



Environmental STUDIES CENTER

Wild **Adventures**

Spring 2021



Mobile County
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Critter Corner

Meet Dudley

Dudley, the American white pelican, came to the Environmental Studies Center in January of 2019. He had been hit by a car on the Dauphin Island Bridge. There was damage to his wing, and he had several abrasions on his wings and body. He healed well but unfortunately because of the damage to his wing he was not able to fly well enough to be released. He now shares a cage with Toby, the wild turkey.

The American white pelican has the second longest wingspan of any bird in North America. The wingspan averages 7 to 10 feet across. They are also very heavy birds, with average weights of 11 to 20 pounds. Unlike the brown pelican, the white pelican does not dive for its food. They catch their food while swimming. Most of their diet is fish, but they will also eat crayfish and amphibians.

Dudley is on exhibit next to the lake so be sure to come out and visit him.



Maintaining the Bog

When you hear the word “wildfire”, you may associate this term as being destructive. While some natural wildfires can be destructive, some wildfires can be beneficial to plants and animals. Prescribed burns can impersonate wildfires that can help maintain ecological balance. A prescribed burn is a controlled use of fire that mimics natural fires in order to maintain natural habitats. Controlled burns offer many benefits to wetland plant and animal life. In wetlands, a prescribed burn can remove dead organic matter and help control woody plants. It is necessary for dead organic matter to be removed in order for smaller new plants to survive. Too much dead organic matter, such as thatch, can prevent animals in the area from accessing the soil underneath. When this organic matter is burned, it not only makes the soil easily accessible but it also helps to release the nutrients back into the ground faster than if it were left to decay on its own.

Here at the Environmental Studies Center, we have a type of wetland known as a “bog”. Every three years we have professionals from the US Forestry Service come out and perform a prescribed burn on our bog. They carefully survey the bog and take into consideration the weather conditions, equipment needed, and number of people necessary in order to safely conduct the burn. By employing a controlled burn, we are able to manage weeds and restore nutrients to the natural habitat. By burning the decaying matter on the bottom of the bog, we are able to expose soil for the native seed plants and trees. Much of the wildlife such as birds, insects, and reptiles depend on the habitat that the bog provides. This is why it is extremely important to maintain the natural habitat for the unique plant and animal life of our bog. So even though fire can be damaging at times, it can also be a friend to wildlife.



Wildlife Wish List

Clip-on clamp lamp	1 cc and 3cc syringes	Chicken vegetable baby food
Pine bark mulch	Pine shavings (for cages)	Dried whole corn
Cages	Baled hay	Frozen mixed vegetables
Heating pads	Ziploc freezer bags (gallon & quart)	Fresh fruits and vegetables
Liquid laundry soap	Bleach	Raw peanuts (in shell)
Liquid dishwasher soap	Paper towels	Nuts (in shell)
Wal-Mart gift cards	Newspaper	Dry dog food (small bites)
60-watt light bulbs	Plastic wrap	Unsalted sunflower seeds
Scrub brushes	Dawn dish soap	Canned sardines in water
Cash	Animal crackers	Canned dog and cat food
Wild Birdseed	Scratch Feed	Cheerios
Small frozen fish		

Wildlife Adoptions

For a \$25 annual donation, you can help with the feeding, care, and shelter of one of the native wildlife housed here at the Environmental Studies Center. Not only can you adopt an animal for yourself but, you can give an adoption as a gift. Adoption benefits include: adoption certificate, photograph of your animal, fact sheet about the species, recognition of your adoption on the exhibit, and Environmental Studies Center e-Newsletter. Complete the information below and mail it to the Center with your payment. Make checks payable to the Environmental Studies Center.

Animal Adoption

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____

Zip Code: _____ Phone: _____

Email Address: _____

Please choose one: ___ Raccoon ___ Deer ___ Pelican ___ Seagull ___ Alligator

___ Barn Owl ___ Canada Goose ___ Black Vulture ___ Turkey ___ Coyote

___ Red-Tail Hawk ___ Bald Eagle ___ Brown Pelican ___ White Pelican ___ Screech Owl

___ Barred Owl ___ Great-Horned Owl ___ Great Blue Heron ___ Other: _____



Decline of the Monarch

If you've paid attention to butterflies, then you've probably seen monarchs migrating to Mexico around the month of October. Unfortunately, their numbers have been decreasing over the last decade or so. According to the Xerces Society and The Center for Biological Diversity, monarchs may have reached the threshold in which they go extinct.

About 99% of all monarchs migrate to a group of mountains in Mexico. The other 1% are found west of the Rockies and overwinter in California. For Mexico, the yearly count shows a 53% population decrease than the previous year. In terms of acreage, that's a decline from about 7 acres to 2.83 acres. That's well below the 15 acres scientists believe is the extinction threshold. In California, the population dropped from 30,000 monarchs in the last 2 years to a staggering 1,800 in 2020. This represents a 99.9% decline in their population since 2010.

As with many pollinators, there's no single factor leading to their decline. One factor that has negatively affected monarchs is pesticides and herbicides. Milkweed, which is crucial to larval development, contained pesticide residue in all samples tested. Also contributing to the decline is the loss of habitat, climate change, and wildfires. There is a push for better land management and restoration, but it may be too late.

There are several things we can do to help. First, we can plant native milkweed and nectar producing plants. There are numerous resources found on the internet that can help you identify the proper plants. You can also protect existing habitat. This may include areas with existing milkweed and other critical plants. Lastly and probably most important is to reduce or eliminate the use of pesticides. If you are using pesticides be sure to follow the directions on the label. Remember though, it's not just the monarchs that are affected but other pollinators as well.



Sparse clusters of monarchs in fall 2020 at Pismo State Beach, usually the largest overwintering site in California. (Photo: Sarah Sindel, California State Parks.)

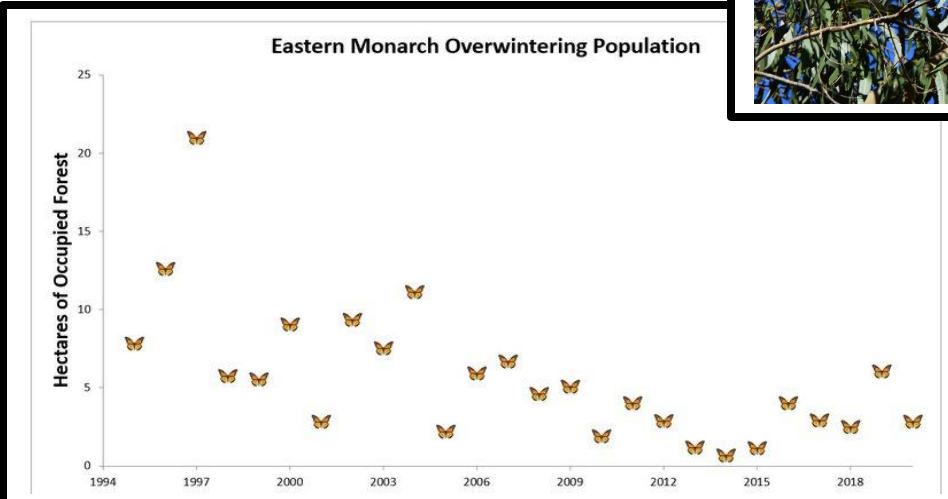


Chart by Tierra Curry. [Image is available for media use.](#)

Reflections from the ESC....

Here at the Environmental Studies Center, when life gave us lemons, we grabbed some sugar and ice water and got busy. When you visit now, you may notice some things look a bit different. We miss our students terribly; however, the quieter grounds have allowed us to make structural improvements which would have been difficult if we had students each day. Instead, our educators rolled up their sleeves and went beyond their call of duty to become construction workers and landscape artists.

We received two grants from The Gulf Coast RC&D Council to improve the amphitheater and add a new boardwalk structure near the gum pond. We were also able to hire Southern Edge Lawncare and Landscaping to install a decorative rain garden that will reduce erosion issues near the lake. With a grant from the Turner Foundation, we reconfigured our pollinator gardens to make them more accessible to students and easier to maintain.

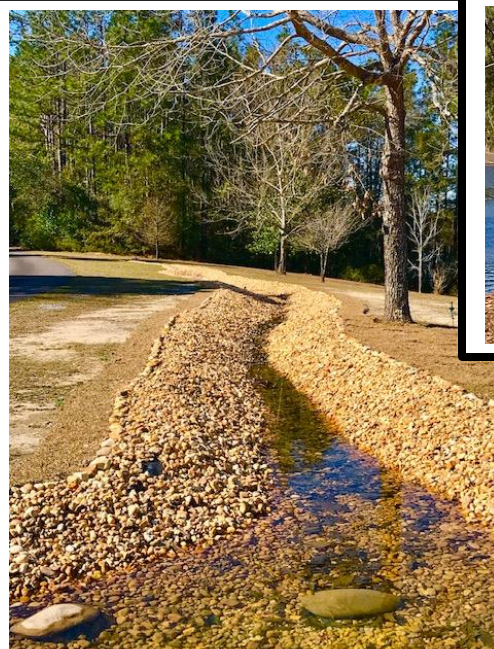
An active hurricane season caused some damage to the property. As a result, we removed a damaged tree that was unsafe and cleared problematic limbs. We also burned our pitcher plant bog to assist in a healthy rejuvenation, and the Eagle Scouts helped us replace the boards on the boardwalk there.

One of our biggest blessings is volunteer Gordon Burch who single-handedly cleared the perimeter of the lake, making for a much prettier view. The new benches and picnic tables built by the Eagle Scouts add a great spot to eat lunch.

The 2020-2021 school year has been an interesting one to say the least. Learning has gone virtual in many cases, and the students who are in a classroom are doing so with a new mindset. The ESC has not been spared. As of printing this newsletter, our doors remain closed to the public. Our outdoor areas, however, are open and ready for visitors. Come see us and what we have improved for you. We look forward to your visit.

We can complain because rose bushes have thorns or rejoice because thorns have roses. - Alphonse Karr

*Dr. Tracy H. Jay
Academic Supervisor*



Art Contest

The annual student art contest winners were announced during the fall semester.

Winners are as follows:

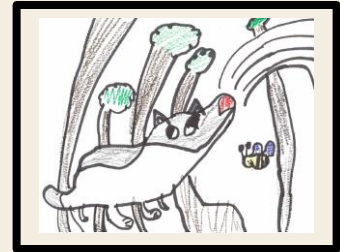
K ~ 3rd Grade
Division



1st Place
Daniel Taylor
Williams Elementary



2nd Place
Isaac Whisenant
Shepard Elementary



3rd Place
Sawyer Calderone
Austin Elementary

4th ~ 5th Grade
Division



1st Place
Brady Whisenant
Shepard Elementary



2nd Place
Marley Conner
Old Shell Rd Magnet



3rd Place
Rosalie Miller
Shepard Elementary

6th ~ 8th Grade
Division



1st Place
Harmony Barnette
Dunbar Magnet



2nd Place
Czarina Gomes
Dunbar Magnet



3rd Place
Naomi Peavy
Dunbar Magnet

9th ~ 12th Grade
Division



1st Place
Sara Tillman
Theodore High



2nd Place
Audrey Brown
Davidson High



3rd Place
Layna Estes
Theodore High

Recent Eagle Scout Projects



We want to thank Blake Adams and Brian Feng for choosing the Environmental Studies Center to carry out their Eagle Scout service projects. Blake Adams replaced the boards on the deck in our pitcher plant bog. Brian Feng built 3 benches and 2 picnic tables that we placed near our lake. The view from them is beautiful.

An Eagle Scout project involves a lot of work for the Boy Scout in charge of it. This includes getting funds for the supplies needed and organizing the people helping him complete his project. We appreciate the time that the Boy Scouts put into their projects. Thanks again!



Recent Patients

Common Tern

The common tern was found on the beach after Hurricane Delta hit. The bird was thin and weak but after a week of care it was able to be released.



Black Tern

A victim of Hurricane Marco, this patient came to the Center exhausted and starved. It was blown to shore by the hurricane and because of the weather it had not eaten for a few days. It had no injuries, so it just needed some time to recuperate and eat. It was released a week later.

Limpkin

This is a bird that is very rare in Alabama and is more commonly found in Florida. It was found near Mobile Bay in the Brookley area of Mobile. It came to the Center emaciated and very weak and lethargic. We are not sure what happened to it because it had no visible injuries. Unfortunately, after 4 days of care, it passed away.



Black Burnian Warbler

This patient came to the Center after it hit a window. Fortunately, the warbler was just stunned and after a night of rest and food it was released.

Patients in 2020

BIRDS

Common Name	Total Number Rec'd	Common Name	Total Number Rec'd
Acadian Flycatcher	1	Mallard	4
American Coot	2	Mississippi Kite	2
American Crow	2	Mourning Dove	19
American Kestrel	2	Northern Cardinal	22
American Robin	4	Northern Mockingbird	14
Band-rumped Petrel	1	Osprey	5
Bald Eagle	1	Purple Martin	1
Barn Owl	3	Red-bellied Woodpecker	11
Barn Swallow	1	Red-eyed Vireo	2
Barred Owl	8	Red-shouldered Hawk	3
Belted Kingfisher	1	Red-tailed Hawk	11
Black Skimmer	1	Red-winged Blackbird	2
Black Tern	2	Royal Tern	3
Black-bellied Whistling Duck	1	Ruby-throated Hummingbird	5
Blackburnian Warbler	1	Rusty Blackbird	1
Blue Jay	10	Sanderling	1
Broad-winged Hawk	5	Sooty Tern	4
Brown Pelican	35	Sora	1
Brown Thrasher	4	Summer Tanager	1
Canada Goose	1	Tufted Titmouse	2
Carolina Chickadee	1	Virginia Rail	2
Carolina Wren	20	White-winged Dove	1
Chimney Swift	8	Wood Duck	8
Chuck-will's-widow	2	Wood Thrush	3
Common Grackle	2	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	1
Common Ground Dove	1	Yellow-billed Cuckoo	1
Common Loon	3	Yellow-rumped Warbler	3
Common Tern	5	Non-Migratory Birds	16
Common Yellowthroat	2	Bird Total	337
Cooper's Hawk	7		
Downy Woodpecker	2	MAMMALS	
Eastern Bluebird	12	Common Name	Total Number Rec'd
Eastern Phoebe	1	Armadillo	1
Eastern Screech Owl	4	Cottontail Rabbit	15
Eastern Towhee	1	Opossum	129
Great Blue Heron	2	Mammal Total	145
Great Crested Flycatcher	2		
Great Horned Owl	4	REPTILES	
Herring Gull	1	Common Name	Total Number Rec'd
House Finch	4	Aquatic Turtles	12
House Wren	1	Box Turtle	57
Laughing Gull	33	Gopher Tortoise	1
Limpkin	1	Reptile Total	70

GRAND TOTAL

552

Thank You Boots!

A donation was made in honor of our volunteer, Boots Connolly. The money will be used to support the care of our exhibit pelicans. Boots has been a volunteer at the Environmental Studies Center since August of 2007. She volunteers on Thursday morning and on Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's day. Boots is our oldest volunteer at age 86! She is a faithful volunteer and a true joy to be around. Thank you Boots for all that you have done for the Center! We also want to thank the person who made the donation, but they wish to remain anonymous.



Photography is fun!



Photography Contest

Sponsored by The Environmental Studies Center and
Calagaz Photo and Digital Imaging



The contest is open to amateur photographers grades K-12 from any school in Mobile County including public, private, and home schools.

Photography Contest Theme:

Wild Mobile- including sunsets, landscapes, cloud formations, ecosystems, beach, ponds, bugs, songbirds, wildflowers, trees, and foliage. (Please do not include domestic animals in your photos).

Grade Divisions:

Grades K-2 Grades 3-5 Grades 6-8 Grades 9-12

The 1st place winner from each grade division will receive an ESC T-shirt.

Rules:

1. Entries must be delivered in person to the Environmental Studies Center by March 31st.
2. All photos must have been taken within the last 15 months.
3. Entries must be an 8 X 10 color glossy print with an index card label attached with photographer's name, grade level, school, along with a phone number and email. Each student can receive one free 8 X 10 glossy color print from Calagaz Photo in Mobile, AL.
4. Judges will make selection based on quality, composition, originality, creativity, and general appeal.
5. The photographs will be property of the Environmental Studies Center and will not be returned to the photographer.

Winners will be announced on the Environmental Studies Center Facebook Page.

The photographs will be displayed at the Environmental Studies Center.



Environmental
STUDIES CENTER

Our Address: 6101 Girby Road Mobile, AL 36693



Mobile County
PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Contact us at 251-221-5000
www.mcpsesc.com

Come Visit Us...

Open Monday-Friday 8:00 am – 4:00 pm

Individual admission: \$3 per person

Group Tours: Reservations required – Call 251-221-5000 for pricing and availability



The Environmental Studies Center is a natural sciences education facility designed to provide unique learning experiences. In addition, wildlife rehabilitation plays a vital role each day here at the Center. With over 500 acres of rich woodlands, the Center affords teachers, students, and the general public an opportunity to experience firsthand the natural environment. Natural resources include pine and bay forests, swamps, freshwater streams, carnivorous plant bog, and a twenty-acre lake.

Man-made resources include numerous nature trails, covered pavilions, live animal exhibits, butterfly garden, and native plant garden. Indoor facilities include an auditorium, gift shop, and classroom containing live reptile exhibits, a saltwater aquarium, and numerous preserved specimens native to Alabama.

The Environmental Studies Center houses a wildlife rehabilitation program that is dedicated to the care and potential release of injured and orphaned native wildlife. The wildlife rehabilitation program receives around 800 wild patients a year. These animals all need food, care, and shelter to survive. The program relies upon donations from people like you for its operation and success.



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Sea Grant
Mississippi-Alabama