



# The Delta News

## 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center



Volume 1, Issue 2

December '09

### Your Delta Fun Fact of the Month:

Alabama is home to 16 bat species. A nursing mother bat can eat over 4,500 insects in just one night! And a Little Brown Bat can eat up to 600 insects a night!

We'd like to say Thank You to local authors Joe Cuhaj, Roger Reid, and Robert Leslie Smith, who signed their books at the first Cypress Gift Shop Open House on November 14. Even if you missed the chance to meet them, come by the gift shop and check out their books. We also have a great variety of gifts for the holidays.



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## Ospreys hold Open House!



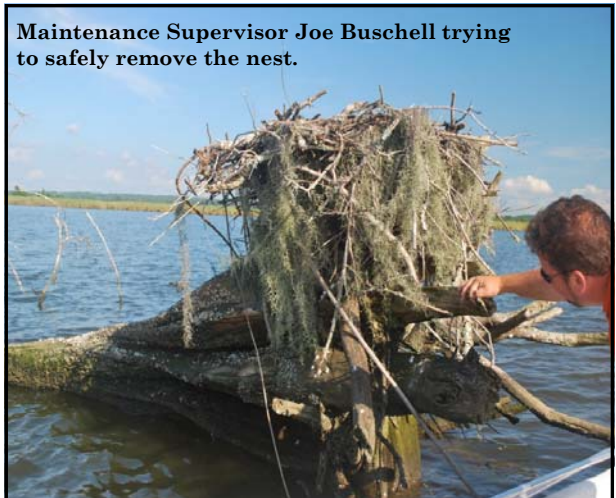
The Osprey Nest in its original home with parent and fledgling.

New exhibits are always exciting for 5 Rivers staff, and our latest is no exception. This spring we noticed something very out of place on the Apalachee River. An osprey nest was perched precariously close to the water. While they typically build their nest in treetops 20-30 feet above the water, this nesting pair decided to build upon a fallen tree just a few feet above the water. While this gave a unique viewing opportunity for guests aboard The Pelican pontoon boat, a single tropical storm surge could have destroyed the nest and the chick inside.

It isn't often one sees an osprey nest at eye level, and this one provided a unique window into the family life of this predatory bird. Both male and female took turns watching over the nest, cleaning, feeding and protecting the chick. The single chick fledged successfully and began to hunt for itself, and before long the nest was abandoned for the season.

Osprey will re-use a nesting site year after year. 5 Rivers consulted experts both at the state and federal level, and it was agreed that the nest would not likely be viable again, or worse could be washed away in the middle of the next breeding season, drowning any helpless chick inside. With that in mind, 5 Rivers staff collected the nest and brought it into the Apalachee Exhibit Hall for all to see. When the osprey return next year, they will search for a site to rebuild their nest. We hope that they might choose one of the two nesting platforms on the 5 Rivers site!

We hope you'll come spend some time and marvel, like we did, at the precision architecture of sticks and Spanish moss that make up the seemingly hodge-podge pile. See how many types of fish bones, scales, crab carapaces and other leftover evidence of the diet of one of the largest raptors in our nation. It's well worth the price of admission – which is always free!



Maintenance Supervisor Joe Buschell trying to safely remove the nest.

## Watchable Wildlife: The American White Pelican



**White Pelican in flight. You can see the black tips on his wings. These markings are only visible during flight.**

Looking for a really good excuse to drag the canoe or kayak out this winter? Look no further! Some of our favorite snowbirds are in town – the American White Pelican. A short and easy paddle into Justin's Bay may take you into the middle of hundreds of these wintering birds feeding in the shallows, preening their feathers and waddling about socializing.

One of the first things you'll notice is their sheer size, as they are one of largest birds in the nation with a wingspan up to 9 feet and a body weight of 15-20 pounds. Unlike our year-round resident brown pelicans, the white pelican doesn't dive from the air for food, but rather dips its head under the water to scoop up fish. Their feathers are white, as you might guess from their name, but when they take flight and spread their wings you can see the striking black tips of their flight feathers. After wintering along the Gulf Coast, they'll head back north to colder parts of the nation and Canada until we see them again next year. Paddle out and see these beautiful birds while you can! If the white pelicans aren't around when you visit 5 Rivers, don't fret. Just ask our staff to show you the white pelican video we produced from their visit last year.

## Join 5 Rivers for a Holiday Celebration!

5 Rivers is getting ready for the upcoming holiday season with a holiday bash! On December 13th from 12pm to 4pm, come celebrate the holidays on the delta. Admission is free to the public and plenty of activities are planned for kids and adults alike. You can enjoy a "sleigh ride" through our woods or perhaps make your own ornaments to take home with you. Listen to live bluegrass delta music by Delta Reign duo Benita and Pat Murphy. The Tensaw Theater will show several holiday classics, such as The Polar Express, A Charlie Brown Christmas, A Christmas Story, and, of course, The Grinch. Enjoy hot cocoa and cider with cookies as you sit by a Delta Hall's real wood burning fireplace. The Pelican pontoon boat will be on hand with 30 minute tours of the delta for only \$5 a person, and of course, don't forget to get that singing voice ready for Holiday Karaoke! Bring a new unwrapped toy to help Toys For Tots or a canned good for the Waterfront Rescue Mission and get a 10% off coupon for the Cypress Gift shop. Be sure to bring the camera to get your photo taken with our Alligator all decked out for the season. You can even make it your one stop holiday shopping destination by visiting the Cypress Gift Shop and taking advantage of its unique and nature inspired gifts. At 2pm, catch the 5 Rivers version of a Christmas parade, as our Christmas flotilla paddles down Sardine Pass in full holiday regalia. To enter your own vessel in the parade or for more information about our holiday celebration call Shonda or Kellie at 251-625-0814. We look forward to seeing you there!



**Our very own version of a delta Santa and his reindeer.**



**Last year's festive kayakers enjoying the day.**



## 5 Rivers Acquires Two New Educational Staff Members.



6 month old Bonnie

If you've toured 5 Rivers in the last 6 months, you know how much we like to talk about Alabama's wonderful diversity of snakes! This month, we made two additions to our reptile collection. Both are corn snakes with very different qualities. Eleven year old Cornelia is a wild caught snake that was donated to the facility by Spanish Fort teacher Jane D. Nall.

Cornelia spent the last three

years in the classroom, so she is already great with kids and adults alike. Our other new resident is 6 month old Bonnie (and yes, she is next to our gray rat snake Clyde). Bonnie is a more unusual corn snake, as she was bred in the pet trade to be albinistic, or lacking in dark pigment. This lack of camouflage, while possible, would be a disadvantage in the wild, as she would be easily spotted by predators. Don't worry though, she's safe with us at 5 Rivers! Stop by soon and say welcome to the newest members of our 5 Rivers Critter Staff.



11 year old Cornelia

### A Quick Glimpse of December's Events:

- 12/1/09** Mobile Bay Canoe and Kayak Club Meeting (*Guest speaker Amanda Cox will discuss wooden boat building*)  
Hunter's Education Course
- 12/8/09** Audubon Society Meeting  
Hunter's Education Course
- 12/5/09** 5 Rivers Class: "Snakes" Grades 3-5 (Reservation required)
- 12/6/09** Bottle Creek Indian Mound Lecture and Boat Tour
- 12/12/09** Saturday Adventure: Pond Management. *Bring your own water or plant samples for advice from Auburn Extension Agent PJ Waters.*
- 12/13/09** 5 Rivers Holiday Celebration!
- 12/17/09** Spanish Fort "Twas the Night Before Christmas" reading by the fire.
- 12/25/09** Christmas Day (*5 Rivers will be closed*)

**For more information on any events please call us at 625-0814, visit our website at [www.alabama5rivers.com](http://www.alabama5rivers.com) or visit our facebook page.**



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[www.Alabama5Rivers.com](http://www.Alabama5Rivers.com)

Find us on Facebook!

Open Monday thru Sunday 8am to 5pm

**Want to be a part of our newsletter?** Feel free to email any pictures you have that pertain to nature, the delta, or even 5 Rivers to Shonda at [Shonda.Borden@dcnr.alabama.gov](mailto:Shonda.Borden@dcnr.alabama.gov) Please have your photos be no bigger than 2 mb and be in either gif or jpg form. While your photo is appearing in the newsletter, stop by the Apalachee Exhibit Hall to also check it out on display! And if you want to be added to our newsletter list, please send your email address to Shonda as well.