

Flicker Flashes

Published by
The Birmingham Audubon Society

For conservation and greater knowledge
of birds, their habitat, and natural world

Audubon Teaches Nature Geology and Paleontology in Alabama: A Treasure Underfoot

Presented by Dana Ehret, guest speaker

Sunday, February 19, 2017 - 2 P.M.

Oak Mountain Interpretive Center

Alabama is widely known for the diversity of its plant and animal life, its beautiful landscapes and the abundant riches of its freshwater and marine life. We in Alabama are truly blessed to be able to enjoy and reap the rewards of this natural beauty. It's easy to overlook that what lies underneath all of this natural beauty and forget that it too is a treasure. Alabama's ancient history is written in its rocks and geological formations, and buried in those, like chapters in a book, are its paleontological treasures. Our guest speaker for February's seminar, Dr. Dana Ehret, of the Alabama Museum of Natural History in Tuscaloosa, will present a general overview of geology and paleontology of Alabama. If you are like me, you'll want to hear what Dana has to say, for two reasons:



Wetumpka astrobleme in Elmore County, Alabama. East side of Breezehill Boulevard near downtown Wetumpka. Anne Mitchell is inspecting the shocked quartz specimens
- Photo by MHunter

one, it's a chance to broaden your knowledge, and two, it will add an extra dimension to our Audubon field trips. When you see these formations and fossils for yourself, you'll have a better appreciation for what treasures lie underfoot, and how they might influence those plants, animals and birds that we see topside. Remember to come early to enjoy refreshments in the Observation Room (and the birds at the feeders) at the Alabama Wildlife Center, and then, when it's time for the program, we'll proceed to the Oak Mountain Interpretive Center.

Next month's seminar:

Mysteries of Bird Migration Anne G. Miller, Guest Speaker,
Sunday, March 19, 2017, 2 p.m. Alabama Wildlife Center

2017 Field Trips: Looking Ahead

Your field trips committee strives to select field trips that feature the full spectrum of Alabama's bird life, and for that reason we have scheduled a wide variety of birding sites as our destinations and at times when birding will be ideally suited to finding the species of interest at each site. Herewith is the schedule for the remaining 2017 field trips through summer:

March 11: East Lake Park and Zion Prairie
March 25: Perry Lakes Park and Spencer Farm,
Marion Junction

April 1: Moss Rock Preserve
April 15: Brushy Creek Lake, Bankhead National Forest
May 6: Monte Sano State Park
June 24: Forever Wild State Cattle Ranch,
Hale County
July 29: Prattville, Autaugaville, Lowndesboro
August 5: Greensboro area catfish farms
August 12: Gainesville, Aliceville, Livingston

February All-day Field Trip

James D. Martin Wildlife Park

Gadsden, Alabama

Saturday, February 4, 2017 - 7 A.M. - 3 P.M.

The James D. Martin Wildlife Park, located behind the Gadsden Mall and a stop on the Appalachian Highlands section of the Alabama Birding Trail, is a haven for bird life year-round, and on this outing we'll see a diversity of waterfowl that winter there, and perhaps sight a Bald Eagle or two.

A network of boardwalks extends over the 300-acre lake, which is an impoundment of the Coosa River, and connects to several wooded islands in the lake. Resident and winter passerines can be observed on the islands, while the boardwalks offer the best views of the waterfowl. Also, there is an island situated behind the mall where we might find herons or egrets that will nest there later in the year.

Plans: Meet at 7:00 a.m. at the Eastwood Village Chick-fil-A, located at 1648 Montclair Rd, Irondale, AL 35210. We will

carpool and caravan from there to the park in Gadsden. Be sure to bring a lunch and dress warmly for the weather, as we will be near or on the water most of the day.

Trip leaders:

Susan Barrow, 205-253-8667, Matt Hunter, 205-915-8186, and Anne Miller, 205-902-1389.



Great Blue Heron - Photo by MHunter

February Half-day Field Trip

Beginner Bird Walk/ Great Backyard Bird Count, In Partnership with the Birmingham Zoo

Bird Walk, Saturday, February 18, 8 A.M - 10 A.M.

Zoo GBBC Activities: 10 A.M. - 2 P.M.

For years the Birmingham Audubon Society has held a beginner bird walk in partnership with the Birmingham Zoo, in observance of the Great Backyard Bird Count. Beginning at 8:00 a.m. we will gather at the Children's Zoo entrance gate and depart from there on our walk, with members of the Birmingham Audubon Society and Birmingham Zoo bird curators serving as our expert guides to help with bird identification. The route will take us through the zoo, stopping in the Alabama Wilds and the water retention basin area where we are likely to see a variety of winter visitors and resident birds, and perhaps some shorebirds too. We'll record our findings as we go, for reasons you'll soon understand. It is no coincidence that we have scheduled this bird walk for the same weekend as the Great Backyard Bird Count. Besides the National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count, the GBBC is one of the better known "citizen science" projects that relies on ordinary citizens to gather and submit data on birds.

Data collected during the bird walk will be entered into the GBBC database. As noted on the GBBC website (<http://gbbc.birdcount.org/>), the Great Backyard Bird Count

is an annual four-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are across the continent. Anyone can participate, from beginning bird watchers to experts. It takes as little as 15 minutes on one day, or you can count for as long as you like each day of the event. It's free, fun, and easy and it helps the birds.

Additionally, in conjunction with the GBBC the Birmingham Zoo will hold a variety of bird related activities for children following the bird walk, from 10:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. You and your children or grandchildren are sure to enjoy themselves as we search for our fine-feathered friends, and you'll learn a thing or two about the GBBC process along the way. Make your plans now to join us.

Trip Plans: Meet at the Birmingham Zoo's Children's Zoo Entrance gate at 8:00 a.m.

Trip Leader: Greg Harber, 205-807-8055.

All Birmingham Audubon field trips are free and open to the public.

Additional trip information may be found at our website, birminghamaudubon.org and on our Facebook page.

February Nature Program

What to Do Without Keys?

Unlocking the amazing biodiversity of Alabama's freshwater snails and the worms that live within them.

Presentation by Dr. Lori Tolley-Jordan, Department of Biology
Jacksonville State University
February 16 at 7 P.M.
Birmingham Botanical Gardens

For the February Nature Program, we will be hosting Dr. Lori Tolley-Jordan from Jacksonville State University. Dr. Tolley-Jordan has been studying the rich diversity of freshwater mollusk species in Alabama, especially in the Cahaba River basin, since her time in graduate school at the University of Alabama. She will present some of her current research regarding freshwater snail ecology and conservation.

The public is welcome to attend. Please come early for refreshments and conversation. Fellowship and snack time begins at 6:30 p.m.



Lori Tolley-Jordan – Photo courtesy of Lori Tolley-Jordan

Gosse Nature Walk #4: Crestwood Park and Crestwood North

Friday, February 10, 2017 - Noon to 1 P.M.

On Friday, February 10th, join Birmingham Audubon Outreach Director Ansel Payne for an easy lunchtime nature walk at one of Birmingham's most celebrated neighborhood parks. Together, we'll explore some of the winter birds that frequent Crestwood Park's pine trees and central stream, then head up into the historic Crestwood North neighborhood for a block-by-block look at Birmingham's urban bird and plant life. Meet up is at the Crestwood Park parking lot at noon (GPS: 33.5288, -86.7486; easily accessed from U.S. Highway 78). As always, Birmingham Audubon's Gosse Nature Walks are free and open to all ages – no birding or nature experience necessary!

Trip leader: Ansel Payne –
RSVP to: anselpayne@birminghamaudubon.org and let him know whether or not you'll need binoculars no later than Wednesday, February 8th.



*Crestwood Park - Restored tributary of Village Creek with Gabion walls.
Photo © Abraham Odrezin; used with permission.*

Meet Chris Sykes, Birmingham Audubon's New Membership & Volunteer Coordinator



Birmingham Audubon is pleased to introduce the latest addition to our growing staff, Membership & Volunteer Coordinator Chris Sykes. A native of Paris, Tennessee, Chris comes to us from the United States Marine Corps – where he served for six years as a corporal, with extended stays in Europe (Spain, Portugal, Italy), the Middle East (Jordan), and Africa (Djibouti) – and from UAB, where he recently earned a Bachelor of Arts in Communication. Chris has also worked in administrative and managerial positions at the Department of Veterans' Affairs and Erwin and Associates, Inc., respectively. He currently lives in Homewood with his wife Megan, their dog Sully, and a cat named Kiki. As the coordinating force behind Birmingham Audubon's growing membership and volunteer database, Chris says he looks forward to interacting with the organization's many supporters, as well as learning more about the birds of central Alabama. We hope you'll have the opportunity to meet him in person soon!

Request for Bald Eagle Data

Program Director Dr. Andy Coleman is continuing his work examining the ecology of bald eagles in Alabama, and requests locality information on active nests in the state. If the nests are easily accessible, he would like to survey the ground beneath the nests for discarded prey items to continue his study of the feeding behavior of Alabama's bald eagles. If the nest is not easily accessible, or is on private land, he would still like to have the locality data; although he will not

visit the nest, these data will be used to examine the species' nest site selection. This analysis will help us understand potential influences of the surrounding habitat on the reproductive success of this species.

If you would like to share information or if you have any questions, please contact Andy at: andycoleman@birminghamaudubon.org



*Bald eagle nest,
Eufaula, Alabama
Photo by
Andy Coleman*

Name that Bird - Avondale Park Edition



This month's mystery bird, as photographed by David Fisher (used with permission)

This diminutive white waterfowl caused quite a “splash” when it showed up in the central pond at Avondale Park last month – a sighting that sent Facebook- and Twitter-savvy birders on a true “wild goose chase” through the city. About the size of a Mallard, the species is rare throughout much of Alabama, although encountered with some frequency at Decatur’s Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge. Its normal winter range is mostly confined to the lands west of the Mississippi, while its breeding range is far up in the Canadian north. When thinking about field marks, consider that this goose is one of two commonly confused species. Comparing it to its close, perhaps more seasonally named relative, note this bird’s smaller bill, smaller size, and lack of black coloration (“black lipstick”) along the internal margins of the bill. Both share mostly white plumage, pinkish bills, and black wingtips.

Can you identify this species? And do you know its often-confused doppelgänger? We’ll give you the answers in next month’s *Flicker Flashes!*

First Annual MLK Day Habitat Restoration a Success for Limestone Park



Birmingham Audubon volunteers worked through the holiday, restoring native prairie at Limestone Park.

Birmingham Audubon, along with volunteers from Hands On Birmingham and Friends of Limestone Park, spent this year’s unseasonably warm Martin Luther King Jr. holiday working hard on behalf of birds and the people who love them. About forty adults and young people converged on Limestone’s winter landscape for an afternoon of native-prairie restoration and invasive-species removal: work crews, led by Dick Mills and joined by Birmingham Audubon staff members Andy Coleman, Ansel Payne, and Chris Oberholster, spent time preparing soil for a new native prairie expansion, sowing and covering seed, and identifying and removing invasive Bradford pears (*Pyrus calleryana*). Some

of our friends at Ruffner Mountain and Birmingham Botanical Gardens also chipped in, giving up part of their day-off to help build habitat at this important urban park. Notable for its unusual mixture of wetland, prairie, and swamp habitats, Limestone Park is Birmingham Audubon’s most biodiverse Urban Bird Habitat Initiative site, and one of the northernmost breeding areas for Anhingas, also known as “water turkeys” (*Anhinga anhinga*). Visitors are welcome at the park year round, but spring and summer offer the best opportunities for seeing native prairie flowers – be sure to schedule in a visit later this year, and watch Dr. King’s legacy bloom!

Limestone Park provides one of the northernmost breeding areas for Anhingas in Alabama. Photo by Greg Harber



The 81st Annual Birmingham Audubon Christmas Bird Count

Friday, December 23, 2016

The count day temperature ranged from 41 to 65 degrees in a Christmas week with near record high temperatures for the time period. The morning sky was fair giving way to overcast by afternoon with breezes 8-10 mph throughout the day. We had 29 participants in 8 parties plus 1 feeder watcher. The group effort was 68.75 hours and 372 miles. We had a respectable species total of 81 which is a great rebound from a low species total of 69 for last year's count. Notable species were Horned Grebe, Spotted Sandpiper, Rufous Hummingbird, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Blue-headed Vireo, Black & White Warbler, Orange Crowned Warbler, Brewer's Blackbird and a count week Rose-breasted Grosbeak. "Missed birds"

included American Kestrel, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Palm Warbler and Pine Siskin. Special thanks to our wonderful compilation hostess, Elberta Reid.

John Imhof, Jeremy Bearden, **Greg Harber**, Hans Paul, Ansel Payne, Mairin Odle, Ken Sansom, Jake Sansom, Doug Baulos, **Matt Hunter**, Jesse Griswold, Sam Griswold, John Morgan, Jim Shepherd, **Pelham Rowan**, **Rick Kittinger**, Ron Kittinger, Ranny Kittinger, Miriam Rueger, Frank Sandford, **Anne Miller**, Dick Mills, Todd Devore, Dee Gertler, Linda Neighbors, **Lauren Howell**, Zac Corbett, **Sharon Hudgins**, David George (compiler) and Patricia Hefner at the feeder.

Canada Goose	300	Northern Flicker	32	Eastern Towhee	57
Wood Duck	12	Pileated Woodpecker	3	Chipping Sparrow	103
Gadwall	3	Merlin	1	Field Sparrow	11
Mallard	46	Peregrine Falcon	1	Savannah Sparrow	37
Ring-necked Duck	75	Eastern Phoebe	60	Fox Sparrow	4
Bufflehead	CW	Blue-headed Vireo	1	Song Sparrow	48
Hooded Merganser	13	Blue Jay	78	Swamp Sparrow	20
Ruddy Duck	10	American Crow	199	White-throated Sparrow	74
Pied-billed Grebe	26	Fish Crow	2	Sparrow specie	10
Horned Grebe	1	Carolina Chickadee	117	Dark-eyed (Slate-colored) Junco	30
Great Blue Heron	35	Tufted Titmouse	93	Rose-breasted Grosbeak	CW
Black-crowned N Heron	8	White-breasted Nuthatch	37	Cardinal	106
Turkey Vulture	44	Brown-headed Nuthatch	49	Red-winged Blackbird	393
Bald Eagle	1	Brown Creeper	3	Eastern Meadowlark	40
Sharp-shinned Hawk	2	Carolina Wren	68	Rusty Blackbird	83
Cooper's Hawk	8	House Wren	1	Brewer's Blackbird	1
Red Shouldered Hawk	17	Winter Wren	1	Common Grackle	1391
Red-tailed Hawk	31	Golden-crowned Kinglet	14	Brown-headed Cowbird	73
Killdeer	56	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	59	Purple Finch	4
Spotted Sandpiper	1	Eastern Bluebird	76	House Finch	50
Least Sandpiper	17	Hermit Thrush	19	American Goldfinch	87
Wilson's Snipe	7	American Robin	229	House Sparrow	44
Rock Pigeon	453	Brown Thrasher	24		
Mourning Dove	141	Mockingbird	93		
Barred Owl	1	European Starling	419		
Rufous Hummingbird	1	American Pipit	30		
Belted Kingfisher	16	Cedar Waxwing	263		
Red-headed Woodpecker	21	Orange-crowned Warbler	1		
Red-bellied Woodpecker	55	Pine Warbler	39		
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	18	Myrtle Warbler	147		
Downy Woodpecker	45	Black-and-White Warbler	1		

Join and Support Birmingham Audubon

Are birds, wildlife and our natural habitat of interest to you?

If so, we invite you to be a part of a community that enjoys, values and protects birds and our natural world.

Founded in 1946, the Birmingham Audubon Society is Alabama's leading non-profit organization engaging people in the enjoyment and conservation of birds, their habitats and the natural world. With your support, we involve people through recreational birding, by extending their horizons with education programs, and by engaging them in conservation actions such as planting trees, counting birds, and working with local, state, and national policy makers.

There are many ways you can support Birmingham Audubon

Please join us and make a difference for birds and your quality of life, right here in Alabama!

Membership

Take the first step and become a Member of Birmingham Audubon. Get connected with our *Flicker Flashes* newsletter. See birds by participating in one of our free field trips, and learn something at one of our free monthly programs.

Make a Donation

We rely on your support and are proud to work on your behalf to restore wildlife habitat, conserve areas that are important to birds, and inspire appreciation and understanding of our natural world. Your generous donation, above and beyond the basic membership dues, is an important source of funding which allows Birmingham Audubon to facilitate our vital mission of connecting people with birds and the places they live.

Your memberships and donations support:

- **Free monthly programs on nature and science topics**
- **Free field trips led by expert birders to great birding cultural locations**
- **Annual banquet with nationally recognized speaker**
- **Discounted registration for Birmingham Audubon Mountain Workshop**
- **Members-only birding classes**
- **Graduate student research grants**
- **Adult and student education opportunities and initiatives**
- **Alabama Birding Trails**
- **Local, state and national conservation initiatives**
- **Members-only Lending Library**

Birmingham Audubon Society Membership Application

Join Renew **Annual Membership: \$ 20.00**

Donation to support the programs & projects of Birmingham Audubon: \$ _____

Total: \$ _____

Please make check payable to:

Birmingham Audubon Society

Please charge my credit card

Visa **MasterCard**

Card Number _____

Expiration Date _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____

Phone _____

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Please keep my donation anonymous

Yes No

I want to receive communications electronically

Yes No

I want to be contacted to learn about volunteer activities

Yes No

If you are interested in joining National Audubon Society, visit: www.audubon.org

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February 2017

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- Feb. 10 Gosse Nature Walk #4: Crestwood Park and Crestwood North (See pg. 3)
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