



Skimmer

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The Francis M. Weston Audubon Society

Where there's a Will there's a Way Favorite Birding Spots are Revisited

By Lucy Duncan

I feel just like a kid in a candy store. Let me tell you why. Without a boat, Ft. Pickens—our favorite birding locale—has been beyond reach without a long, sandy hike. My husband Bob and I have looked forlornly across the three miles of Pensacola Bay to see the enticing stretch of beach leading to the picnic area, Battery Langdon, the bike trail, and without a doubt, to birds both rare and exotic. We could almost see them in our imaginations. But how could we get there?

Enter the bicycle. From the entrance to Ft. Pickens we now bike and walk to the two big black asphalt piles and tidal ponds along the defunct road. Stretching for several hundred feet in all directions, bits and pieces of broken roadway punctuate the white sand, forming a black and white textured moonscape. Here where the storm tides cut through the island are three low tidal flats, teeming with gulls, terns, and shorebirds. Here clouds of terns rise in unison as a Merlin swoops by. Here are several dozen Snowy Plovers hidden amongst the rubble. Here gray chunks in the sand turn into sleeping Willets and Sanderlings. One minute, sandpipers are there, then they're displaced by dowitchers, soon replaced by rowdy, dancing Snowy Egrets. Amazingly, other shorebirds love the top of the big asphalt pile.

The tidal pond shallows sport dozens of sand dollars in the three-toed shorebird tracks. Dragonflies zig-zag down the island along with migrating butterflies. But most exquisite is the vast and undulating beach, solitary and silent but for cresting waves. Nourished by mineral-laden storm tides, the sea oats have reclaimed the beach waving a thick, fringed blanket of gold. For miles there's the glittering white sand crisply outlined by the blues and Van Gogh greens of the gulf—the colors of our coast.

Another special place is inland—a little-used trail through the Naval Live Oaks. This trail wends through large coastal

oaks bordering Brown's Pond, then opens into a vast pine savannah. You can find migrants and resident birds, or along the pond, a Purple Gallinule, a lone heron or egret, or occasional Wood Ducks. Beyond the pond, the longleaf and slash pines tower above amber grasses and palmettos. Many pines still bear the scars of the turpentine trade—V-shaped hatch marks that once drained rosin into tin boxes. An abandoned Red-cockaded Woodpecker nest is a reminder of the colony that once yielded the day's final tally when Francis Weston led the Christmas Bird Counts.

Your own backyard might be your favorite birding spot, or it could be a woodlot or local park delighting you with Nature's diversity. A weedy patch, a power line right of way, or your backyard birdfeeder or pond can yield birding surprises. Fall is here. The migrants indeed provide the season's 'candy store.' It's time to dust off the binoculars, if you ever put them away.

Ivory-billed Woodpeckers in
Northwest Florida...

No kidding.

See page 6, Great News!

Field Trips

Saturday, October 14

Ft. Morgan & Bon Secour Birding.

Morris Clark will lead us to look for migrants at one of the best places along the upper gulf coast. We will spend some time at the Sargent's bird banding station. Expect some moderate walking in sand. Bring a picnic lunch and drinks for the day. Insect repellent is always a good idea. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the Winn-Dixie parking lot located on the east side of Navy Blvd. in Warrington. We will return by mid-afternoon.

Saturday, October 28

Perdido Key Unit of Gulf Islands National Seashore Native Plants. *James Burkhalter* will lead us along the park's newly constructed boardwalk in search of fall wildflowers and native plants. Expect easy walking. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the Winn-Dixie parking lot located on the east side of Navy Blvd. in Warrington. We will finish by noon.

Saturday, November 11

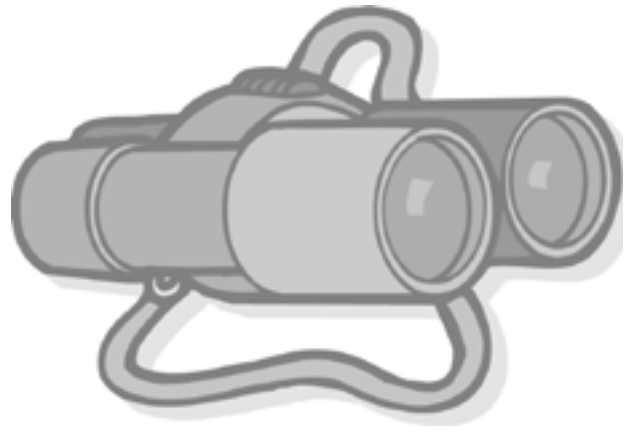
Solutia Wildlife Refuge Birding

Meet at 8:00 a.m. in the parking lot of Solutia's recreation area located left of the entrance road before reaching the main gate on Chemstrand Road. **Sharhonda Owens** and **Morris Clark** will lead us through the Solutia Wildlife Refuge. Expect some moderate walking. Long pants and closed toe shoes are required. Since all transportation within the refuge will be in vehicles provided by Solutia, we must know the number of participants. So, please pre-register by calling Morris Clark at 968-5498 before Wednesday, November 8th and leaving your name, phone number and number of participants in your party. We will finish by noon. There is a nice picnic area available for those who wish to bring a lunch.

Saturday, December 9

Mobile Bay and Causeway Birding

Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the Albertson's parking lot on the corner of Nine Mile road and Pine Forest Road. We plan to eat lunch at a restaurant, and return by early afternoon.



Chapter Meetings

Pensacola Junior College, Main Campus, 7:00 p.m.
Baroco Science Center, Room 2142.

Thursday, October 26

Invite the Birds for Breakfast: Here's What Native Plants to Serve. A combined address to our members and the local chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society by *Karina Veaudry*, the new Executive Director of FNPS.

Thursday, November 30

The Nature Conservancy Presence in Northwest Florida, presented by *Vernon Compton*, Project Director, The Nature Conservancy.

Board of Directors' Meetings

November 2 and December 7, 7 p.m.

(Open to all members) Baskerville-Donovan building, 449 West Main Street, Pensacola.

Other Events

October 7-21, bird banding at Ft. Morgan.

Open to visitors daily.

October 9-22 Alabama Coastal BirdFest

See page 6 for details.

Saturday, October 7 and November 11, 8 a.m.

Hyatt Center Volunteer Day

Regional conservation, nature events, volunteer days, and committee meeting dates can be found online at www.fmwardubon.org/ <<http://www.fmwardubon.org/>> . Select Calendar of Events for details.

Message from the President.....Annelise Reunert

Our chapter is dedicated to educating the next generation of environmentalists. We say so, and we put our money and our efforts into it with Audubon Adventures, Birdathons, Kids Kollege and a sustained commitment to the Hyatt Environmental Center.

Does it make a difference for the children in our community? You bet. Inspired by a visit to the Hyatt Center, students in Mrs. Hassebrock's PATS class (Primary School Academically Talented Students) from Bratt Elementary decided to launch a fund raiser for the chapter. The children involved the whole school by using frequent science reports to remind all students of the purpose of the fund raiser. The kids researched wildlife and nature subjects and broadcast their findings with reminders to support the project over the school's public address system. Art classes sold their

paintings of birds and wildlife to parents and teachers at silent auctions, and young solicitors collected and counted all the contributions. The total came to the astounding amount of \$793.51.

At a ceremony in early September, Peggy Baker and Annelise Reunert presented the school with an Audubon print of Eastern Screech Owls as our way to thank the students, staff and families. At a celebration in the school's cafeteria, we discussed owls with a large group of interested kids and listened to a recorded screech owl call many, many times. We hung the picture in the entrance hall for all to see, and Peggy set a date for the Birdathon for the school.

Audubon of Florida's state office provided the owl print. We can't think of more generous supporters of the Hyatt Center than the students, staff and parents of Bratt Elementary School— Thank you to them all.



Bratt Elementary School students Shelby Comalander, Korbin Bryan and Morgan Ward with their paintings used to raise money for the Hyatt Environmental Center.



PATS Teacher, Mrs. Hassebrock, with students Allen Henderson, Dale Brown, Anna Donald and Bradley Van Belt.

EDUCATION *by PEGGY BAKER and JIM BRADY*

For the next several issues, this column will be a joint report from Peggy Baker, Education Committee Chair, and Jim Brady, Center Committee Chair.

The Education Committee thank those of you who have chosen to support one or more Audubon Adventures classrooms for the current school year. We invite undecided Chapter members to consider adopting a classroom so we can make a consolidated order for materials.

The Center Committee is delighted to report the hiring of two naturalist/educators, Lynn Bossong, and Paige Bates, (see bios separately) and the implementation of Phase I of our grant. This grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and funded by Gulf Power, The Southern Company, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service, is intended to develop a new 5th grade curriculum for the Hyatt Center programs, and to target 2nd and 5th grade classes at 10 designated elementary schools in Escambia County. To do the latter, our naturalists will conduct pre-and post-field trip visits to each class that schedules a field trip to the Center.

We will also provide each school with a birdfeeder and a year's supply of birdseed. The chapter naturalists have worked with Molly O'Connor, the RHEC teacher on special assignment, to develop the curriculum and the content of the pre- and post-field trip visits. We have purchased a laptop computer, color printer, and projector for their use in conducting the school visits as well as touting the grant project to the community.

The first target school, Hallmark Elementary School, is scheduled to visit the Hyatt Center in early October, which will mark the beginning of Phase II, classroom pre-visits and field trips. Our member, Mary Newman, has volunteered to be the chapter sponsor of Hallmark, and will be accompanying Lynn and Paige on their visits to the classrooms.

In our next issue, we will tell you about other activities we will be conducting under the grant. In the meantime, chapter members with a few spare hours each week might consider adopting a target school and assisting our naturalists in this exciting project. Call me, Jim Brady, at 456-5083 or RHEC at 937-2117 to learn more about this opportunity.



F I E L D M N O T E S

by Bob Duncan

■ **Fall migration is in full swing!** Southbound migrants are pouring in behind each advancing front. October will be here soon, my favorite birding month when cool, dry air brings with it lots of birds. Late September and October are good months to look for vagrants from the western U. S. Many first area and state records have been found in this month. **Scissor-tailed Flycatchers** and **Western Kingbirds** are on the move and may be found on wires and exposed perches at our migrant traps. Fort Morgan and Dauphin Island beckon us to visit. Birds flying south all night arrive along the coast in early morning, so plan your trips accordingly and get to the migrant traps early to reap the rewards.

■ **A cold front penetrated the area on September 14.** Though weak with only light northerly winds behind it, it did bring migrants to Gulf Breeze. Lucy and I tallied 22 neotropical migrants on 15 September including **Red-eyed, Yellow-throated, White-eyed** and **Blue-headed Vireos** and ten species of warblers, including **Blue-winged, Prairie, Chestnut-sided, Magnolia** and lots of **Baltimore Orioles** feeding on our shrimp plants.

■ **The tidal flats at Ft. Pickens** continue to produce great numbers of terns, **gulls and shorebirds**. In September, thousands of **Black Terns**, along with lesser numbers of **Least, Sandwich, Royal, Common** and **Forster's Terns** could be seen along with **Snowy Egrets**, a **Tricolored Heron** and a rare **Reddish Egret**. **Black Skimmers** loaf on the beach. A **Great White Heron*** found there by Peggy Baker and Jane Crittenden 4 September continues as of this writing (27 September). This is the white morph of the Great Blue Heron that strayed from the Florida Keys. As of this writing and six trips later. Lucy and I have recorded 23 species of shorebirds, including three rare ones, **Buff-breasted Sandpiper*** (four trips), **Baird's Sandpiper*** (two trips) and **Wilson's Phalarope*** (two trips). A trip to the Ft. Pickens tidal flats 8 September yielded Betsy Tetlow, Linda Bogiages and the Duncans a rare **Baird's Sandpiper**.* Very encouraging were the large numbers of **Least Tern** juveniles, an indication of a great nesting season on the now partly inaccessible island. Also encouraging were the number of endangered **Snowy Plovers**, both adults and juveniles with a maximum of 28 one morning. Peggy Baker and Jane Crittenden's walk

to the Ft. Pickens tidal flats yielded four **American Avocets**, a **Wilson's Plover*** and a **Marbled Godwit** 4 September as well as the **Great White Heron**.* On a productive walk to the Ft. Pickens tidal flats on 16 September, Lynn and Jay Gould and Ann Ziccardi found two **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** and an assortment of other shorebirds.

■ Other Sightings

Bernice Gilley's report of young **Nutmeg Mannikins** in her east Pensacola yard on 20 August indicates this escaped exotic is alive and well in the area. An amazing count of 55 **Burrowing Owls** by Lenny Fenimore at site B-70, Eglin AFB indicates its continued local breeding success. On 26 August, Powers and Rosann McLeod watched a **Great Horned Owl** create pandemonium with other birds at their east Pensacola home. An **Olive-sided Flycatcher*** made an appearance in our neighborhood on 1 September. It's always found on the tallest exposed perch sometimes using the same perch year after year. With so many exposed perches around, it took a little effort to find the bird this fall. Late August and early September are the parameters for finding this bird, and Gulf Breeze is known throughout the state as the only location where a birder can reliably expect to add this bird to a state or life list. A **Rufous Hummingbird** 2 September in Jerry French's yard in Gulf Breeze was rare and early. Not seen in the area in over twenty years, I found a **Bell's Vireo*** in an undeveloped lot in my neighborhood on 13 September. This was the eastern race of a species that is in sharp decline in the eastern U. S. The Duncans and Betsy Tetlow spotted a rare and declining in numbers **Cerulean Warbler** at Ft. Morgan on 14 September along with nine other species of warblers. A **Western Kingbird** made a brief appearance near our Gulf Breeze home on 15 September.

The Skimmer welcomes reports of noteworthy birds. If you have something to report, please call Bob or Lucy Duncan at 932-4792.

* **Species with asterisks require documentation so that they may be processed to become part of the ornithological record.**

CONSERVATION

by Alice Harris

Conservationists have long supported and argued for “wildlife corridors” to connect large preserved patches of land. It has been hoped and believed that such corridors would benefit animals because they could move safely between the larger preserves, and maintain genetic diversity. In many places, such corridors of relatively long and narrow protected lands now connect significantly larger patches of preserved habitat. Some corridors are planned on a very large scale, such as the 1800-mile long corridor that links Yellowstone National Park to the Yukon Territory.

While the idea has been implemented in many places, there is little hard data to back up the rather intuitive idea that these corridors make sense. Some in the conservation community have speculated that relatively narrow corridors might actually result in increased wildlife mortality, with the corridors exposing animals to threats from dogs, traffic, or other hazards along the way.

Scientists have completed a relatively large and long-term experimental study of these corridors, and the results are encouraging. The five-year long study showed that when patches of open habitat in South Carolina pine forests were connected by corridors, plant diversity in those patches was about 20 percent greater compared to similar patches of habitat that remained

isolated, i.e. not connected by corridors. At the start of the five-year period, plant diversity in all the study patches was similar. As time went by, the patches not connected to others by corridors gradually lost species compared to those that were connected. By a mechanism not fully understood, the corridors contributed to plant diversity in the areas connected by corridors.

The study also showed that native plants, but not exotics, benefited from the presence of the corridors. The presence of exotics was not correlated to whether the plots were connected by corridors. It appears that exotic species are so good at distributing themselves that corridors did not improve that ability.

A proposed wildlife corridor here in Northwest Florida, which will benefit the Red-cockaded Woodpecker and other species, calls for broad, protected links between Eglin AFB Reservation, Blackwater River State Forest and the Apalachicola National Forest. The agreement between the Department of Defense, The Nature Conservancy and others will eventually connect isolated Red-cockaded clusters and benefit both plant and animal species. For a relatively recent press release from the Florida DEP about newly protected northwest Florida lands on the Yellow River and other places, see floridadep.com/secretary/news/2006/03/0331_02.htm.

TRIPPING— tools of the trade

by Ann Forster

Equipment-wise, birding can be as simple as a feeding tray to be watched from a kitchen window. In reality most birders love gadgets and birding gear...acquiring, using, and discussing endlessly. There are binoculars, telescopes, sound recording and playback devices, and cameras (with digital currently in the lead). Other birding addictions involve books and maps. No birder ever has enough books and unbelievable as it may seem, new improved bird books are published continuously. Almost unnoticed has been the availability of vastly improved maps, many of which are dedicated to birding routes.

When we first started birding—the first recorded date in my old Peterson is 1968—the only maps were road maps given away at service stations. There were state maps and you could order county maps from state DOTs but they were hopelessly out-of-date. The state maps were printed on such cheap paper that they fell apart long before the trip was over.

Equipment-wise, birding can be as simple as a feeding tray to be watched from a kitchen window. In reality most birders love gadgets and birding gear...acquiring, using,

In the early 1970s the American Birding Association was formed. They held their first convention in Denver. Before the meeting the president of ABA asked birder/journalist, Jim Lane, and his birder/publisher friend, Harold Holt, to do a booklet of maps to birding hot-spots around the Denver area. It was such a success that Lane birder's guides to East Texas, California, Arizona, and Florida followed. These books supplemented by park, refuge, and forest maps kept a whole generation of birders happily occupied in finding great birds. At some point in the 1980s, we saw a birder using a Texas Gazetteer and got the information and ordered one. We drove down every back road in east Texas marking our gazetteer with good shorebird fields, etc...our own “Lane” guide. Now we have gazetteers for all our favorite birding states. Best of all, many states (following the lead of Texas) have developed statewide birding trails that have wonderful maps and other information. Typical of Texas, their maps are so darn big you have to spread them on the hood of the car to read them.

Olde Sarge's used to be our source for birding maps, so when they closed we were stuck with ordering them again. Now Pensacola has a real map store that is part of a chain called MapSource at 5710 N. Davis Highway. It has lots of useful materials but, best of all, it has a huge rack of our best map friends—gazetteers.

■ **FMW Chapter recently hired two naturalist educators**, who work at the Roy Hyatt Environmental Center in partnership with the Escambia County School District. Lynn Bossong, a native of Homewood, Alabama, and a graduate of the University of Alabama, Huntsville (BS) and University of Alabama (MS) in Biology, has worked in environmental education and at nature centers in Tennessee, Alabama, Colorado, and North Carolina prior to moving to Pensacola. Paige Bates, a native Pensacolian and recent graduate of the University of Florida (BS) in Wildlife Ecology and Conservation, comes from working in 4-H youth programs at the Escambia County Extension Service. Both naturalists will be supporting the Gulf Coast Urban Education Initiative, through a grant funded by Gulf Power Company, Southern Company, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

■ **Skimmer by email.** You can save our chapter both postage and printing costs by receiving the *Skimmer* electronically. As soon as each issue is ready for mailing, it can be in your e-mailbox, in full color. To sign up, email webmaster@fmwaudubon.org. You may also sign up at this address to receive reminders of chapter meetings and functions.

Great News!



Mounted specimen of a male Ivory Billed Woodpecker (*Campephilus principalis*) courtesy of John Cancalosi/ARDEA LONDON

■ Auburn University researcher, Dr. Geoff Hill, announced the rediscovery of Ivory-billed Woodpeckers in northwest Florida, right on our own back doorstep in the Choctawhatchee River basin. Dr. Hill's September 26 announcement detailed his team's efforts to document the sightings with unquestionable photographic evidence and sound recordings, neither of which is easy with this shy and cautious bird. Stay tuned through the winter for updates on their findings, and this tantalizing hope of recovery of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker.

■ **The National Park Service issued its final 2006 Management Policies August 31.** Despite last minute lobbying by the off-road vehicle industry, the final version confirms the NPS's over-arching predominant mission of long-term conservation and preservation, and reinstates protections for park air quality, wilderness, natural quiet, and other resources.

■ Federal Judge Laporte of the U. S. District Court in San Francisco reinstated a ban on road construction on nearly a third of the National Forest system. The decision overturned a Bush administration rule requiring governors to petition the federal government to protect national forests in their states, and, it would have allowed states to build logging roads through millions of acres of publicly owned national forests.

■ **The Alabama Coastal BirdFest will be held October 19-22 in Fairhope, AL.** Visitors are invited to take part in 18 guided tours to prime birding spots along the Alabama Coastal Birding Trail, two evening dinner events with exciting speakers, and a free, day-long Bird & Conservation Expo.



Tours include coastal and inland walking tours, and boat tours on Weeks Bay, Mobile Bay, and in the Mobile/Tensaw River Delta. Visitors can expect to see a variety of shorebirds, marsh species, passerines, and raptors as well as

migratory birds. Proceeds from the BirdFest go toward preserving and protecting bird habitat on the Alabama Gulf Coast. For more information or to register for tours or evening events, please visit alabamacoastalbirdfest.com or call 251-929-0922.

■ **The Audubon Center for Birds of Prey** recently released its 300th rehabilitated Bald Eagle back to the Florida skies since 1979! This eagle is a symbol not only of our nation but of the success of the Bald Eagle recovery efforts by Audubon through education, conservation and rehabilitation. The eagle, found on the ground and unable to fly, was rescued and received emergency treatment by wildlife rehabilitator Leslie Johnson. The bird was then transferred to Audubon Center for Birds of Prey in Maitland, a nationally renowned center for eagle care. After medical treatment of his wounds and conditioning in the 100-foot flight cage, the eagle was ready for release less than one month after his rescue. Eagles and their nest sites continue to be protected by state and federal laws.

■ **Late breaking news:** The Nature Conservancy just finalized purchase of 11,313 acres on the Yellow River through the Florida Forever Project. This acquisition links Eglin AFB with Blackwater River State Forest, and the Gulf of Mexico with Conecuh National Forest in Alabama. TNC also acquired 205 acres adjacent to Whiting Field and connected to the Blackwater Heritage Trail.

So, after all the dithering these past few weeks, Pluto is no longer a real planet. Sad. The problem, as Astronomers Anonymous finally conceded, is not its puny size, but its wacky orbit. I don't know, I think it was the dumb name, right from the start.

I first learned of Pluto from a newspaper story in 1934, and mentioned it to my Aunt Hattie, who scoffed, "Pluto is a dog! And not even a real dog! Planet? Don't be ridiculous!"

The Peregrine Falcon

The Peregrine Falcon, the world's fastest bird of prey, pokes along at 30 miles per hour in level flight. In dives, or "stoops," they have been clocked at 275 mph! Peregrines are also the world's most wide-spread bird, found on every continent except Antarctica. They occur from the tundra to the Tropics, from wetlands to deserts, from maritime islands to continental forests, and from featureless plains to mountain crags. It is absent as a breeder only from the Amazon Basin, the Sahara Desert, most of the steppes of central and eastern Asia, and Antarctica. Peregrines migrate through northwest Florida, and small numbers winter here. As of late September, one has already been spotted in Gulf Breeze hanging in the stiff north wind while its prey—birds—ducked for cover. Its diet consists of birds, bats, and a few rodents.

The name Peregrine means "wanderer," and northern-nesting Peregrines are among North America's long-distance migratory species, some moving 25,000 kilometers annually. Although wanderers, they are very territorial, and are often seen in aerial chases and battles with other birds of prey. Its pointed wing tips, powerful flight, and aerial acrobatics make a stellar day for birders when one is observed.

As with most birds of prey, males are smaller than females. Male falcons are called tiercels, which means "one-third." They are one-third smaller than females. An immature Peregrine Falcon is similar to the adult, but has browner upper parts, a heavily streaked breast, and blue-gray beak, legs and feet.

Peregrines can see about eight times as far as a human. They can spot a meal up to a mile away. Each eye weighs about one ounce. If a Peregrine were the size of a human, its eyes would weigh four pounds each! Like most predators, a falcon's eyes are set toward the front of its head giving it excellent depth of field vision.

There's the problem. You start naming planets after underworld gods and see what happens? Walt Disney gets wind of it. And of the three Plutos which do you suppose winds up being the most famous? Face it, scientists have neither imagination nor style when it comes to naming things. Or deciding what is and what isn't a planet.

Or a national symbol. Ben Franklin would be sizzling. His practical choice, the turkey—based doubtless on its being the best eating bird in the world and the savior of Western pioneers—gets used instead in the naming of a bird that no one, not even a starving coyote, would so much as sniff at. Isn't 'Common' Vulture more fitting, in every sense of the word? And the plain old robin. Well, is it or isn't it? As we surely know, it isn't a robin at all, but a thrush. Adding 'American' doesn't really help (and even its generic name is offensive to some ears). Halloween Thrush? Some odd folk somewhere call it the 'migratory thrush'. Bless them. Scientists can't seem to make up their minds about anything—planets or birds. Like that kite. First it was the White-tailed Kite, then it became the Black-shouldered Kite, now it's back to White-tailed again.

Just when the embarrassment of Pluto's Disney connection had waned, here comes another dwarf 'planet' orbiting the sun—on a clearer path, larger than Pluto by half, and named for a zany TV warrior babe. So they named the rock 2003 UB 313, until they could come up with something else—which they did. Eris, goddess of Chaos and Strife. Could double for next year's hurricane too.

And as for Pluto, the whole ado about nothing could have been avoided way back in 1930 if the science guys had come up with a better name for that less than moon-sized chunk of ice and carbon, ninety-seven orbits beyond our own. A name like Voluptas, maybe. I can't see Walt Disney naming his floppy eared dog Voluptas.

