubon International is needed when statements are made such as the following: "Martel also has pledged to design the property in parallel with Audubon International, to ensure environmental integrity" (*NE Miss. Daily Journal*, April 2009).

Audubon is not associated with Audubon International in any way and Audubon does not certify development as being environmentally sound. Indeed, Audubon may oppose such development. Audubon sanctuaries are protected natural spaces for public enjoyment and no Audubon sanctuary is certified for development. Audubon does not support the certifications offered by Audubon International.

Proponents of the new resort were encouraged in April 2009 by the signing of a bill allowing liquor sales. A lease has yet to be secured from the Corps of Engineers who own the land as part of the Tenn-Tom Waterway. Some waterway lands were acquired by eminent domain in the 1980s and relocations were made to benefit the waterway. Environmental and economic impacts from the resort project need to be fully vetted. But for certain, the development will be visible from Crow's Neck Environmental Center where children from all around Mississippi attend camp to enjoy nature.

## New Director Named For Mississippi River Field Institute

**R**EID BISHOP, THE NEWEST AUDUBON EMPLOYEE IN MISSISSIPPI, BRINGS A WEALTH OF experience as a scientist, researcher, educator and artist to the job of director of Mississippi River Field Institute.

“Working with Audubon on the conservation of the Mississippi River is a perfect consolidation of my varied scientific, artistic, educational and personal interests,” Reid said. “I feel like I have finally found what I’ve been searching for. My kids also now think that I have the coolest job in the world.”

Reid grew up in Vicksburg and now lives in Clinton with his wife Kelley, a physician in Jackson, and three children. Before coming to Audubon, he was a professor of analytical chemistry and biochemistry at Mississippi College in Clinton. He earned a Ph.D. from the University of Mississippi Medical Center, did post-doctoral work at Emory University, worked as a researcher for the U.S. Agriculture Department and was a visiting professor at Millsaps College in Jackson.

The concept for the Institute grew out of discussions about the need to involve more people and communities in stewardship of the Mississippi River and its adjoining flood-plain habitats. It will be a broad-based educational and science program to support Audubon’s conservation efforts along the Mississippi.

A main venue for outdoor-based educational programs will be Tara Wildlife, a lodge, conference center and 17,000-acre private preserve near Vicksburg.

With help from Audubon Mississippi board member Ken Hicks of Vicksburg, among others, Audubon raised initial funding to allow the hiring of a director and to start developing the Institute’s programs. Reid began working June 1 on business planning, curriculum development and other duties. He is based in Audubon’s Lower Mississippi River Program Office in Vicksburg.

The watershed formed by the Mississippi and its major tributaries is one of the most expansive and valuable natural systems in the world, supporting huge populations of migratory and resident

birds, fish and other wildlife. Yet these and other natural attributes have been under-recognized and under-appreciated compared to the river system’s economic importance in providing the nation’s major inland shipping network and all the economic activity associated with it. A century of intensive river management also has led to huge challenges, such as the rapid loss of coastal wetlands around the river’s mouth in Louisiana and increasing threats to people and wildlife from tropical storms resulting from that land loss.

In his work in academia, Reid developed a nationally recognized undergraduate research program in the synthesis and stability of DNA. He has published dozens of scientific papers, given lectures around the country, and been awarded research grants from the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, and Research Corporation. He is a past Chairman of the Mississippi Section of the American Chemical Society and is a member of the newly formed Mississippi Biophysical Consortium.

While pursuing his career in science education, Reid maintained close to his first academic love: art. Reid is a natural science illustrator and has published technical illustrations in medical and chemistry textbooks. He is a member of the Guild of Natural Science Illustrators. He also has maintained an active personal interest in sculpture, both figurative as well as in the large scale representation of biological molecules.

Reid is an avid outdoorsman and has spent countless hours exploring the waterways and the backwoods of the states surrounding the Mississippi River as well as the barrier islands of the Gulf of Mexico. His interest began during his childhood while he was actively involved with the Boy Scouts of America in Missouri, Illinois and in Mississippi. He attained both the rank of Eagle Scout and the Vigil Honor.



G. Reid Bishop, Ph.D., the newly hired Executive Director of the Mississippi River Field Institute

## Army Corps of Engineers Agreement

**T**he National Audubon Society, represented by Vice President Roger Still, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Mississippi Valley Division (MVD) have signed an agreement to strengthen collaboration and communication aimed at restoring and protecting habitat and water quality along the Mississippi River, one of this nation's greatest natural and economic assets.

The regional Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) unites ecosystem restoration experts from the environmental and natural resource staff of MVD's six districts with those of Audubon's Mississippi River Initiative to collaborate on key conservation initiatives within the 12 states and 370,000-square-mile geographic boundary of MVD that stretches from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico.

Audubon's Lower Mississippi River Program Office in Vicksburg, which supports conservation projects in Mississippi and along the entire Mississippi River, coordinated the development of the agreement with Corps staff in Vicksburg.

The MOU was announced April 1 aboard the Motor Vessel Mississippi before members of the Mississippi River Commission, who were meeting in Vicksburg. The panel was making its annual high-water inspection tour as part of its mission to advise Congress and the administration of President Barack Obama on the management of the Mississippi River.

Corps and Audubon staff have already begun exploring sustainable management of important habitats such as the Atchafalaya River system in Louisiana; Mississippi River diversions to restore wetlands and strengthen storm protection below New Orleans; and conservation education projects at places such as the Mississippi and Missouri River confluence near St. Louis.

“A strengthened relationship between the Corps and Audubon is absolutely essential,” said Division Commander Brig. Gen. Michael Walsh.

“This agreement must be more than a piece of paper,” Walsh said. “The importance of this great river to our nation's economy and to our natural heritage demands that we work together for a balanced, sustainable future.”

“Together, we can meet the broad array of challenges to keep this vital working river a river that works,” Still added. “We can advance the restoration of Mississippi River Delta habitats that ensure a sustainable future for the people of coastal Louisiana. We can make certain the Mississippi remains as a globally significant migratory flyway for birds, and that it supports other important wildlife species. And we can protect water quality along entire length of the river.”

*(Continued from page 1)*

bird lovers alike — that encourages conservation organizations, local and federal governments, and every day citizens to be proactive about protecting a bird species before it becomes threatened or endangered. Loss of habitat is cited as the biggest cause of species decline. Of particular concern is the rapid degradation of the Eastern Meadowlarks' grassland habitat. In fact, seven of the 20 species on Audubon's Common Birds in Decline list rely on some sort of grassy habitat to survive. Meadowlarks and many other birds, like Bobwhite Quail and Field Sparrows, depend on grasslands for food and nesting locations.

More than a quarter of the land in the continental United States is grasslands, according to The National Audubon Society. These primarily consist of hayfields, pastures and rangelands. There are also natural grasslands, such as short, mixed and tallgrass prairies. Grasslands are threatened by overgrazing, conversion to croplands, frequent haying, field abandonment, invasive plants, resource extraction and urbanization. In addition, suppressing the natural occurrence of fire throughout the country has allowed for native grasslands to grow into mature forests.

The Coldwater River Watershed Stewardship Cooperative, an initiative piloted by Strawberry Plains Audubon Center, is designed to work with landowners throughout the watershed to create land management plans that preserve native habitats. These management plans and landowner incentives are needed to conserve wetlands, forests and grasslands. The program encourages people to see beyond property boundaries in order to make habitats more contiguous and therefore, more beneficial to birds and other wildlife.

#### **What You Can Do:**

- **PRESERVE FARMLANDS:** Promote strong conservation provisions in the federal farm bill, especially the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), which pays farmers to keep marginal farmlands idle and supports millions of acres of good bird habitat. Contact your county's office of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) or Farm Service Agency (FSA) to find out how to increase the number of acres devoted to helping birds dependent on farmlands.
- **SAVE GRASSLANDS:** Be proactive with your local, state and national officials to increase

the amount of habitat that can support breeding grassland birds. In particular advocate for smart growth and protection of open space. Promote late mowing (preferably early August in most parts of the country) in hayfields and healthy public and private ranchlands devoted to livestock grazing. Urge parks to devote large parcels to prairie restoration.

- **STOP INVASIVE SPECIES:** Work with county agricultural officials to help fight the spread of non-native annual grasses. Support local and regional regulations, management and research to combat non-native, invasive species. Plant native species in your home landscape.
- **BECOME A CITIZEN SCIENTIST:** Participate in Audubon's Great Backyard Bird Count or Christmas Bird Count. For more information, visit <http://www.audubon.org/gbbc/>

For more information about Audubon's State of the Birds report and other common bird species in decline, visit <http://www.audubon.org/bird/stateofthebirds/>

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