

News from the Island



NEWSLETTER OF THE DAUPHIN ISLAND BIRD SANCTUARIES, INC.

Volume 16 , Issue 1

Summer 2009

President's Message

Greg Harber

The notion of change, and of what things change with time, has been on my mind a bit this summer, so if you would, please allow me to share my thoughts with you.

I traveled to north Georgia at the end of June to visit with my friend Jack Johnston. The purpose of my trip, in addition to spending time with Jack and Jean, was to spend some time birding in the mountains of North Carolina. Jack had been urging me to come visit him, saying he had some places he wanted to show me where we could see Blue-winged and Chestnut-sided Warblers. What's a self-respecting birder to do? How could I turn down his request?!

As it so happens, when I was a child my family used to vacation in the mountains west of Franklin, NC, and so when Jack headed to Standing Indian campground this trip began to serve a dual purpose: it was now a trip down memory lane as well. It had been 40 long years since I camped with my family at this delightful summer hide-away tucked into the mountains. As we drove west out of Franklin, and I began to realize where we were headed, snippets of the campground and its environs began rising to my consciousness, unbidden from the memory vaults I thought had been closed so long ago for lack of use.

We stopped at the turn off U.S. Hwy 64 to look and listen for birds, and found a bonanza of bird sound awaiting us. Least Flycatchers, American Redstarts, Black-throated Green Warblers and Common Yellowthroats called from the boggy area below us. The melodious song of a Rose-breasted Grosbeak puzzled me for a moment; had a tanager been taking voice lessons? Indeed, even when I saw it fly I immediately thought the striking black and white wing patterns belonged to a Loggerhead Shrike. When I followed it to see where it landed in a tree across the road, and I saw that striking rose-

colored breast, the shackles fell away and I finally assembled all the clues to this bird's identity. Further on down the road we heard many Blue-headed Vireos and Black-throated Blue Warblers singing. To borrow a phrase, "Toto, we're not in Alabama anymore."

Standing Indian is now a very popular spot, as evidenced by the full campsites and overflow crowds. I don't remember it being this way, but then again, does one think of such things as a child? Back then I was concerned with more important things: tubing in the cold river, panning for rubies at the little beachhead, or clambering up the big hill where the groundhog lived. As we drove past in Jack's car I had to laugh. The "big hill" of my childhood memories isn't even a tiny knoll! I later checked with my siblings, and they all agreed: it had indeed been a "big hill" to them as well, so this is either a reflection of our Florida flatlander upbringing, or the hill grew smaller over time! The campers and RVs are more modern now, replacing the tent camping existence so many in my generation knew, and the road through the campground is now paved. My memories of this place haven't changed, but it is obvious that change has visited this place.

As we drove toward the campground these I had expected to see: the favored campsite by the hill, the quiet creek, and tendrils of smoke rising from smoldering ashes in the campfire rings. What caught me off guard, however, was the picturesque Ascension Episcopal chapel tucked into the tangle of rhododendrons by the roadside. When we rounded the bend in the road, and I saw it for the first time in 40 years, the logjam in my memory bank split wide open. I had forgotten how beautiful and simple and inviting this place of worship was, nestled here in the green cathedral. Even now, recalling the beauty of the place moistens the corners of my eyes. It was exactly as I remembered it, and as I hope it will always be.

(Continued on page 4)

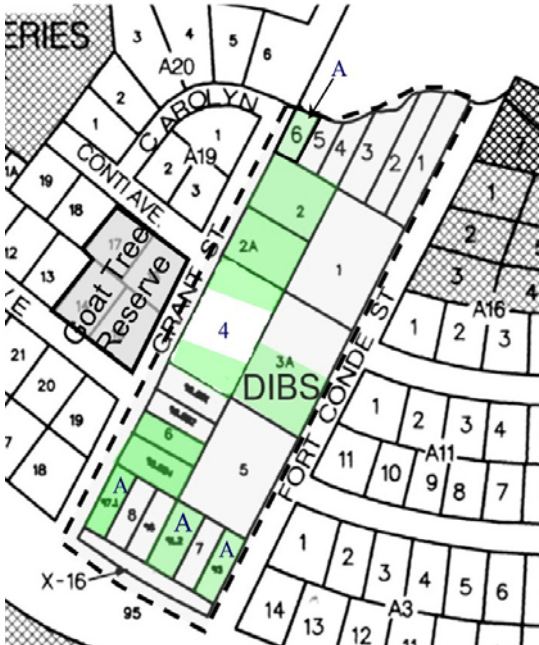
Executive Director's Report

John F. Porter, Jr., Ph.D.

America's Birdiest City/County Bird-a-thon

Once again Dauphin Island has won the coveted title of America's Birdiest Small Coastal City with 189 species! But others are working hard to catch up. Our colleagues at the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory did their count at Port Aransas and came in at 185 species, with San Francisco coming in at 179 species. Check the website for the complete results, <http://coastalbirding.org>.

DIBS Holdings Steiner Block



is two parcels of tupelo gum swamp on the south central portion of the Island, shown in the plat to the right. Of these two, the westernmost is mostly a well developed gum swamp, while the easternmost is partly dry, but not suitable for development. In the interim, since our partnership grant with TNC, the USFWS has changed the rules somewhat making it more complicated to get appraisal approval, but we (DIBS & GCBO) are on schedule to complete this acquisition before the year's end.

Land Acquisition - Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act
The Nature Conservancy - We are just completing a four year effort in partnership with the Nature Conservancy's Migratory Bird Program. With a NMBCA grant for \$206,250 from the US Fish and Wildlife service we have been able to acquire four more parcels in the Steiner Block as shown in this plat. These lots are identified as 'A' in the sketch. The majority of the remaining property in the block is held by a partnership that intends to hold it undivided until they get an acceptable offer, which we currently believe to be unrealistic. As a consequence, following Board suggestions, we have moved to another area for habitat protection with a new partner.

The Gulf Coast Bird Observatory - To this end, we have a similar partnership with the GCBO, in this instance the habitat to be protected

Dewberry- Epinet Swamp



Land Trust Alliance

Including the above properties and the Shell Mound property we are working with State Lands to protect, we have over \$1,000,000 invested in some 9 acres of habitat, with a concomitant obligation to protect this natural resource in perpetuity. Recognizing our own mortality, the board has begun steps to assure this perpetual protection by affiliation with an accredited land trust. To this end we invited Walter Ernest, Executive Director of the Weeks Bay Foundation to our April board meeting to describe their activities. The Foundation is a non-profit, 501-(c)-3 corporation for the support of the Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. Their board recently started the process for receiving accreditation by the Land Trust Alliance (LTA), the national agency for accreditation of land trusts. Such accreditation rests on the successful adoption of the LTA's *Standards and Practices*, a stringent set of operating procedures for land trusts. Additionally their board recently extended their potential area to include coastal Mobile Co. in addition to coastal Baldwin Co. Following this meeting Mr. Ernest and Dr. John Borom, an influential member of the Weeks Bay Foundation board, spent an afternoon visiting the Island and viewing the habitat we have protected. Our objective is to explore ways by which we may establish a mutually beneficial relationship with the Weeks Bay Foundation to assure protection of our Dauphin Island habitat forever. Our board also committed to join the Land Trust Alliance with the ultimate goal of receiving accreditation. Our (DIBS & WBF) next step will be to visit the Land Trust for Coastal Mississippi and see how we may profit from their experience.

The Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries, Inc. would like to thank the following individuals, organizations, and companies for their financial support of our conservation efforts by becoming members, renewing their memberships, or making special, honorariums, and memorial gifts. This list represents contributions received between February 1 and July 31, 2009. If we have omitted your name from this list, please contact our treasurer, Mary Porter at 251/861-2120 or maryflintporter@gmail.com

Special Gifts:

Birmingham Audubon Society
 Doug Ford (Dauphin Island Woman's Club)
 Estate of Sarah Ellen Gillespie
 ExxonMobil Matching Funds (Sam A. Flint)
 Mary Jones Dunbar
 Gregory J. Harber
 Melinda Rohrer
 Sharon & Thomas McPherron

Honorariums:

For: Gregory J. Harber, Robert G. Tate & Elberta G. Reid

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For: Roger Clay

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For: Tom & Joan Siegwald

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For: John F. Porter, Jr

From: The Waldrip Family (Father's Day)

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For: Russell Bailey

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For: Dot & Walt Burch

From: Linda & Dick Reynolds

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From: Mary Anderson Pickard

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For: Dawn Good Yoder

From: Alabama Ornithological Society

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Renewed Members

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~ Membership Application ~
 Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries, Inc.

Name: _____
 Address: _____
 City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
 Phone: () _____ E-mail: _____

Membership Levels:

- Cardinal, \$25
- Indigo Bunting \$50
- Rose-breasted Grosbeak, \$100
- Snowy Egret, \$250
- Great Egret, \$500
- Life Member, \$1,000
- Family Life Member, \$1,250
- My check for \$ _____ is enclosed

Please make check payable to: DIBS, Inc.

Mail this form and check to:
 Mary F. Porter, DIBS Treasurer
 P.O. Box 1295
 Dauphin Island, AL 36528-1295

(Continued from page 1)

Another site we visited, after lunch, was Wayah Bald. It is situated along the Appalachian Trail, at the end of a long dirt road that winds through the forest. The stone tower at the top of the bald is reminiscent of the tower at Cheaha State Park - the men of the CCC built both structures so I guess this is no surprise. We stopped along the road there and listened for bird song. A Veery sang from the depths of the forest but a male Chestnut-sided Warbler was much more accommodating! The croaking of a Raven was heard in the distance, at the tower.

My recollections of the tower were non-existent but I do clearly remember one hairpin turn in the road. More specifically, I remember the view of looking down from the top of the turn at the roadbed below. Jack commented about the distinctness of my memories. I cannot account for them, except to say that one can never know what will make an impression on a child of 7 or 8 years of age. Maybe this memory is tied to that Florida flatlander background and the fact that hairpin turns were unknown to me as a child. Regardless, the hairpin turn is still there today and it won't likely go away any time soon.

And this brings me back to the start of my message: the passage of time and the changes that

accompany it. As I discovered during my trip down memory lane, some things change while others seem to remain the same. In retrospect, it seems my memories of Standing Indian and Wayah Bald match the present day reality where human endeavors have had the least impact.

And this matters how? Over the past dozen or so years our volunteer Executive Director John Porter has been working tirelessly to preserve in perpetuity the best habitat Dauphin Island has to offer for migratory birds. For John and many others, this is a priority. We cannot foretell what the future will bring for each of us personally, but we do know that deed restrictions will preserve forever the properties that John has worked so diligently to protect.

To this end, DIBS has begun discussions with the Weeks Bay Foundation, a South Alabama Land Trust, about our common interests in land preservation. Read more about this in John's report. Our goal is to minimize the impacts of those aforementioned human endeavors, so that your memories, my memories, our memories, of Dauphin Island and its birds will match perfectly the memories of a 7 or 8 year old child visiting the island for the first time fifty years from now. Now, isn't that a pleasant thought?



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