

Apalachee Audubon

The Newsletter of the Apalachee Audubon Society, Inc.

Vol. 108, No. 3

November 2009

www.apalachee.org

NOVEMBER PROGRAM: SOUTHEASTERN HUMMINGBIRDS

Thursday, November 19th, 918 Railroad Avenue

Social at 7:00 p.m. Program 7:30 p.m.

Fred Bassett of the Hummer/Bird Study Group will discuss Ruby-throated Hummingbirds and western hummingbird species wintering in the Southeast, and talk about how the birds are banded.

If you thought the onset of winter meant that it was time to take down your hummingbird feeders, think again. Thanks to the efforts of the Hummer/Bird Study Group, we are learning that many hummingbirds are overwintering in the Southeast.

Fred Bassett is a Federally-certified master bird bander who works with the Hummer/Bird Study Group, a

non-profit organization dedicated to the study and preservation of hummingbirds and other migratory birds. (www.hummingbirdsplus.org)

A retired Air Force pilot, Fred has worked with birds for over fifteen years. Each summer he studies hummingbirds in western states and during the winter, he documents western hummingbirds wintering in Alabama and Florida. The last ten winters, he has captured more than 1,600 hummingbirds belonging to ten different species. Last winter he caught and banded five species in Tallahassee; Rufous, Black-chinned, Ruby-throated, Calliope and Buff-bellied.



Ruby-throated Hummingbird
Photo by Kathleen Carr

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

| | |
|---|---|
| President's Message | 2 |
| Map to Amtrak Station | 2 |
| Bird Bits: White Pelicans | 3 |
| Book Review | 4 |
| Education Committee Report | 5 |
| Road Trip: California Condors | 6 |
| Butterfly Garden Update | 7 |

UPCOMING AAS BIRDING FIELD TRIPS

Birding at Talquin State Forest

Saturday, November 21st, 7:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Hosted by: Mike Tucker

Skill Level: Easy **Cost:** No entrance fee required.

Meet at the Lake Jackson Winn Dixie parking lot near McDonald's on North Monroe (across from Fred George Road) at 7:30 a.m. We will drive to the entrance, about 3 miles—the northern section of the forest at the end of Tower Road.

We will walk about 4 miles along sandy jeep trails, observing birds, butterflies, and wildflowers. Easy hiking for the most part, but be prepared for wet areas and sun exposure. Expect to be done by 1:00 p.m.

What to bring: sturdy shoes, binoculars, water, snacks, insect repellent, field guides, camera, sunscreen and a hat.

Mike Tucker is a lifelong outdoorsman with interests in birding, hiking, camping and wildlife observation. Mike also enjoys bicycling and canoeing. For more information, you can contact Mike at tuckems@hotmail.com or call (850)562-0555 (home) or (850)545-3489 (cell).



New This Year! Birding by Car

St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge

Saturday, December 12th, 8:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

Hosted by: Lynn Reynolds

Skill Level: Easy **Cost:** \$5 entry fee for the refuge

Please RSVP if you're interested in attending.

Meet at Wachovia Bank on S. Monroe at 8:00 a.m. We can arrange to pick up any birders who are without transportation. **Seats are limited, however, so call Lynn at (850)421-1074 to RSVP or for details.**

No walking required on this leisurely birding drive out Lighthouse Road in St. Marks NWR! Lynn Reynolds will lead a small group of cars/vans, stopping at Stoney Bayou, Lighthouse Pool, or wherever the birds are congregating.

We will set up spotting scopes alongside the cars for those who wish to have a closer look, and will stop for lunch at Picnic Pond. Bring binoculars, water, insect repellent and a lunch or snack, and be prepared to share your best birding story as we enjoy this casual, comfortable trip to see wintering waterbirds and who knows what else.

Lynn Reynolds is a member of the Apalachee Chapter and is currently serving on the Board of Directors.

BECOME A MEMBER

Join National Audubon Society and Apalachee Audubon!

For just \$20 a year you can be a member of both National Audubon and our local Apalachee Audubon chapter. Your membership will include *Audubon*, our bimonthly flagship publication. Each issue of this award-winning publication features beautiful photography and provocative journalism. Our chapter newsletter will keep you informed of local and statewide Audubon and other nature-related events.

You can pay for membership using a credit card by calling Audubon's toll free membership number. (*Please mention our chapter ID E-19 for us to get full credit for a new membership*).

1-800-274-4201

If you prefer to pay by check for an annual membership, send your \$20 check made payable to National Audubon Society and mail to:

National Audubon Society
PO Box 422246
Palm Coast, FL 32142-2246

Allow 4-6 weeks for arrival of your first issue of *Audubon*. The cost of membership is tax deductible except for \$7.50 (which is allocated to *Audubon* magazine).

Apalachee Audubon Society (AAS) 2009 – 2010 Officers and Board Members

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Newsletter is published 8 times yearly
(Sept.-May, except December).

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Apalachee Audubon Society, Inc.
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www.apalachee.org

AAS is a 501(c)3 tax exempt organization. All contributions are tax deductible. Inquiries can also be sent to 76 Dogwood Forest Rd., Crawfordville, FL 32327-0588.

Mission Statement: Protection of the environment through education, appreciation, and conservation.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Ed Gartner

A few weeks ago, the instructor in a Master Gardener's class asked: "Who here does not fertilize his lawn—ever ?

At least 80% of the 40 plus Master Gardeners and wannabees raised their hands. Why?, he asked. "Because our soil is rich enough and using excess fertilizers damages the environment and waste our Earth's resources," is a synopsis of the answers. When fertilizing is necessary, for roses for instance, use mixes containing no phosphates, as the soil in the red hills is over-rich and adding more has negative consequences.



REALITIES

The batteries in electric cars do not produce energy. They only store it!

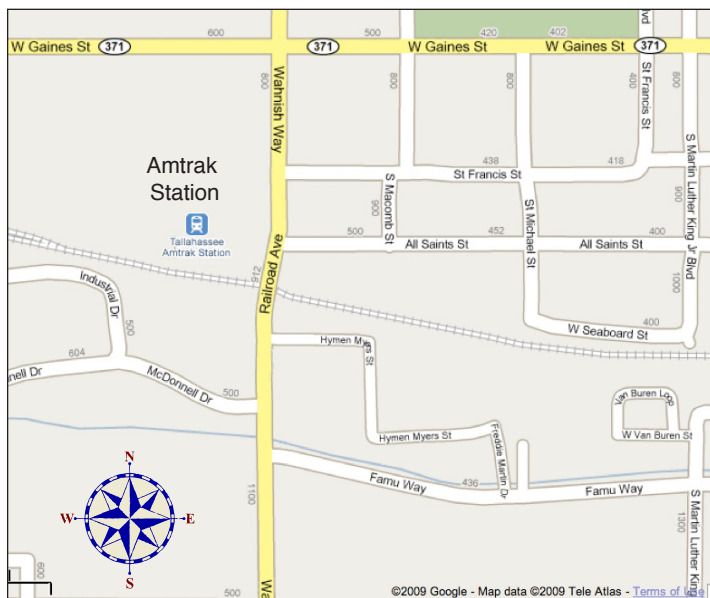
For up-to-date notifications of upcoming activities, join the AAS email notification list at:

www.groups.google.com/group/apalachee-audubon/

AAS PROGRAM MEETING LOCATION

Historic Amtrak Station
918 Railroad Avenue
Tallahassee, Florida

Note: A reminder that Gaines Street is undergoing construction and portions of the road will be closed between 7:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. Please allow extra time for potential detours.





Pelican flock over St. Marks NWR. Photo by Harry Hooper.

BIRD BITS: WHITE PELICANS *by Harry Hooper*

As several of us were admiring the antics of a pair of Bald Eagles harassing an Osprey carrying its catch back to a perch, one observer noticed a distant, slowly spiraling cloud high up against a deep blue, nearly cloudless sky. As this ephemeral cloud drifted closer, it appeared to constantly change in shape and color, amoeba like, intermixing dark silhouettes with white crosses edged in black. Soon, these distant avian gliders were close enough to discern their prominent field marks—*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*, American White Pelicans.

Birds of the central and northern plains, the northwestern states, and parts of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, Canada, White Pelicans spend their winters in California, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and the Gulf coastal states from Texas to Florida. This species is one of the largest of our North American avifauna, larger in length, wing span, and weight than the Bald Eagle, Whooping Crane, Great Blue Heron, and Turkey Vulture. The only species that matches this white giant in size is the California Condor. Both the

California Condor and the American White Pelican have wing spans that reach nine feet and achieve weights of up to 19 pounds. The white pelican is longer than the condor by over a foot. Tundra and Trumpeter Swans are smaller but average 10 pounds heavier.

Though the White Pelican and Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) appear to be alike in shape, the brown's wing span is two feet shorter, its length a foot shorter, and its weight averages 10 pounds less than its cousin.

The feeding technique of these two species is also quite different. Whereas the Brown Pelican performs "suicide" dives from as high as 50 feet above the water's surface, the White Pelican corrals schooling fish into tight groups by casually swimming as a group. Once the fish are trapped in a shallow area, the feeding begins when the birds start jabbing their massive bills into the panicked schools. Herons and egrets also take advantage of this opportunity to feast on the trapped fish.

The White Pelican is considered rare to abundant in Florida during the winter

months arriving generally between mid-October to early December. Birds start migrating north to their breeding grounds during the months of March and April. Occasionally, birds will remain during the summer months, most of these being juveniles and non-breeding adults.

St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge is a great place to observe these beautiful birds floating on the thermals high over your head. As they soar in irregular circular formations, their plumage presents a contrast of dark and light within these moving masses. Stoney Bayou Pool #1 and Mounds Pool #2 are good places to observe these beautiful birds at rest or bathing. While birding and enjoying the ambiance of the refuge, keep an eye to the sky for a chance to enjoy these wintertime wonders.



BOOK REVIEW

Birdwatcher: The Life of Roger Tory Peterson

by Elizabeth J. Rosenthal
The Lyons Press, 2008, hardcover
422 pp., list price \$29.95

Reviewed by Herb Probasco; reprinted with permission from Canyon Wrenderings, newsletter of Black Canyon (Colorado) Audubon Society.

In my inbox not so long ago was an email message with the subject line: “Roger Tory Peterson.” I didn’t recognize the sender’s name, but the message didn’t appear to be spam. So I opened it.

It was my lucky day. The message was from Elizabeth Rosenthal. She had found my name as editor of Canyon Wrenderings, our Audubon chapter newsletter, and wanted to send me a review copy of her new book: *Birdwatcher: The Life of Roger Tory Peterson*. Less than two weeks later, the book arrived.

Timed to appear in 2008, the centennial year of Peterson’s birth, Rosenthal’s biography is a solid work, thoroughly researched and thoughtfully written. While its focus is on the most widely known naturalist of the 20th century, the book also documents important moments in the field of conservation. Included are 14 pages of black and white and color photographs of Peterson at work and on tour. (While Peterson is shown at his drawing board, none of his completed artwork or photographs is included, perhaps due to copyright issues.)

The story is told in six parts: “Fledging,” “Intercontinental Migration,” “Paradoxical Homo Sapiens,” “Conservation Stories,” “Inspiring Flights” and “Bird Man of Bird Men.”

More Bird Book Recommendations

As the holiday season approaches, here are more titles that you might want to add to your wish list or gift list.

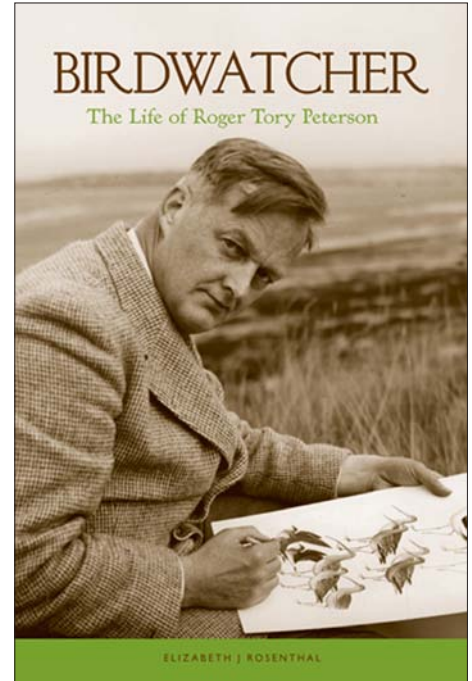
Peterson Field Guide to the Birds of North America
New single-volume edition published by Houghton Mifflin at the end of August 2008, on the centennial of Roger Tory Peterson’s birth.

Birdscapes: Birds in Our Imagination and Experience
by Jeremy Mynott. This book is about our experience of birds: the reasons we are attracted to them, the ways we encounter and describe them, and the significance they have in our lives.

Life List: A Woman’s Quest for the World’s Most Amazing Birds, by Olivia Gentile. A biography of Phoebe Snetsinger, who saw more species of birds than any other living person.

Twenty-four pages of source notes, grouped by chapter, appear at the back of the book.

How did the son of working-class immigrants—Peterson had only limited training as an artist and never went to college—become a household name, a giant in ornithology, the holder of many honorary doctorates and the recipient in 1979 of the Presidential Medal of Freedom? The details are in the book.



Rosenthal, whose website is www.petersonbird.com, is an accomplished author who earlier published a biography of Elton John. (By day she is a lawyer for the State of New Jersey.) She did scores of personal interviews with those who knew Peterson—from his earliest years as a camp counselor and beginning birdwatcher to those who traveled the world with him on natural history expeditions. We come to know those who inspired him to create the first field guide to birds, as well as those who worked intimately with him in his years with the National Audubon Society and the National Wildlife Federation and those who explored the world with him. Of Peterson’s personal life, we learn of his three marriages and how his lifelong focus on art, photography and natural history took its toll on his family ties. One chapter is entitled “Hidden Roger.”

Born in the first decade of the 20th century and dying in the last, Roger Tory Peterson was a prominent figure in the birding world before he was 30 and remains so today, more than 10 years after his death. His plate was always full, and he apparently never looked back. He barely slowed down, even when his irrepressible enthusiasm nearly cost him his life—more than once. (You will have to read the book to learn about those episodes.)

Put down your binoculars long enough to add this volume to your lifelist of good stories.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT

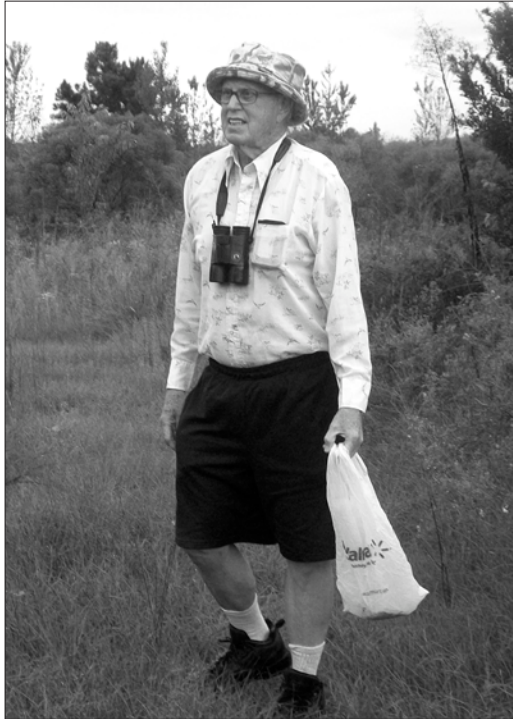
by Elizabeth Platt

The AAS education committee met at the Cornerstone Learning Community on September 16th to discuss goals for the year. Attending were committee co-chairs **Dawn Saucier** and **Elizabeth Platt**, **Matt Morris**, **Karen Wensing**, **Judy Goldman**, and **Gail Menk**. We decided on three goals: to promote learning about birds and nature in the classroom through use of the Audubon Adventure kits and on-site visits by AAS members, and to support hands-on activities in the out-of-doors. We also agreed to contribute

resources information to the education page of the AAS web site. The following reports illustrate how the committee's goals are being carried out at various area schools.

Responding to a call from the School of Arts and Sciences for a presentation about Wakulla Springs, the limpkin, and other springs species, **Marvin Collins** and Elizabeth Platt spoke with four groups of grades K-1 and 2-3 students on September 25th. The photo presentation was highly interactive and the presenters were very impressed at how observant and knowledgeable the children were. Two weeks after the presentations the children went to Wakulla Springs with their teachers to learn more. Few groups of youngsters could have been as well prepared!

Education Committee co-chair Dawn Saucier visited Magnolia School on September 17th to present a program on bird-watching basics to a group of about 32 students in grades K-5. As a follow-up, AAS volunteer **Lynn Reynolds** led a bird walk for the students on their recent school field trip to St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. The students first participated in orienteering activities at Plum Orchard Pond, then enjoyed lunch at the picnic area, where they were treated to the sight of a bald eagle soaring overhead. In the



Gail Menk birding in a meadow near Lake Jackson.

afternoon, classes were divided into small groups for nature hikes around Tower Pond. Students kept notes in their science journals about species seen, then used field guides to help identify birds such as the Downy Woodpecker and Common Yellowthroat.

On October 1st, Gail Menk accompanied a bus load of Cornerstone Learning Community 4th graders to Birdsong Nature Center. Under the supervision of teacher Matt Morris, students uprooted invasive rattlesnake roots (*Stachys floridiana*) that have been crowding out Pickerel weed flowers that attract hummingbirds.

Matt also lectured about the ecology of the longleaf pine and how the sap in the tree acts as a conduit for lightning, which in turn ignites fires that burn off forest understory. Matt then pointed out a persimmon tree infested with tent caterpillars. These creatures interfere with the tree's photosynthesis, but also provide a ready food source for yellow-billed cuckoos. Finally, students were sent out to collect and identify

animals in a brook so as to understand what species occupy that ecological niche.

Gail Menk, one of our areas most accomplished birding guides, has offered to accompany very small groups of teachers on local field trips to help them learn about our common birds. He can be reached at (850)575-9361.

Injured Eagles Need Your Used Postage Stamps!

Yes, it's true! The Audubon Center for Injured Birds of Prey (located at Maitland, Florida) collects used postage stamps and sells them to wholesalers for sale to collectors all over the world. All you have to do is cut postage stamps from your mail, leaving at least 1/4 inch of paper all around the stamp. (Or just bring the envelope and I will trim them.) Any postage stamp is useful—big, small, U.S., foreign—any postage stamp! There will be a box to collect them at Audubon meetings. If you have a lot of stamps, you can call to arrange for a pickup.

We appreciate your help.

If you have questions or want to arrange for a pickup, call **Eileen Boutelle** at (850)656-3346.

ROAD TRIP REPORT: SIGHTING A CALIFORNIA CONDOR

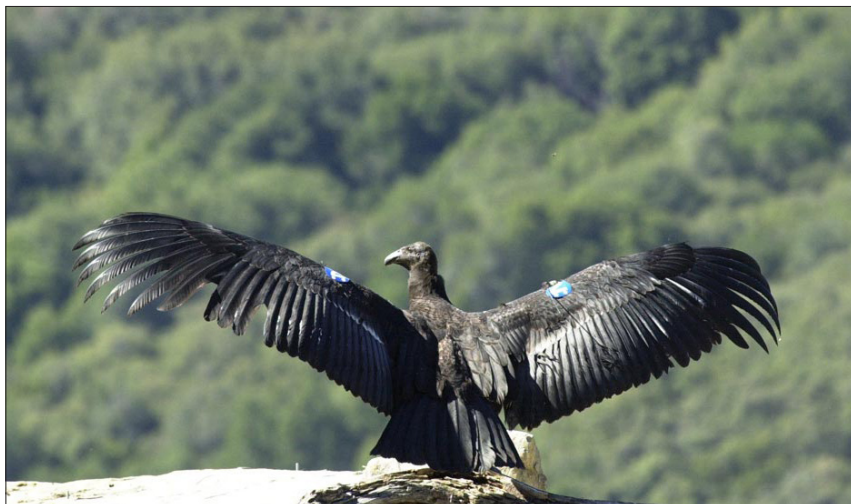
by Karen Wensing

In October, I visited the Grand Canyon with Exploritas (Elder Hostel). It was not a birding trip but since I haven't spent much time in our western states, I easily managed adding Mountain Chickadee, Pygmy Nuthatch, Stellers Jay, Western Scrub Jay and the California Condor to my life list. Talks by a Grand Canyon National Park Ranger and a volunteer as well as some park service pamphlets provided the following information on the condor reintroduction program.

A magnificent bird by any standard, the California Condor, *Gymnogyps californianus*, has a 9.5 foot wingspan, the largest of any North American bird, and can weigh up to 25 pound. The range of *Gymnogyps* and subspecies also covered most of southern North America, including Florida until 10,000 years ago.

However, its range contracted during the ice age and with the loss of large mammals such as mastodons, giant sloths, camels and saber-toothed cats. The population of California Condors along the Pacific coast and the western states further declined as European settlers reached the west. General habitat destruction, egg collecting, DDT, eating poisoned carcasses, lead and shooting (they were erroneously thought to be predators of domestic livestock) were the primary causes.

On the brink of extinction, a controversial and expensive wildlife recovery program was begun in the 1970s by a coalition of zoos, U.S. and state governmental agencies and the Peregrine Fund. In 1987, the last 22 birds in the wild were captured for a captive breeding program. These long



Young California Condor ready for flight, spring 2000. Photograph by Scott Frier, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

lived birds—up to 60 years in the wild—aren't sexually mature until they are five or six years old and then they produce one egg every other year. It takes a baby condor five to six months to fledge and they typically stay with their parents for up to a year. So, increasing the population takes a long time. Fortunately, the reintroduction team discovered that the birds will double clutch if an egg is removed from the parents. The extra eggs are incubated and raised by caretakers using condor shaped hand puppets to prevent them from imprinting on humans.

Today the world population of California Condors is more than 320 birds; over half fly freely in the wild and some have begun to reproduce on their own. They can be easily distinguished from Turkey Vultures, not only by their size, but by the white triangle on the underside of their wings toward the leading edge. Each one has a radio transmitter as well as numbered wing tags.

Coyotes and Golden Eagles are natural threats. Power line electrocution and lead poisoning are man-made problems. The reintroduction team has developed an aversion lesson with simulated power poles at the release site. However, more than one third of Condor deaths have been from lead poisoning. The Arizona Game and Fish Department has embarked on an education program to encourage hunters to use non-lead ammunition so the birds won't be poisoned by lead shot and bullet fragments when they eat carcasses and gut piles left in the field. The reintroduction team also does blood tests on the birds annually so they can treat any birds that have been exposed to lead.

For more information online, visit these web sites:

www.nps.gov/grca/naturescience/condor-re-introduction.htm
www.sbcondors.com/sb-zoo-condors/faq/



A California Condor at the Condor Ridge exhibit of the San Diego Wild Animal Park. Photo by Chuck Szmurlo taken December 11, 2006.

PROJECT UPDATE

ST. MARKS NWR BUTTERFLY GARDEN

BY LYNN REYNOLDS

Our Picnic Pond butterfly garden at St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge was planted on October 17th, and the Monarchs found it the same day! We had blooming plants for them, and on October 24th, the day of the Butterfly Festival, visitors to our display were also able to see Monarch caterpillars feasting on the milkweed. AAS is proud to have this part of the project operational even before learning if we have grant approval.

Thanks go to **Angie Williams** and her Wakulla High Environmental Science students for their soil analysis work, to Crowder Excavating & Land Clearing, Inc. for the generous donation of topsoil, and to **Jim West** and his Lincoln High Horticulture students and parents for raking and spreading the soil, and shaping, planting and staking the garden. Thanks also to **Christine Barns** and **Gordon Perkinson**, volunteers with the St. Marks Refuge Association, who are assisting with the maintenance of our newly installed garden. Kudos to all of you!

Phase Two of the project will involve planting wildflower borders along the parking areas at Picnic Pond and adding more nectar plants on Lighthouse Levee Trail. We can always use additional volunteers, so anyone interested in helping out is encouraged to call one of the Garden Steering Committee members: **Ann Bruce**, **Ed Gartner**, **Harry Hooper**, or **Lynn Reynolds**. (See masthead on page 2 for contact information.) More partners are welcome as we beautify for butterflies!



Monarch butterfly caterpillar feeding on milkweed. Photo by Harry Hooper.

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2010 AAS Program Speakers & Topics

| | |
|-------------|--|
| January 28 | Jim Cox, <i>Hunting</i> (Tall Timbers) |
| February 25 | Sandy Beck, <i>Owls</i> (St. Francis Wildlife) |
| March 25 | Donna Legare, <i>Planting for Wildlife</i> (Native Nurseries) |

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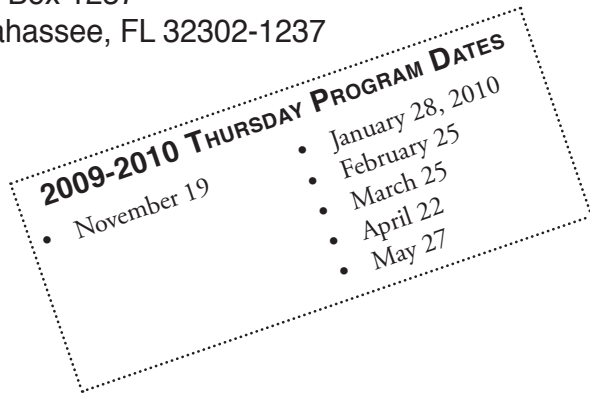
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APALACHEE AUDUBON SOCIETY CALENDAR: NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2009

Note: A reminder that Gaines Street is undergoing construction and portions of the road will be closed after 7:00 p.m.

Social begins at 7:00, meeting at 7:30 p.m. Located at the historic Amtrak Station, 918 Railroad Avenue—map on page 2. For more information, call (850)510-4877 or visit: www.apalachee.org

Chapter/Audubon Events

November

- 19 **Program Meeting:** Fred Bassett of the Hummer Bird Study Group will talk about winter and summer populations of hummingbirds in the Southeast.
- 21 **Birding at Talquin State Forest:** Join Mike Tucker for a four-mile hike along sandy jeep trails, observing birds, butterflies, and wild flowers. See page 1 for details.

December

- 12 **Easy Birding by Car at St. Marks Refuge:** Join Lynn Reynolds for a leisurely drive out Lighthouse Road, no walking required. We will stop at key places and set up scopes alongside the cars. Spaces are limited. Call Lynn Reynolds at (850)421-1074.

Related Events

November

- 14 **Birdwalk at Birdsong Nature Center:** Melissa Forehand will lead a walk looking for late autumn migrants and wintering birds. Begins at 8:00 a.m. Located at 2106 Meridian Road in Thomasville, GA. For more information, call Bird Song at (229)337-4408 or Melissa at (850)510-4877.



*Hummingbird
by Kirsten Munson*

See page 7 for upcoming program speakers and topics.