



MWCC



Bulletin

The Power of One

By Cindi Brown



In April, a friend asked if I could assist in stopping the building of a 1000-foot broadcast tower right beside Lake Miccosukee, on the basis of wildlife interests. He had just listened to a National Public Radio broadcast about the millions of songbirds killed by these towers. He knew that as an

MWCC I might have access to information about migratory patterns and documentation of bird kills in the area.

I found this issue fascinating. People have devoted their lives to preventing this killing of songbirds and there is a website devoted to it (www.towerkill.com). Also, media attention is increasing. The Atlanta Journal & Constitution did a three-part series on the serious issue of the millions of songbirds being killed annually by the proliferation of towers. Newsweek is also devoting a cover story to the topic soon.

Scientific studies indicate that these towers are partly responsible for the 80 percent decline in songbird populations since the 1970s. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has developed "Recommended Guidelines for Towers." These guidelines recommend bird diverter devices and specify the type of lighting to be put on such towers (white strobe lights are considered best and there should be no solid or pulsating red lights). They also state that no towers should be placed in migratory flyways.

I found that the area proposed for the tower was, in fact, in the midst of a migratory songbird flyway, and a known bird roosting/nesting area. Along with other parties, I made a presentation to the Leon County Growth Management Committee, then to the County Commission. A moratorium was put on new towers (including the proposed one) until a new broadcast tower ordinance could be drafted, with the help of a citizens' advisory committee. Commissioner Jane Sauls appointed me to the committee.

At our first meeting, the lighting guidelines were put into the ordinance, along with guidelines for placing bird diverter devices on guy wires. At the second meeting, we included additional USFWS guidelines in the draft ordinance specifying no construction of towers in flyways, wetlands, and roosting or nesting areas. Two people who had not come to the first meeting wanted the lighting criteria taken out. We had a very lively debate and ended up tabling it. I was asked to find out exactly why USFWS recommends white lights and no solid red or red pulsating lights. I found two studies which appeared to demonstrate that a bird's eyes are much more sensitive to and attracted to the red and infrared end of the electromagnetic

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The Power of One

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spectrum, and that red lights appear to affect a migrating bird's magnetic compass. I then e-mailed this information to the other committee members. I went to the third meeting prepared to argue for the lighting guidelines. But to my great amazement, the opposing members said they had read all the information I sent them, and they withdrew their opposition!

The first public hearing on the proposed ordinance was on October 15. The ordinance was passed by the County Commission at its second and final hearing on October 29.

I would like to say that, this being my first 'grassroots' experience actually working with an issue and following it through, that I have been truly amazed at how effective citizens can be if they care about an issue. I have received extremely positive responses from many Commissioners during this process, including emails of support and encouragement. I have been amazed at how responsive our Commissioners are, and also learned that concerned citizens can and do make a difference about just any issue (as long as they find out soon enough) ... and, as Marjory Stoneman Douglas so aptly put, "as a matter of fact, it is the ONLY thing that makes a difference."

Book Club

by *Connie Bersok*

"The story of who I am cannot be severed from the story of the flatwoods" writes Janisse Ray in the introduction to her book "Ecology of a Cracker Childhood." She also writes "I was born from people who were born from people who were born from people who were born here." As a result, the chapters of the book alternated between her childhood in a junkyard in rural south Georgia and the lives of her relatives, with the natural world that surrounded that junkyard.

On September 29, a group of readers got together at the second meeting of the Nature and Book Lover's Club to discuss Janisse's book and share our impressions. It seemed that everyone had a favorite story that dealt with Janisse's family. These tales covered topics that ranged from her grandfather's tendency to take to the woods as an escape and the mental illness he shared with her father, to the tolerance and "native genius" of her mother and grandmother. We also had a lively discussion about the imaginary letter from John James Audubon from the great beyond to John Bachman. Throughout the book, there was a connection between the lives they lived and the world around them, whether it was story of hunting, a rafting trip



MWC Bulletin

Our mission is to provide a forum for sharing information and ideas among volunteers of the Master Wildlife Conservationist program that support our group efforts as community educators.

If you wish to contribute an article or information for our next issue, call Melba Bailey at 894-1352 or send an e-mail to melba@tfn.net. All completed articles are due by **January 10**, but submit your ideas or proposed topic ahead of time so we can plan the layout.

Thanks to all who contributed articles for this issue. Editing, proofreading and layout were done by Melba Bailey, Connie Bersok and Kathy Criscola.

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– the editors

We ended the evening with a round-table discussion of how each of us found ourselves interested and involved in ecology. It was interesting to learn that many of us had early childhood experiences, not unlike those of Janisse, where there was no real boundary between everyday life and the outdoors; others became interested in the natural world later in life.

The Nature and Book Lovers' Club is open to anyone who wants to read and share thoughts and enjoy the company of similar minded folks – no membership forms, fees, or commitments to attend future meetings! The next book to be discussed will be "*Four Wings and a Prayer: Caught in the Mystery of the Monarch Butterfly*" by Sue Halpern on January 12, 2003. The potluck gathering will be at Melba Bailey's house, starting at 6:30 pm. Contact Melba at melba@tfn.net or 894-1352 for directions.



In the Spotlight

Albert Trull: Renaissance Man

by Melba Bailey

When I called Albert to set up an appointment for this interview, he asked if I had ever seen where he lived. He lives in his office on the south side of town that he converted from an old dairy about twenty years ago. To get to his office, you enter a courtyard that used to be the main pasteurization room until Albert removed the ceiling and floor and trucked in dirt. Albert has reclaimed a small space for nature and it is doing what nature does: going wild.

Albert is happy because he feels that he has found his true calling. He is totally dedicated to conserving our natural resources and working to restore neglected or abused habitats. He doesn't remember exactly what set him on this path, but once the idea came to his consciousness, he couldn't ignore it. He reads constantly and he remembers being influenced by the book, *The Sand County*

Almanac, written by Aldo Leopold. He also fondly remembers walks in the woods with his uncle when he was a youngster and thinks that may have been the genesis of his newfound passion because it runs so deep.

This seemingly sudden urge to change focus has happened to Albert several times in his life and he has always trusted it. He started out studying chemical engineering in college, but realized one day after an afternoon nap that he really wanted to be an architect. He didn't even wait until the end of the semester before he switched schools. After practicing architecture for several years, a friend announced that he was going to study urban planning. It struck Albert that this was exactly what he wanted to do also. Without hesitating, he packed his belongings and moved to Tallahassee to study at FSU. He continued his studies until he ended up with a PhD in Systems Analysis and Planning and co-authored a book with his major professor.

Maybe this willingness to take new paths is inherited. Albert was born in Birmingham, Alabama, which is not surprising once you've heard that soft southern drawl. What is surprising is that both of Albert's parents came from Cuba. Albert's father moved to Alabama seeking

more opportunity than was available in Cuba. In Birmingham, his father made the acquaintance of a Dr. Cooper. Meanwhile, Albert's mother, an orphan in Cuba, was adopted by a Presbyterian missionary. She eventually ended up in Birmingham doing medical research and met the same Dr. Cooper and, as luck would have it, he introduced her to Albert's father.

Albert practiced architecture in Tallahassee for over 20 years before retiring. I hesitate to say "retire" because he certainly hasn't stopped working. Besides his MWC volunteer work, he belongs to three organizations that are committed to improving, restoring or preserving the quality of life in Tallahassee. He is a member of Blueprint 2000 whose job, Albert believes, "is to make sure that what voters voted for comes about." He serves as chairman of the Gaines Street Revitalization Committee and



Albert Trull at San Luis tree planting with Connie Bersok.

is on the South Monroe Planning Committee.

His dream for the Southside includes the restoration of blighted areas as well as the proposed Capital Cascades Trails. There used to be eight natural small lakes and ponds located between the CSX overpass at Apalachee Parkway and Orange Avenue. All of them have been built over and covered with hard surfaces. "We need to get rid of unnecessary hard surfaces and restore it to natural areas capable of handling stormwater," states Albert.

Albert replenishes his enthusiasm and increases his knowledge by attending as many workshops on environmental and ecological issues as he can. He speaks glowingly of Schumacher College, an international center for Ecological Studies in England, where he has attended courses on Sustainability and Responsible Science. Last September, he attended a "One Earth" workshop where ten ecologists from around the world spoke. Recently, he attended an Extension workshop on stream restoration and he is very enthusiastic about using this new knowledge.

Most importantly, he believes strongly that "we have to teach the children" because their future depends on what knowledge we impart to them today by what we do as well as by what we say.

Featured Species

The Florida Softshell: A Unique Florida Turtle

By Matthew J. Aresco, FSU Dept. of Biological Science



As a turtle biologist, people often ask me, “What is your favorite turtle?” I always answer unequivocally: “the Florida softshell.” The Florida softshell turtle (*Apalone ferox*) is a large freshwater turtle with a relatively flat, leathery shell and a distinctive tubular snout. Its eyes are positioned towards the front of the head, giving it almost binocular vision and a distinctly more intelligent look than other turtles. When people see this turtle for the first time, they usually say, “What a strange looking turtle.” I thought the same thing when I captured my first one in southern Alabama in 1995.

The Florida softshell has well-developed webbing on each foot. It is lightning fast in the water and also on land. While conducting research on turtles at Lake Jackson over the last few years, I have chased many softshells, often crashing through blackberry thickets only to come up empty handed but plenty scratched up, as they easily beat me back to the water. And forget about catching them in the open water!

Adult softshells are tan/dark brown above and white/cream colored below. Hatchlings and small juveniles are beautifully colored – dark brown/olive with large round, dark spots. They have brightly colored yellow, orange or red stripes on the head and a red/orange rim on the outer margin of the shell. Adult females can reach 24 inches in length and adult males 14 inches in length. Males have thicker and longer tails than females, though.

The softshells I have encountered are either very docile or very

aggressive. There is no in-between. Those that are aggressive can inflict a serious bite with their long neck, powerful jaws, and sharp jaw sheath. On one occasion, I was carrying a large male softshell in a cloth collecting bag and in a momentary lapse of thought, I threw the bag over my shoulder and was quickly bitten through the bag and my shirt. When the turtle finally let go after about five painful minutes, I had a bruise on the back of my arm shaped just like a pair of softshell jaws. But don't get me wrong: softshells are still my favorite turtle.

The Florida softshell ranges on the southeastern lower Coastal Plain from southern South Carolina to Mobile, Alabama. They are found in a wide variety of freshwater habitats including lakes, ponds, rivers, canals, swamps, and suburban/urban stormwater ponds. They prefer shallow, slow-moving water with a soft bottom and abundant aquatic vegetation. The Florida softshell will readily migrate over land to nearby wetter areas if their wetland dries. I have saved many from sure death on U.S. Highway 27 at Lake Jackson over the last few years. Of all the turtles I do find dead on the highway, my heart always aches a little more when I find a dead softshell.

The Florida softshell is omnivorous and feeds on snails, insects, crustaceans, amphibians, and fish (live and dead), as well as algae and aquatic plants. In June, I captured a very large softshell at Lake Jackson and kept it in a water-filled container overnight to see what it had eaten (via its excretion). The next morning I was surprised to see the container

filled with bird feathers; this turtle had eaten a coot!

Softshell turtles have been heavily harvested in some areas for their meat, and some populations in northern Florida have declined because of over-harvesting. The life history characteristics of turtles – such as late maturity (5-8 years for softshells) and high rates of egg and juvenile mortality – make some species especially vulnerable to over-harvesting. Populations can be decimated if large numbers of mature adults are taken, and recovery can be very slow.

My recent observations suggest that Florida softshells are specifically targeted at area lakes for their meat. During the recent dry-down of Lake Jackson, I found only 87 Florida softshells and they represented only 1.8 percent of 4,856 turtles that I captured in 2000. The Fla. Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission enacted a new rule in 2000 that prohibits the harvest and possession of softshells and their eggs from May 1-July 31, which corresponds with their nesting season. A long-term management strategy is essential to protect the Florida softshell and to ensure that this unique turtle remains a visible and viable part of Florida's freshwater ecosystems. The next time you see a strange tubular snout appear from the water lilies, be encouraged: it is probably a Florida softshell turtle peering out to look around.

For more information about Matthew Aresco's turtle research, visit www.lakejacksononturtles.org or e-mail aresco@bio.fsu.edu.

Attention, Please!

MWC Annual Awards & Recognition Dinner/Program, December 3

Who: All MWC program graduates and their spouse or special guest

Place: Brokaw-McDougall House, 329 N Meridian St, Tallahassee

Date and Time: Tue Dec 3; 5:30-6:30 social hr; 6:30-9:00 dinner & program

RSVP by Tues Nov 26: Leon County Extension Office (487-3004)

Guest Artist: Dale Crider, environmental singer/songwriter/activist

Cost: \$5.00/person with a covered dish; \$10.00/person without



Come join your fellow MWCs in this year's evening of good food, fellowship, friendship renewal, and recognition of the hard work of our active volunteers during 2002. This year, our guest artist/lecturer will be a singer/songwriter who will perform many of his most popular ecological songs during his presentation.

Dale Crider, Florida's environmental troubadour, has written, recorded and performed numerous songs about Florida, its unique wilderness and wildlife. These songs have helped bring attention to the plight of endangered wildlife, to their habitats in rivers and other fragile aquatic ecosystems, and to the natural systems that support all life in Florida.

Crider worked for the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission for 30 years, as a waterfowl biologist and an environmental and educational specialist. He makes his home near Gainesville.

As both singer and biologist, Dale has convinced people of all ages that Florida wildlife habitats and the plants and animals dependent on them should be saved. He has performed on stage with Tom T. Hall, The Bellamy Brothers, Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Gamble Rogers, Will McLean, and John Hartford. He has entertained governors and various policy makers from Tallahassee to Washington.

Announcing a New Course

Master Wildlifer is a short course designed by Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service for landowners and land managers across the southeast who are interested in integrating wildlife management considerations into current land use and management. Farmers, forest landowners, homeowners, and others who are interested in improving their property for wildlife will find the Master Wildlifer program to be a wealth of practical information that serves as a guide to develop and improve wildlife habitat on their land. For practicing land managers, the course will highlight alternative management approaches for wildlife in forest, farm and urban settings. The course is broadcast from Clemson, and brings together extension wildlife specialists from several states plus wildlife experts from state game management agencies and organizations.

The video course will be held at Gadsden Co Extension on seven consecutive Tuesday evenings, 7-10 pm EST, February 4 through March 18, 2003. Leon Co Extension Agent Stan Rosenthal and Gadsden Co Forester Mike Renwick will be our downlink site co-hosts. This is an excellent opportunity for MWCs to continue their education. The reference notebook is being written by the speakers and will be an excellent reference manual. Stan, Mike and Will Sheftall will host a local field trip to supplement the video instruction. There's no volunteer component to this program.

The cost of early registration (*through Thurs Jan 9, 2003*) will be \$75. A spouse can register and share your notebook for an additional \$35 during early registration. Beginning January 10, registrants will pay \$95 or \$45 if a spouse is sharing a book. Late registrants will receive their notebook later in the course. Persons completing six of the seven sessions will receive a certificate and Master Wildlifer cap. Call the Florida Forestry Association at 222-5646 to register.

MWC CLASS of 2003

If you know of someone interested in being in the 2003 MWC class, please suggest that they call Will Sheftall at 487-3004. Recruitment for the next class will begin in November, and interviews with applicants will be scheduled during December.

MWC CALENDAR

Nov. 2002 – Jan. 2003

November

- 7 Thurs. **Deadline to pre-register** for Gopher Tortoise Workshop, 656-7113.
- 12 Tues, **Gopher tortoise workshop for landowners & land managers**, presented by **Ray Ashton** of the Gopher Tortoise Conservation Initiative. Co-sponsored by the Florida Wildlife Federation, Tall Timbers Research Station, and UF/IFAS Extension. 9:00 AM – 4:30 PM, Tall Timbers – Komarek Environmental Education Barn, 13093 Henry Beadle Dr (off CR 12), Tallahassee. \$46 fee includes lunch. Pre-register by Nov 7. Call Diane Hines at FWF (656-7113) for further information and to register.
- 12 Tues. **Gopher tortoise lecture**, presented by **Ray Ashton** of the Gopher Tortoise Conservation Initiative, Newberry, FL. **“Gopher Tortoises, a Keystone Species, an Indicator of the Plight of Florida’s Upland Wildlife.”** Free and open to the public, sponsored by Florida Wildlife Federation. R.A. Gray Building auditorium (Museum of Florida History Bldg), 500 S Bronough St, Tallahassee, 7:00-9:00 PM.
- 16-17 Sat. – Sun., **Plantation Wildlife Arts Festival**, Thomasville Cultural Center, between E Jackson & E Washington, Thomasville, GA. Works of art on display and for sale by nationally-renowned wildlife artists in all media. Special demonstrations and events each day. Call 226-0588 for information.
- 21 Thurs., **MWC/North Florida Naturalist Society lecture** to be given by **Kent Smith**, biologist with Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission’s Bureau of Protected Species Management, on the **status of manatees in North Florida**, Leon Extension Auditorium, 615 Paul Russell Rd, Tallahassee, 7:30-8:30 pm (refreshments at 7 pm).
- 26 Tues., **Deadline to RSVP** for MWC Awards & Recognition Dinner, 487-3004.

December

- 3 Tues, **MWC annual awards & recognition dinner**. Brokaw-McDougall House, 329 N Meridian St, Tallahassee. 5:30-6:30 social hr; 6:30-9:00 dinner & program. All MWC program graduates and their spouse or special guest are invited. **RSVP by Tues Nov 26** to Leon County Extension Office (487-3004). \$5.00/person with a covered dish; \$10.00/person without. **Guest Artist: Dale Crider, environmental singer/songwriter.**

January

- 9 Wed, **Deadline for early registration** for Master Wildlifer satellite broadcast shortcourse. Call the Florida Forestry Association at 222-5646 to register.
- 12 Sun, **Nature and Book Lovers’ Club quarterly meeting**, for discussion of **“Four Wings and a Prayer: Caught in the Mystery of the Monarch Butterfly”** by Sue Halpern. Potluck at Melba Bailey’s house, 6:30 pm. Contact Melba at melba@tfn.net or 894-1352 for directions.
- 15 Wed, **Deadline for landowners of 10 acres or more** to sign up with NRCS for cash grants and technical assistance through the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQUIP). Applications will be evaluated on a county basis using the criteria established by the NRCS Local Working Group. Practices eligible for grants include control of invasive exotic plants. For more information, contact Darrell Johnson in Leon Co at 877-6899.
- 16 Thurs, **MWC/North Florida Naturalist Society lecture** to be given by **herpetologist Dr Dave Cook** of the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission, Komarek Environmental Education Barn, Tall Timbers Research Station, 13093 Henry Beadle Dr (off CR 12), Tallahassee, 7:30-8:30 pm (refreshments at 7 pm).

January (continued)

- 25 Saturday, **Arbor Day tree planting**, North Florida Fairgrounds, 9:00 am. Come help spend a couple of hours improving Tallahassee's urban canopy and habitat in the South Monroe Street urban corridor. Bring shovel, work gloves, water and some kids!
- 27 Mon, **Prescribed fire workshop**, offered by Florida's Forest Stewardship Program. Austin Cary Memorial Forest (ACMF), Alachua Co, meet at ACMF at 8:00 AM. Call Chris Demers at UF/IFAS School of Forest Resources & Conservation to register, 352-846-2375.

February

- 4 Tues, **Master Wildlifer** south wide satellite broadcast wildlife management **shortcourse for landowners begins**. Gadsden Co Extension, 7:00-10:00 PM. \$75 if pre-registered by Jan 9; \$95 after Jan 9. Call the Florida Forestry Association at 222-5646 to register.