



The Delta News

5 Rivers Delta Resource Center



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Your Delta Fun Fact for the Month:

Did you know Hummingbirds are the only birds that can not only hover, but fly backwards as well?! These tiny aerialists are amazing flyers!



Welcome, Amelia!



Amelia meets a future rocket scientist!

We hope you will help us welcome our newest 5 Rivers staff member, Amelia, who after much ado has made it to her new home. Amelia is— you guessed it — a baby striped skunk. She is a 12 week old kit, and flew in from a licensed skunk breeder 1000 miles away. We picked her up at Mobile Airport and, as you might imagine, attracted more than a few curious glances. (When quizzed about the flight, Amelia seemed to prefer the honey roasted peanuts over the ginger cookies, but wishes next time to fly first class so she'll have more tail room.)

The most common skunk found throughout North America, striped skunks are infamous

for their ability to spray a horrific and persistent smelling liquid from their hindquarters when threatened by a potential predator. Even their scientific name, *Mephitis*, means "bad odor". It is the kind of odor that has to wear off, because not even soaking yourself in tomato juice will knock a dent in it. Skunks are able to aim and spray up to 12 feet, emitting an oily musk that not only has a gut-wrenching, nausea-inducing smell, but also burns the eyes and nose of its predators. This allows the skunk to saunter on its way, teaching a well-earned lesson to the would-be predator to avoid the striped critter at all costs from then on.

Skunks are a growing part of the national pet trade, but many states are understandably strict regarding this species. 5 Rivers, as a conservation and educational facility, was able to acquire the permits required to house a captive-bred skunk. It is common for breeders to "de-musk" skunks, or to remove their musk glands so they're unable to spray. Here at 5 Rivers we like to see returning faces as well as new guests, so we decided having the musk glands on our newest staff member removed was a good idea. Fortunately this requirement does not extend to the rest of the staff!

The striped skunk is easily identifiable. Their black body has a white stripe that begins at the head, forks out to a "V" pattern, joining again at the bushy tail where the color becomes a mixture of black and white fur. They are generally nocturnal, foraging at night with long front claws for food that ranges from small mammals and insects, to grains, carrion, birds, and eggs. They play an important role in the wild by working hard to control the rodent and insect populations.



Striped Skunk
(*Mephitis mephitis*)

What's up in the Delta this month?



It's summertime, and the Delta has turned from the muted brown of winter to vibrant green. Grasses and submerged vegetation are a great food source for many animals, including our seasonal visitors, the manatee. We had our first manatee sightings of 2010 from the 5 Rivers dock on June 29—and we hope to see more throughout the season!

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Be sure to come by and help us in welcoming Amelia to her new home here at 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center!

Watchable Wildlife: Bald Eagle

Haliaeetus leucocephalus

As we celebrate our Nation's independence this month, what better time than now to take a closer look at our country's symbol, the **Bald Eagle**. This majestic bird of prey was listed on the federal endangered species list. Widespread use of the pesticide DDT on agricultural crops in the mid 1900s caused the eggs of not only the bald eagle, but other birds such as the brown pelican as well, to become weak and brittle. When the females attempted to keep their eggs warm, the eggs would crack killing the unborn chicks inside. The use of DDT was banned in 1972, and bald eagle populations nationwide began a slow recovery. In June, 2007, the bald eagle was removed from the endangered species list, marking one of our greatest conservation successes.

Surprising to most people, bald eagles are found all over the state of Alabama. The highest concentration of eagles occur in Pickwick Lake near Waterloo and Guntersville Lake at Guntersville State Park, but bald eagles are also found near other large bodies of water, such as coastal areas, lakes, and large rivers.

The bald eagle is a fairly easy bird to spot. As an adult, it has a brown body with a very distinguished white head. The wings are long and broad, allowing it to soar in the air in search of its preferred food, fish. If fish is not readily available, they have been known to eat small mammals, carrion, or even large birds. Bald eagles are not above stealing their food from other birds of prey. It is not uncommon for a bald eagle to spear a fish laden osprey, hoping the osprey will drop its food so the bald eagle can swipe it for an easy meal.



(c) George Jameson

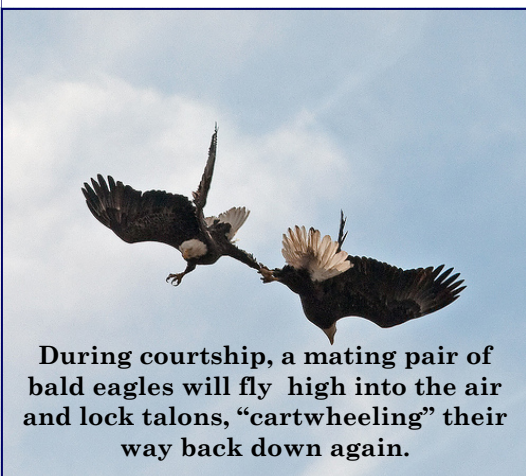
Bald eagles mate for life, and will share in the nest responsibilities. They have an amazing and slightly dizzying aerial display while courting. It is known as the "cartwheel" display. The male and female will fly to high altitudes and lock talons. They begin to spiral downward, tumbling and doing cartwheels until they almost hit the ground. Seemingly inches above the ground, they break apart, hurting neither themselves nor their partner.

The bald eagle is a substantial and formidable bird. A female can weigh up to 15 pounds, making it the largest bird of prey in the country. The bald eagle will also build the largest nest, up to 13 feet deep and 8 feet wide! They can live up to 30 years of age in the wild, with some known to live up to 50 years in captivity.

Habitat loss and degradation are still a threat to this species. While they are no longer on the endangered species

list, they are still protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, making them illegal to hunt.

As we celebrate our Independence Day, be sure to keep a watchful eye to the sky for our Nation's symbol flying overhead.



During courtship, a mating pair of bald eagles will fly high into the air and lock talons, "cartwheeling" their way back down again.



The John L. Borom



For an even better chance of seeing the Bald Eagle, be sure to take a guided tour during the 2010 John L. Borom Alabama Coastal Birdfest October 13th thru the 17th. Keep checking back! Brochures with all the trip information will be available soon. www.alabamacoastalbirdfest.com



“Just One Tree” Winner Takes Inaugural Paddle

On June 24th, our Just One Tree contest winner Addie Hill joined her dad and the 5 Rivers staff for an evening paddle. It was the maiden voyage of her canoe that she won by guessing how many seeds were in the “Wheel of Misfortune”. The trip took the paddlers into Justin’s Bay, just in time for a gorgeous sunset. Justin’s Bay made a great first trip, as there is only one way in and one way out, with lots of calm water to paddle on. A variety of wildlife was spotted. At least two purple gallinules were seen, along with a baby alligator! By the end of the paddle, a beautiful full moon illuminated the water, helping us find our way back. We hope Addie enjoyed her first paddle as much as we did!



Addie and her father are all smiles as they get the hang of paddling their brand new canoe.

The staff of 5 Rivers would like to thank Spanish Fort Bass Pro for donating the prize canoe, and 5 Rivers Delta Safaris for providing the rest of the party with canoes and kayaks for our paddle. If you would like to try out Justin’s Bay for yourself, be sure to give Delta Safaris a call at 251-259-8531. They have canoe and kayak rentals for day trips, overnight trips, or guided trips! Whatever you would like your adventure to be, 5 Rivers Delta Safaris can help make it happen.

5 Rivers would like to say a big “**Thank You!**” to all the students who participated in the 2010 Spanish Fort Art Camp: “The Nature of Art”. Not only did these students have a chance to create beautiful artwork, but they also got an up close look at just some of the animals, plants, and insects that make up the delta. We enjoyed everyone we met this year, and we look forward to having a whole new set of art students next year!

A Quick Glimpse of July’s Events:



7/1/10	StoryTime: “Sweet Briar Goes to School” Followed by a meet and greet Amelia	7/13/10	Hunter’s Education Course
7/3/10	Delta Safaris Wine Tasting Cruise (\$45pp)	7/13/10	Audubon Society Meeting
7/3/10	5 Rivers Road Show: Gulf Coast Exploreum	7/15/10	StoryTime: “The Feather Club”
7/4/10	5 Rivers Road Show: Gulf Coast Exploreum	7/17/10	Saturday Class: “Spiders!” Grades 3rd thru 5th (Free)
7/4/10	Sunday Matinee: “American Eagle”	7/17/10	Delta Safaris Wine Tasting Cruise (\$45pp)
7/4/10	Fireworks Boat Cruise (\$25pp)	7/18/10	Sunday Matinee: “Frog: The Thin Green Line”
7/6/10	Mobile Bay Canoe and Kayak Club	7/24/10	Saturday Class: “Archaeology” Grades 3rd thru 5th (Free)
7/6/10	Alabama Hiking Trail Society Meeting	7/25/10	Sunday Matinee: “Lord of the Ants”
7/6/10	Gulf Coast Amphibian and Reptile Keepers	7/27/10	StoryTime: “I Thought I Saw An Alligator”
7/6/10	Sierra Club Meeting	7/29/10	StoryTime: “How Gimble Gopher Tortoise Found a Home”
7/8/10	StoryTime: “Jumpin’ Jubilee”	7/31/10	Delta Safaris Wine Tasting Cruise (\$45pp)
7/10/10	Saturday Class: “Wilderness Awareness” Grades K thru 3rd (Free)	Daily 2-hour Delta Eco-Tours, \$22/adults, senior and child discounts available. Reservations at 251-259-8531.	
7/10/10	Saturday Adventure: “Gators After Dark” (\$10pp, includes spotlighting boat tour)		
7/11/10	Sunday Matinee: “Poisoned Waters”		
7/13/10	StoryTime: “Chickadee’s Message”		

For more information on any of our upcoming events, check us out on FaceBook, visit our website at www.Alabama5Rivers.com, or give us a call at 251-625-0814!