



# The Delta News

## 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center



Volume II, Issue II

February '10



### Your Delta Fun Fact for the Month:

Alabama's state insect is the Monarch Butterfly. World-famous and unique for their lengthy annual migration, these insects fly across the United States northward in the spring and southward in the fall. Individuals don't live long enough to make the exhaustive trek on their own, so typically 3-4 generations are involved in a full migratory cycle.



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### COMING IN FEBRUARY TO THE APALACHEE EXHIBIT HALL

### New 5 Rivers Exhibit Highlights the Trouble with Invasive Species

Chances are, you've seen a popcorn tree before. There's probably one in your front yard. You might even enjoy its shade, its beautiful yellow-red fall color, and decorative white seeds. Chances are, you are not aware that behind such a beautiful exterior is a dark side.

Our "popcorn" tree is more formally known as the Chinese Tallow Tree, which sheds light on where this plant calls home. It was introduced into North Carolina in the 1700s and later planted in orchards so that the waxy white seeds could be harvested to make candles, soap, and other such "tallow" products. Today, we no longer collect the seeds for wax, but it continues to produce them anyway. A single adult tree can produce 100,000 seeds per year! Since few animals eat the seeds (they are actually toxic to many animals), many of the seeds remain available to sprout in the environment. As a result, popcorn trees are now found all over the southeastern US. It has even been introduced as far west as California, where it was initially planted as an ornamental tree. (They're probably going to regret that!)



The Exhibit's "Wheel Of Misfortune", which was painted by Cypress Gift Shop Clerk Mary Martin, will hold the seeds collected from a single popcorn tree. As you turn the wheel, they will trickle through the hourglass. Do you think you can count them all?!

"Just One Tree" is an interactive exhibit that has been crafted by the staff at 5 Rivers. At its center is a wheel of "misfortune" that contains all the seeds harvested from a single, 25 year old popcorn tree from Fairhope, AL. As you turn the artful wheel (painted by Mary Martin from our Cypress Gift Shop, and designed by Maintenance Supervisor Joe Buschell) the seeds will trickle through the hourglass design, giving you a chance to estimate how many seeds came from just one tree. A ballot box is built into the design and prizes will be given for the closest guess. The display also recommends ways to control popcorn trees in your yard, and recommends some beautiful native tree species you might consider planting in its place.

Thank you to Bass Pro in Spanish Fort for donating the prizes: a 14-foot Old Town canoe, a youth and adult personal flotation device, two paddles, a first aid kit, dry bag, compass, and flashlight—all that plus a guided canoe trip and more!

## 5 Rivers Classes Set to Resume



Director Hank Burch teaching the different trees found in our woods during “ImPRESSive Plants”

5 Rivers kicked off its Saturday Adventure Class Series, in 2009 with an abundance of topics for students to choose from. Kids in grades three through five had the opportunity to learn about a range of topics from the makeup of birds to how wind energy works. They even had the chance to get up close and personal with some Alabama turtles!

5 Rivers will again be offering its Saturday Adventure Class Series starting on March 13th with “Wilderness Awareness”, a class that will help students become aware of what’s around them in their environment. “Fun With Feathered Friends” is scheduled for March 27. Classes, are typically be held from 11:30am to 2:30pm, but details for each class are given upon registration. A snack will be provided, and some classes will even include a boat ride aboard the 23 passenger pontoon boat The Pelican. Most classes are free, and registration is required since space is limited.

For parents who are looking for something fun to do, 5 Rivers will also be offering programs for adults. These one to two hour presentations will cover a range of topics from knot tying to photography.

For more information on any of the upcoming classes and presentations, or to register for a class, please call Shonda or Kellie at 251-625-0814. Class schedules and specifics for both adults and students will be available online at [www.Alabama5Rivers.com](http://www.Alabama5Rivers.com) and on our Facebook page.

## Watchable Wildlife: Eastern Bluebirds

When 5 Rivers first opened to the public in April, 2007, staff were greeted in the mornings by Eastern Bluebirds flitting from building to building, little bright flashes of blue to welcome us to work each day. We see even more of them three years later, as we’ve tried to make the property as hospitable as possible for these beautiful creatures.



Eastern Bluebird male, taken at 5 Rivers by Photographer Terry Hartley.

Male bluebirds are striking to see and impossible to miss with their brilliant royal blue body and head, and a reddish brown chest. Females are a bit more subdued than their counterparts, and have grayish blue body and head, and a pale wash of an orange-brown chest. They are a favorite of birders throughout the Eastern United States, and we’re lucky in southern Alabama in that we have year-round populations. Although they won’t turn their beaks up at a tasty berry or two, bluebirds eat mainly insects, making them pretty handy to have around in our part of the world.

Eastern Bluebirds mate in the spring and summer, and nest in protective tree cavities. They typically have 3-6 eggs per clutch, and depending on health and food sources, may have up to 3 clutches per year. Where they used to be a common site throughout their range, their numbers have declined in the last several decades due to a variety of factors, such as loss of habitat, egg predation, and competition for food and nesting sites from introduced species. One way to help is to install properly sized and placed nest boxes. 5 Rivers has 23 bluebird boxes around the facility that were installed by a group of very hardworking Boy Scouts as part of an Eagle Scout project in the spring of 2008 (thanks, Jared!), Within 2 weeks of installation we had local bluebird residents moving in. Come see them for yourself, and bring a camera! And don’t forget to ask the 5 Rivers staff for some tips on attracting these little jewels to your yard.



## 5 Rivers Delta Safaris Now Offers Birthday Parties!

5 Rivers Delta Safaris is well known for their wonderful tours of the delta aboard the pontoon boat “The Pelican”, but did you know they offer so much more than that?! Beginning this year, Delta Safaris is offering adventure themed birthday parties for kids of all ages. These parties offer a variety of age-specific, educational focused fun games all while giving the kids a chance to enjoy the outdoors. Climb aboard for a pirate themed adventure where kids can hunt for hidden treasure while facing enemy scallywags, rugged terrain, and dangerous creatures. If pirates are not what your child is looking for, they could have a safari themed adventure in which they would have the chance to explore the world through an animal’s eyes with games such as “Awesome Opossum”, “Blind-Bat, Brown-Bat”, obstacle courses, and more.

For more information on birthday parties or any of the upcoming events by Delta Safaris, call 251-259-8531 or visit them online at [www.5RDS.com](http://www.5RDS.com).



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

- 2/2/10** Alabama Hiking Trail Society Club Meeting
- 2/2/10** Mobile Bay Canoe & Kayak Club Meeting: Geological History of the Delta
- 2/7/10** Delta Safaris Wildlife Photography & Hike, Starts at 10am (\$10)
- 2/9/10** Hunter's Education Course
- 2/9/10** Audubon Society Club Meeting
- 2/20/10** Delta Safaris Free Canoe/Kayak Paddle & BBQ, 11am-4pm
- 2/21/10** Bottle Creek Lecture and Tour (Reservation Required)
- 2/27/10** Delta Safaris Moonlight Paddle and BBQ (Reservation Required, \$5)

**For more information on any events please visit our website at [www.alabama5rivers.com](http://www.alabama5rivers.com) or visit our Facebook page.**



30945 5 Rivers Blvd.

Spanish Fort, AL 36527

251-625-0814

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

Find us on Facebook!

Open Monday thru Sunday 8am to 5pm