

# Skimmer

April – May, 2007  
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The Francis M. Weston Audubon Society

## Biofuels: Better but No Panacea

By Doug Larson

**W**hat would you do if you looked into the mirror and saw staring back the biggest threat to the climate, to national security, and the swelling U.S. trade deficit? Those are the threats presented by Americans' oil addiction. Are biofuels the antidote to America's oil addiction?

The surge in enthusiasm for biofuels is the latest in a trail of failed attempts to wean us off oil in the transportation sector. Remember natural gas vehicles and electric cars? Will biofuels be different? Maybe, but biofuels are not the silver bullet.

In the U.S., the most common biofuel in use today is ethanol produced from corn. Ethanol is available in blends with gasoline ranging from 10% ethanol and 90% gasoline to E85, a blend of 85% ethanol and 15% gasoline, which cannot be used in all vehicles. Biodiesel is the other biofuel. It can be manufactured from vegetable oils, animal fats, or recycled restaurant greases. Blends of 20% biodiesel with 80% petroleum diesel can generally be used in unmodified diesel engines.

Ethanol production is rapidly increasing, more than doubling between 2000 and 2005, but still accounts for less than 2% of the U.S. gasoline and diesel fuel consumption. In 2005, about 14% of the corn crop was used to produce ethanol, a percentage that is continuing to increase. The increase in ethanol production has contributed to a doubling of corn prices since 2000. Ethanol demand is driven by government incentives. Absent incentives, the wholesale cost of ethanol is equivalent to more than \$3.00/gallon of gasoline. However, the path to biofuels is not more of the same. Ethanol from corn cannot arrest America's appetite for oil.

The future of biofuels depends on the development of commercial scale plants that can convert cellulose—the leaves, stems, and stalks of plants as opposed to the fruit and seeds (e.g., corn kernels)—to ethanol. Ethanol from cellulose can have environmental benefits including reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. The Natural Resources Defense Council estimates

that successful deployment of biofuels could reduce U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by 1.7 billion tons per year—equal to more than 80 percent of transportation-related emissions and 22 percent of total emissions in 2002. Substituting switchgrass—a native perennial—for corn as the feedstock for ethanol production could reduce nitrogen runoff, reduce soil erosion, increase soil carbon levels and provide better bird habitat. Producing biofuels from forest thinning, restaurant waste oil, urban waste, and animal waste offers other environmental benefits.

Concerns over the air emission impacts from ethanol use have been much debated. That debate has focused on emissions from low blends of ethanol (e.g., 10%). Ethanol at higher concentrations provides clear air quality benefits.

The challenge is to make the transition from corn to cellulose. This will require accelerated research and development, deployment of commercial scale demonstration projects, and continued government incentives.

Given these challenges, are biofuels worth the investment? The answer is yes. But we should not wait for a biofuel fix to our oil addiction.

What else needs to be done? One technology available in the auto showroom today will immediately reduce dependence on petroleum and protect the environment—the fuel efficient vehicle. It is the sad reality that the vehicles sold today are no more efficient than those sold a quarter century ago. So when you are looking in the mirror pondering the nation's energy challenges, do you see the solution?



Larson

Doug Larson has worked on energy policy issues for 35 years and is the Executive Director of the Western Interstate Energy Board, the energy affiliate of the Western Governors' Association. The views expressed are his own.

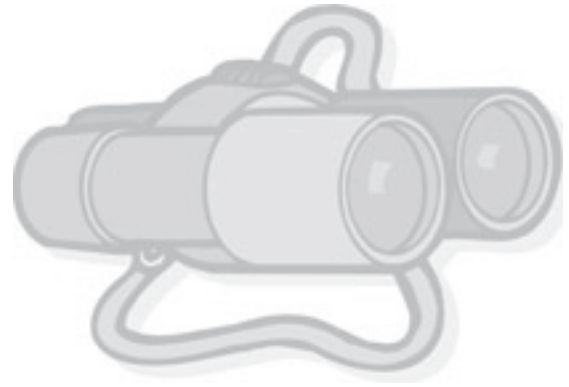
## Field Trips

**Saturday, April 14, Ft. Morgan and Bon Secour NWR Birding.** Peggy Baker will lead this trip for neotropical migrants at one of the best places along the upper gulf coast. The Sargents' bird banding station will not be in operation on this date as advertised in the Feb.-March *Skimmer*. Expect some moderate walking in sand. There will be a small admission fee at Ft. Morgan. Bring a picnic lunch and drinks for the day. Insect repellent is always a good idea. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the Big Lots parking lot on the east side of Navy Blvd. south of U.S. Highway 98. We will return by mid-afternoon.

**Saturday, April 21, Clear Creek Nature Trail Native Plants.** James Burkhalter will lead us along this delightful nature trail at NAS Whiting Field in search of native plants and spring wildflowers, including some wetland and bog species. Expect easy walking. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the northeast corner of the University Mall parking lot in front of the J.C. Penney Store or meet at 8:00 a.m. in the McDonald's parking lot on Highway 90 in Milton. We will finish by noon, and there is a nice picnic area at the entrance for those who would like to bring a lunch.

**Saturday, May 5, Blackwater River State Forest Birding.** Morris Clark will lead us to several types of habitats within the forest in search of both breeding and migrant birds. We should get good looks at Red-cockaded Woodpeckers and many other species. Expect moderate, non-strenuous walking. Bring a picnic lunch, which we will eat at one of the lakes. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the University Mall parking lot in front of the J.C. Penney store or at 8:00 a.m. in the McDonald's parking lot located on Highway 90 in Milton. We plan to return by mid-afternoon.

**Saturday, May 26, Tarkiln Bayou Preserve State Park.** James Burkhalter will lead us along the improved trail and boardwalk in search of native plants and spring wildflowers. The preserve is home to four species of endangered pitcher plants, as well as other rare and endangered plant species. Expect easy walking. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the Big Lots parking lot on the east side of Navy Blvd. south of U.S. Highway 98. We will finish by noon.



## Chapter Meetings

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

**Thursday, April 26, Lenny Fenimore will present the "Burrowing Owls of the Eglin AFB Bombing Range."** As a volunteer for over seven years, Fenimore has monitored the owls, and will share photographs and tales of this amusing and curious bird.

**Thursday, May 24, Annual membership dinner and business meeting.** Join us at the PJC Student Center off Underwood Avenue for a silent auction and drinks at 5:30 p.m., followed by the dinner meeting catered by Skopelos and program. Jerome A. Jackson, the world's foremost expert on the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, will present a second chapter in the saga, "Does the Ivory-bill Survive?" See *Tripping* for more information about our speaker.

## Board of Directors' Meetings

(Open to all members)

**April 5 and May 3, 7 p.m.** at Baskerville-Donovan building 449, West Main Street, Pensacola.

## Other Events

(Open to members and visitors)

**Saturday, March 31 – Friday, April 13,** bird banding at Ft. Morgan. Visitors welcome.

**April 21 to May 6, Birdathon Fundraiser.** See News and Views for more information.

**April 21, Earth Day celebration and displays, 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.** Bayview Community Center, Pensacola.

## Educators Excite Students

**D**uring the last year, FMWAS has employed two naturalists to implement the Gulf Coast Urban Education Initiative at the Roy Hyatt Environmental Center for Escambia County Schools. Paige Bates and Lynn Ogden tell of their year's experience.

Paige relates: As the second grade school visits begin to wind down, I'd like to take this opportunity to tell the chapter about the wonderful progress we've made with the "bird schools." All second grade pre-visits and field trips have been completed, and there are just three schools that have yet to receive their post-visits.

Lynn and I have also become recognizable figures to the second and fifth grade students in these ten schools. At O.J. Semmes last week, I had a second-grader approach me in the front office to inform me that his class was out of birdseed and needed more. At the Navy Point post-visit, before I even had a chance to greet the students, there were twenty hands in the air because they were so eager to tell me what birds they'd seen. It really is amazing to see these children light up with excitement about birds.

Lynn hears from Regis, the king snake at the Center: The excitement for the Audubon ornithology program here at Roy Hyatt Environmental Center has interrupted my winter naps. I'm Regis, reigning eastern king snake here for 14 years. It appears my new caregivers are infecting fifth- and second-graders with enthusiasm for the birds in their own schoolyards. The infection is spreading!

I heard Lynn tell about a fifth-grader she met at Lincoln Park Elementary. The girl knew Lynn from an earlier field trip with Pleasant Grove Elementary, and started animatedly talking about microscopes and looking at cells in our lab here. The girl had caught the enthusiasm. Then, on an after-school visit to O.J. Semmes Elementary to scout bird feeder locations, Lynn heard children crying, "It's the bird lady!" These students were excited about data collection on birds at the school feeder! How's a poor snake to compete with that??

**Congratulations, Paige and Lynn, for a job well done!**

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## From the Chapter President

*The Past Audubon Presidents' Council and the Board of Directors want to acknowledge and thank the many generous members of our chapter who responded so positively to our annual appeal for financial support in December. Ensuring the financial health of the chapter is of great importance since it permits continuation of our many programs.*

*Your outpouring of financial support also is taken as validation in the work we are doing at the Roy Hyatt Environmental Center, in our monthly speaker programs, in our Audubon Adventures series in local schools, in our field trips and in The Skimmer, to name just the most visible activities. We have received more than \$7,000 to support these activities for the foreseeable future. Thank you again for your show of confidence and affirmation of our efforts.* **Jim Brady**

**A**s Jim has stated, we greatly appreciate the generous support of our membership.

We cannot continue our environmental education efforts without you. The BIRDATHON fundraiser is our major effort in securing the funds to continue our very successful program at the Roy Hyatt Environmental Center. But this fundraiser is a FUN-raiser as well. Camey Hanks, our fundraising chair, has given you the particulars in News and Views, so now it is up to you. We chose April 21 to May 6, as the time for this event because the migrants should be plentiful. Just get out and go birding—how painless is that!

Ask your family, friends, dentists, doctors, insurance agents, butcher and baker to make a pledge for each species that you see. You can find information about the Hyatt Center on our web site so that you can show them the good cause for which we are working. If you want to bird the day with a team, Camey will help you find a group to join."

No excuses! You have two weeks to find JUST one day to go birding. You can find the entry form on our web site. So form a team or join a team, and get out and GO BIRDING for the Hyatt Center!

**Peggy Baker**



# F I E L D N O T E S

by Bob Duncan

Usually birding settles down for the winter after the Christmas Bird Count season. Most of the “good” birds have been found during the CBC frenzy and things get sort of boring. Not so this season!!

■ **Western Meadowlark.** On January 19th Lucy and I decided to do some birding at the catfish farms in the Walnut Hill area. It was a cold, damp, gloomy day but a change from birding our normal haunts in the coastal area enticed us to go north. I had just stepped out of the van when I heard a song I had been listening for without results for 39 years! It was like an Eastern Meadowlark’s song but hoarser in quality. YES! A Western Meadowlark! I called to Lucy who quickly got out of the van, heard the song and set up the scope on the bird. We got home and put the bird on the FloridaBirds Listserv—and by this writing, 16 March, over 30 birders from as far away as Miami have come to see and hear it and get it on their state list.

The Western Meadowlark was unknown in the state until 1955 when Burt Monroe, at the time a Navy flight student and friend of Francis Weston, took a specimen and got it on the state list. Dr. Monroe went on to become one of ornithology’s eminent scientists. Our bird was the first local record in forty years and the first for the state since 1977.

Subsequent forays to see the Western Meadowlark yielded another unexpected surprise—the presence of many **Rusty Blackbirds** in fallow peanut fields in north Escambia Co. This species was also a bonus for the south Floridians who came north. There has been much alarm recently in the literature about this species’ declining numbers but Lucy counted an encouraging 50 birds on 19 Jan. Also present were numerous **Brewer’s Blackbirds** in the same habitat, a species which normally winters farther west.

■ **Northern Wheatear.** Another exiting find was the discovery of a Northern Wheatear in a new subdivision in southern Baldwin County. It was found by John and Kay Dillon of Foley, and was the second record for Alabama. It was put on the Alabama-Birds Listserv, and birders came from far and wide to see this straggler that normally migrates from Greenland to Africa. It lingered for weeks in the same general area.

■ The northwest Florida area has been inundated with **American Robins** and **Cedar Waxwings**. We have received numerous calls about their abundance this year. They usually reach the coast about this time but as to why so many, who knows? They have been everywhere in numbers, from Tallahassee to Pensacola and from the Alabama line to the coast. There must have been millions in the Panhandle!

Another great find was a handsome, first winter **Iceland Gull** which Laura Catterton found and photographed at the Perdido Landfill on 17 Feb., probably the same bird that was present a few weeks before. This was submitted to the Florida Bird Records Committee and accepted as the state’s fifth record. Way to go Laura!

■ Heidi Moore and Brenda Francisco observed about 20 **Dark-eyed Juncos** in the Milton area on 8 Feb. This species is a rare winter visitor. Another rare winter visitor was a **Brown Creeper** Jere French saw in his Gulf Breeze yard on 11 Feb. **Boat-tailed Grackles** are fairly common east of Panama City and in the Mobile delta but hard to find in our area. A small population has existed in the Pace area around the Escambia River marshes, but there have been no reports since 1998. The Duncans found 10 males at Floridatown on 12 Feb. Anna Stalcup found some there in November, and Paul Johnson indicated he has been seeing them regularly along the fill. Very rare in winter, a female **Summer Tanager** graced Morris Clark’s yard in Pensacola 22 Jan. to 18 Feb. Between 1 and 14 March, 8 **Swallow-tailed Kites** were seen migrating through the area. The lucky observers of this graceful predator were Jan Lloyd, Merilu Rose, Powers and Rosann McLeod and Matt Shaumberger. It’s an early migrant that winters in Central and South America.

Spring migration is underway! Ft. Morgan and Dauphin Island beckon!!



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

# CONSERVATION

by Alice Harris

Roads and transportation have much been in the news lately. First came the news that the National Park Service was debating and considering whether roads on the barrier island should be rebuilt and, if so, how they should be designed. Then we read about a group that is studying ways to relieve traffic congestion on Highway 98, including building new “bypass” roads that would traverse undeveloped lands north of the more coastal Highway 98 route. What should be done?

As to Gulf Islands National Seashore, one alternative is a highly-engineered road designed to withstand future hurricanes. Some argue to simply rebuild what was there before, while recognizing that eventually a large storm will take it out again. And some suggest that this is the opportune time to go in another direction altogether. Recognizing that roads and barrier islands are irreconcilably incompatible, might there be other ways to provide beach and seashore access to the public?

Meanwhile, Ft. Pickens remains out of reach to most people as is much of Santa Rosa Island to the east of Pensacola Beach. Ferry boat operators indicate they are ready and willing to provide service here, but the administration at Gulf Islands National Seashore seems uninterested or unable to make the physical and administrative accommodations that would be

**More roads  
simply make  
more and faster  
growth possible.  
Is that what  
we want?**

needed to get ferry service to the island. Apparently, another summer will pass with no way for most people to get to most of the local beaches of the national seashore.

Of course, no one really has to get to the beach in order to accomplish the normal activities of daily life. However, Highway 98 overcrowding impacts daily lives. Many frustrating, wasteful hours are spent by those who use that route. Isn't it population growth that is the problem? If growth continues and accelerates, the transportation problem will not be solved with more roads.

Here is an idea. Don't expand Highway 98. Don't build new roads through undeveloped lands to the north. Put the now privately-owned undeveloped lands of northwest Florida, whether forested or farmed, into public ownership. Stop the growth that is choking our transportation systems and choking the (wild) life out of northwest Florida. Don't provide the opportunity for thousands of new residents to move here each year to buy a new house built on an acre or so of newly developed land.

Sure, there is money to be made through development, but is that the only way to have a good economy? If so, are we doomed to impoverishment once northwest Florida is “built out”? Or, could we perhaps enjoy a healthy economy and a healthy environment? Think about it—especially when you are sitting in that backed-up, slow-moving traffic jam.

## TRIPPING—

with our speaker  
**Jerome Jackson**

by Ann Forster

We have been eagerly anticipating our speaker, Jerome Jackson, for the May annual meeting. His area of expertise is the woodpecker family, and woodpeckers are one of our favorite groups of birds. For the most part, they are big, noisy, interesting and easy to observe. Dr. Jackson has written authoritative books on the Red-cockaded and one of extreme current interest, *In Search of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker*. His students have made contributions to our environment through work in biological research and as wildlife managers.

Now we note that he has written a biography of another influential ornithologist, George Miksch Sutton. Dr. Sutton was an ornithology professor at the University of Oklahoma for many years. His areas of expertise were the high Arctic and Mexico. His book, *At a Bend in a Mexican River*, set us on our first adventure in Mexico and that, of course, led to many visits to that wonderful destination. His descriptions of habitat and terrain are so perfect

that you have the feeling you've been there before. One of our most treasured memories was our stay in the University of Oklahoma research station in Colima. As it happened, we were assigned the George M. Sutton suite. Since there were four beds in the room, we weren't certain that we slept in his very bed but were pretty sure he had better sense than to sleep in the one which blocked the bathroom door.

Dr. Sutton was an accomplished artist and his books are beautifully illustrated. His own autobiography, *Bird Student*, is a wonderful account of his early life and adventures, and of the influences on his development as an artist. Another much sought after book is Sutton's *Mexican Birds: First Impressions*, which was a birding expedition/adventure story exciting enough to cause envy in the most casual birder. Dr. Jackson's book, *George Miksch Sutton: Artist, Scientist, and Teacher*, is to be published in May 2007. The book includes fifty reproductions of Sutton's art—twenty-eight in full color—including early, unpublished, or obscure works along with non-avian subjects. We will ask Dr. Jackson to bring books to sell at the May banquet because we have many members who are as hooked on books as they are on birds.

■ **AUDUBON YARD SALE.** We are currently accepting “gently used items” for sale at our Audubon Yard Sale (June 1 and 2, location to be announced). To donate, please contact Camey Hanks @ 554-4971 or 458-7979, or any of the Fundraising Committee members (Jim Brady, Peggy Baker, Morris Clark, Annelise Reunert, Becky Grass). Items needed are kitchen wares, linens, sporting goods, electronics, books, furniture, clothes, and home décor. Items must be in good condition and working order. Money raised will go to our education programs. Your donations and purchases at this Charity Sale help us make a major impact on environmental education.

■ **GOURMET PECAN BITS** for your feathered friends are still being sold. Birds and squirrels with discriminating taste love them! The pecan bits are sold in two lb. bags and are \$5.00 per bag. You can purchase the treats at any Audubon meeting, the Audubon Yard Sale, or by calling Camey Hanks @ 554-4971 or 458-7979.

■ **BIRDATHON!** Spring is here and it’s almost time for Birdathon fun and madness. It’s our annual Chapter fundraiser when we try to see as many species as possible in one day. To participate, create or join a team to bird any 24-hour period from April 21-May 6. Or, you can be a feeder watcher and tally yard or neighborhood birds! Ask your friends and business acquaintances to make pledges or contributions for each species you or your team see. Teams that raise the most money or see the most species will be recognized at the annual May dinner meeting. Novice teams also earn recognition for participation. More details can be found on our website. If you want to enter or join a team, contact Camey Hanks at 554-4971. Entrance forms are available on the website. This is too much fun to miss.

■ **Whooping Cranes.** Recent storms killed 17 out of 18 of this year’s Whooping Crane flock at Chassahowitzka River NWR in Florida. The cranes had been raised as part of Operation Migration, which seeks to restore self-sustaining flocks of Whooping Cranes in the wild. Previously, most of the effort had focused on building a wild flock that winters in Texas; this year the program attempted to begin a wild flock that would winter in Florida. Cranes were bred from captive parents and raised in the wild by humans in bird costumes. Last fall the cranes were led south from their breeding

grounds by an ultralight aircraft. When they led the cranes down, there was one maverick that wanted to land at a wetland north of where they were being brought by the human flight team. The other cranes followed him and they had a heck of a time getting this year’s flock to the designated pen area. Apparently when the weather got bad, the maverick got out and saved himself. It’s too bad they didn’t listen to him in the first place. We hope Operation Migration will continue to attempt to reestablish a Florida flock of this elegant and endangered crane.

## FMWAS NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Peggy Baker, Lucy Michel and Mary Newman present the following slate of officers for 2007-2008:

**Presidents’ Council:** Peggy Baker, Jim Brady, Morris Clark, Annelise Reunert  
**Treasurer:** Becky Grass

**Recording Secretary:** Jan Lloyd

**Corresponding Secretary:** Ann Forster

**Director 2007-2010:** Alice Harris

Elections will be held at the annual meeting on May 24. Nominations may be made from the floor with that person’s permission.

■ **A campaign to raise public awareness about global warming and address climate change** issues in the Gulf Coast area begins April 10, 6-8 p.m. in the Hagler Auditorium (Bldg. 2a) at PJC. “Global Warming, Local Solutions” seeks to stimulate action at the local level. All are encouraged to attend.

■ **Audubon Mountain Workshop and Young Naturalists’ Program.** Make your plans now to join family and friends for four days of fun, learning and relaxation at the Audubon Mountain Workshop, to be held May 10-13, 2007. Just when our weather gets plenty hot and the migrants have left the coast for cooler climes to the north, Alpine Camp in Mentone, Alabama, will host this Birmingham Audubon workshop at their beautiful campus on the banks of the Little River across from DeSoto State Park. For more information, email registrar@birminghamaudubon.org. To register, mailto:registrar@birminghamaudubon.org.

■ **Can you imagine birding if there were no field guides at all?** It would be more like work than fun and only a handful of academics would be involved. That is the situation in much of the world: No field guides, no birders. Where there are no birders, there are very few conservationists. That is about to change thanks to BirdLife International and Lynx Edicions. Several years ago, Lynx Edicions started publishing a vast ornithological reference work—the sixteen volume Handbook of the *Birds of the World*. Because they are also dedicated to conservation, they generously offered their artwork and expertise to this project. The ultimate goal is that “every country should have an affordable and high quality national language guide to its birds.” For more information see [www.birdlife.com](http://www.birdlife.com).

## Hitchcock Comes to Gulf Breeze

**I**t started quietly enough one late winter afternoon, with a small flock of American Goldfinches sifting through seed deposits in our wild garden. But après eux, le deluge.



photo courtesy of Jim Stevenson.

First I heard them, an eerie high-pitched twitter growing louder and louder, and then all of a sudden they were everywhere, our yaupons (*Ilex vomitorium*) thick with crimson berries now becoming bushes of birdwings, bent to the ground by the ravenous horde descending upon us. Okay, a flock of Cedar Waxwings. A very large flock I should add, at least eighty to a hundred at a time, rapidly, methodically, zealously stripping away the berries, and then pausing in the bare branches of the old hickory to rest, and to discharge a rain of purple over our deck below. Momentary periods of an eerie quiet occurred, and then another wave of birds would descend on us, and I would drop the mop and bucket, and run for cover.

In time the birds grew tired or maybe just too fat from their gluttony and, temporarily grounded, they settled on the deck to stumble around in an apparent stupor. Now and then they would stare menacingly at us through the glass doors as we crouched in the living room, wincing at every thump of wings that slapped against our upstairs windows. Remembering Hitchcock, I checked the fireplace to make certain the flue was closed.

They left at dusk, only to reappear the next morning to begin their onslaught anew, this time attacking the

Russian olives (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*) that line our garden. This is the first year we've had a decent crop of 'olives', probably the result of hurricane stress, and I wouldn't have thought them edible, but the waxwings proved me wrong—the proof coming in a hail of pits that sounded like, yes, hailstones raining loudly down from overhead branches onto my kayak hull below. Proof of a rapid rate of metabolism too.

By the third day they were reduced to scavenging the liriopie berries (*Liriope muscari*), and a strange sight it was, waxwings hopping through the shrubbery, chirping and chomping at everything, filling up for the long voyage north. And then suddenly, as if on some silent signal, off they would go again in a thunderous beating of wings, back and forth through the trees in their ceaseless quest for anything else edible.

Now they're gone, moving north, searching as they go, feeding "in amiable, noisy flocks wherever berries are ripening," National Geographic reminds us. As I sweep up the seeds and pits I'm reminded once more of nature's grand design in making certain that her many minions do their part in carrying out the ritual of dissemination and regeneration. Life's lessons are an open book after all.

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**Thursday, May 24, annual membership  
dinner and business meeting.**  
*See page 2 for details.*

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