

President's Message  
Gregory J. Harber

Slowly, the first signs of spring are creeping across the landscape. Trees and bushes, bare and gray after a seemingly protracted winter, are showing the faintest hint of green as leaves and buds emerge from their winter dormancy. The cardinals and wrens are in full-throated song these days. So much so, in fact, that on a bright sunny day it's hard to tell who is more elated about the impending explosion of spring – the birds or me!

Yesterday (March 13th) I had the pleasure of strolling the trails at Lanark, the home of the Alabama Wildlife Federation near Millbrook, AL. The day was somewhat chilly and dreary; light sprinkles and gray skies reminded us that March is often prone to bouts of winter. For the most part we encountered the birds typical of any Alabama woodland setting: several species of woodpeckers, Wood Ducks, bluebirds a'courtin in the meadow, sparrows fushing from under the brush and wrens, chickadees and titmice ducking here and there.

Amongst all these common birds were two Blue-headed Vireos. To my eyes, their soft, clean colors and seamless markings paint a picture of subtle beauty that is so often under-appreciated. I enjoyed watching the vireos as they steadily selected their way through the canopy while the other birds tussled in the leaves below.

The antithesis to the vireo, in almost every way, was a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. This Plain Jane of a bird looked like a hyperkinetic ball of energy tumbling over and around each branch in search of a morsel, all the while whipping its tail this way and that! In summer, the gnatcatcher is as common as dirt in a country house, but on this day – amidst this last gasp of winter – the plain little bird in the nearly non-existent foliage was a most elegant harbinger of spring. Lordy, the sight of that bird made my heart leap as surely as the father's prodigal son returning home at long last!

Reports from the coast of neotropical migrants are starting to appear on the AL-birds and FL-birds lists. Purple Martins and Swallow-tailed Kites (yes!) were among the first to appear. Behind them will surely follow a legion of other migrants from across the far waters. Indeed, Northern Parulas and Louisiana Waterthrushes are now arriving too, fulfilling the promise of spring. I hope that the birders posting these reports realize that they serve as a bit of a mental lifeline on which we inland-bound birders cling, biding our time until we can indulge our passion too.

I hope you'll be able to visit Dauphin Island this spring, and enjoy the fruits of our land conservation efforts these past few months. John Porter, our volunteer Executive Director, recently closed on the four lots on the south side of the Shell Mounds Park. This acquisition was made possible by the generosity of John Stowers, John and Beverly Winn, and a host of DIBS friends and supporters. Read John's report on page 2 for further details.

John also closed the deal on two wet lots on the eastern end of the island, near the intersections of Admiral Semmes Ave with Dewberry and Epinet Str. This location is not likely on your list of places you've visited on the island, but once you've birded the site and observed the flooded habitat, you'll want to make this a regular stop. As you travel east on Bienville Blvd, turn right onto Forney Johnson, then take the second left onto Admiral Semmes.

Last but not least, you'll want to visit the Goat Trees Reserve at the intersection of Grant Street and Cadillac Avenue. Saturday, March 20th members of the Coastal Birding Association and DIBS volunteers held a work day and cleared the underbrush from the trails and low hanging foliage near the water drip, in an effort to make the area surrounding the drip more attractive to the birds. Rest a spell at any of several benches in the reserve and enjoy the peace and solitude – and the birds, of course!

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

As has become customary we will be hosting America's Birdiest City/County bird-a-thon this year, thanks to Mike Wilson's continuing dedication to the cause. See page 3 for details!

### Land Acquisition

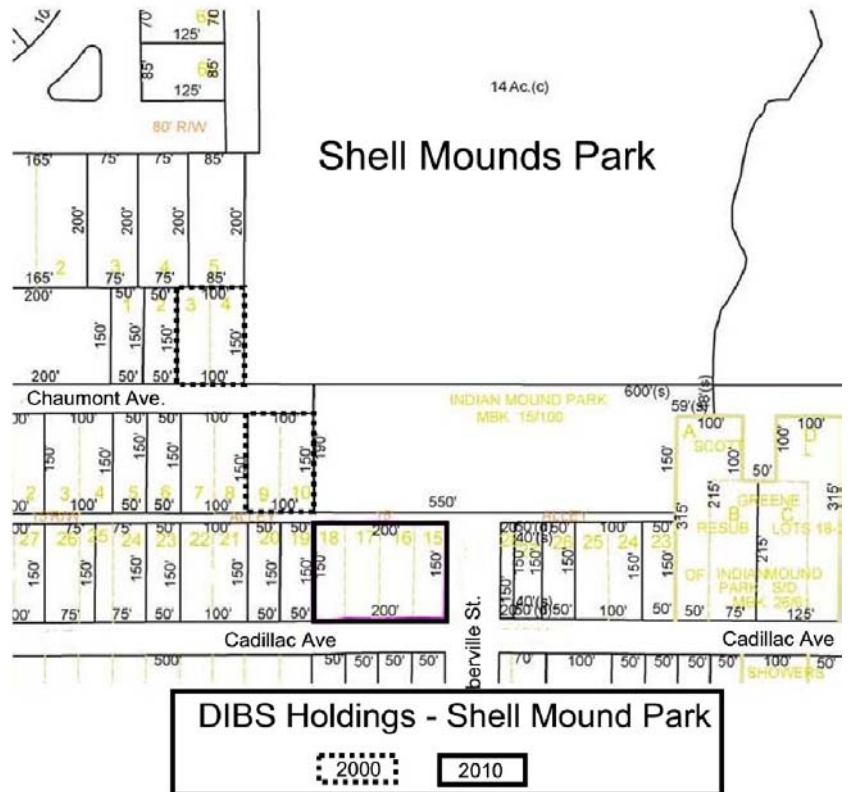
#### Shell Mounds Park - DCNR - Marine Resources

We closed on the purchase of the lots at the entrance to the Shell Mounds, shown on the plat below, on March, 10, 2010. This completed the protection of this critical piece of stop-over habitat, an effort begun ten years ago with our first property purchases, just west of the Bee Tree, also shown on the plat.

Early on it was generally assumed that this property was an integral part of the park. However, in fact, the four lots on the corner of Iberville and Cadillac were the site of the original Dauphin Island School and owned by a foundation. Surprisingly, in mid April 2007, we learned that the property had been deeded to the University of South Alabama Foundation with a covenant requiring the proceeds from its sale to be used for scholarships. To this end it was put up for sale by competitive bid. Closing date for bids was May 1, 2007! John Stowers (Sto), jumped into the fray immediately and offered to finance the purchase, subject to a promissory note from DIBS to repay the purchase price within ten years. Working together, we quickly got an appraisal for the property, \$200,000. Sto then submitted a bid for \$200,100 on the off chance that another prospective buyer might get the same appraisal. Fortunately, our bid was high! We then entered into a lease purchase agreement with Sto to secure payment within ten years and manage the property in the interim.

After several fruitless years of exploring funding sources to pay off this debt we were rescued by a long standing benefactor, John Winn. In the fall of 2009 he established a challenge grant fund for \$100,000 at the Community Foundation of South Alabama, in memory of his recently deceased wife Beverly. We then pledged to match his generous grant with the balance required to pay off the obligation to Sto. During the fall of 2009 we formally solicited donations to the Community Foundation to help us match the need, setting the closing date for the campaign for the end of the year. But when that time arrived the Foundation was still receiving donations so we extended it to the end of January. By then we had generated an additional \$30,000 as match. With the generous support of many individuals as well as that of the Birmingham Audubon Society and the Alabama Ornithological Society we were able to complete the match and finally complete the acquisition.

You should know, however, that we left some funds in the corpus of the fund with the Foundation so that future donations could be matched.





## BEVERLY WINN FUND FOR THE BIRDS

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 their generous donations to the Beverly Winn Fund for the Birds. As detailed in John's report, your faithful support has enabled us to acquire the four lots immediately south of Shell Mounds Park, thereby ensuring that even more quality stopover habitat is forever preserved for the birds. If we have omitted your name from this list, please contact our treasurer, Mary Porter, at 251/861-2120 or maryfintporter@gmail.com.

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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 August 31, 2009 and March 15, 2010. If we have omitted your name from this list, please contact our treasurer, Mary Porter, at 251/861-2120 or maryfintporter@gmail.com.

**Special Gifts**

Butch & Connie Baggett  
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 Kenneth & Rufna Ward  
 ExxonMobile (Matched Gift from Sam A. Flint)  
 Gulf Coast Bird Observatory  
 The Nature Conservancy

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**For: John F. Porter, Jr**  
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 The Greg Waldrip Family (Happy Birthday)

**For: Edith Tolson Upchurch (Edith Hunt's Mother)**

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**For: Thelma C. Wallace (Pat Reed's Mother)**

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**For: Beverly Hendricks Winn**

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**For: Gregory J Harber**  
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 (continued on back page)

~ Membership or Renewal Application ~  
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 Phone: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_  
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 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



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Remember to join us the weekend of April 15-18, 2010 (AOS) as we attempt to defend our title as America's Birdiest Small Coastal City! Teams of up to four people will have 72 hours (noon Thursday through noon Sunday) to identify as many species as possible on Dauphin Island & the adjacent Pelican Island. Birds must be seen from dry land. Prizes will be awarded! For full details please visit <http://coastalbirding.org/>