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Dauphin Island Trip

**Jason Shepard
March 20 – March 27, 2004
Dauphin Island, Mobile Bay, Alabama**

Instructor: Dr. James Triplett

Dauphin Island Trip Journal

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Saturday, March 20 –

Our group, which consisted of 22 people, either teachers, students, or graduate students, set out from Pittsburg Kansas at approximately 8:00 Saturday for Dauphin Island, Alabama in three school vans. The trailer behind one of the larger vans had been preloaded with our equipment. Except for a few stops at gas stations for fuel (both for the vans and for the group members), we drove unhindered all of the way to Mammoth Springs Arkansas, where we stopped for lunch and to briefly observe the surrounding area. Mammoth Springs State Park is situated in the ozark region of Arkansas and is so named because of a large spring that dumps thousands of gallons per hour into the headwaters of the river. This river is frequented by trout fishermen, who can be seen up and down the river.

Soon after leaving the park, it began to get overcast and by the time we arrived in Memphis Tennessee, it was a torrential downpour. We continued to head south until we made it past the storm system and spent the night in Mississippi in Holmes County State Park. There I found a new species of centipede and found a luna moth that was released after a quick look over.

Sunday, March 21 –

We had a quick bite to eat and then left the State Park and headed for Alabama. We ate lunch on the road and arrived at Dauphin Island that afternoon. We made camp and set up our tents and then took a look around the area. Sarah McCoy, Josh Jagels, and I all set up on site #9, which was a nice space because it was in among the tree and bushes so that we were protected against the wind and the sun during the day. After setting up, I and a small group of others headed down to the beach where we got our first close look at seagulls of different species and also blue crabs that we caught off of the shore side of old tree stumps in the water. Later that night we were awed by the clarity of the stars in the sky.

Monday, March 22 –

After another quick breakfast, the entire group walked over to the estuarium across the road. The estuarium was fascinating, and very educational. We were able to answer many of the questions on our list of questions in a short amount of time and learn many new things by reading the panels on the walls. The exhibits were also very well put together and featured many interesting species such as two american alligators that were still young. After visiting the estuarium and having lunch, we split the group and some people went ~~sailing~~ while others, along with myself and the other plant taxonomy students, headed down the trails to collect plants. We did not find very many things in bloom but found a lot of plants such as the creosote bush and the pennywort. That evening after supper, we keyed fishes and were somewhat successful in keying several species correctly.

Tuesday, March 23 –

At 8:00 Sarah McCoy led a bird walk through the Audubon society bird trail where we saw a myriad of different birds. Later on in the week we learned that if we had come to dauphin island a week or two later, we would have witnessed the annual migration of the songbirds and the warblers. During this time, hundreds of birders from all over the United States and Canada come to see the incoming birds. That afternoon, we all boarded the "Verrill". The Dauphin Island Sea Lab keeps this vessel for scientific purposes and was more than happy to take us out to drag the bottom with their large net in search of new species of fish for those on the trip that are taking ichthyology. We found quite a few things, although not as much as in past trips. One of the things we found was a sea robin, which has modified spines that serve as legs to walk along the bottom of the ocean. We also found a large, old, black drum, and saw the marker where a civil war ship sunk.

Wednesday, March 24 –

This morning we had breakfast and then walked over to the historic Fort Gaines and spent the morning investigating all of the things associated with the history of the area. One of the things that was apparent was how much of an affect the salty sea air had made on all of the metal at the fort. That afternoon, we headed over to the Marine Resources Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Office and went on a trail where we saw the wedding tree, and ancient Indian burial grounds, along with

warblers flitting through the trees, and a small cottonmouth. After walking the trail the marine resources officers took us to the airport marsh to do some more saning. At the airport marsh, we found a salt marsh snake and a dead pelican skull which was light and yet amazingly strong.

Thursday, March 25 –

After breakfast, the group split and about six of us went on the ferry across the bay to Bon Secour Wilderness Area. We walked two different trails, one through the woods and the other down past the lake and the lagoon. There was not a lot of wildlife to be seen, however, we saw more than one five lined skink and a nice assortment of plant life as we walked through secondary and primary dune systems next to the beach and lagoon area. After visiting the wildlife area, we drove back to the ferry and took a look at the fort quickly, which was mostly covered by sands. Some of our group became sick on the ferry ride because they had not taken dramamine, however, I did not get sick despite the fact that I did not take any for that trip either.

Friday, March 26 – We broke camp on Friday morning and headed out from Dauphin Island. We drove across Alabama and over to New Orleans, Louisiana. On the way to New Orleans, we drove through Bayou LeBatre, which is the town from the movie Forest Gump, where bubba-gump shrimp was located.

Bird List (Not in order of sighting)

Common Grackle
Boat Tailed Grackle
Great Tailed Grackle
Red Winged Blackbird
Red Tailed Hawk (with snake)
American Robin
Killdeer
Rough Winged Swallow
Great Blue Heron
Blue Jay
European Starling
Mourning Dove
Rock Dove
Canada Goose
American Kestrel
House Sparrow
Eastern Meadowlark
Brown Headed Cowbird
Turkey Vulture
Barred Owl (Dead on side of road)
Wild Turkey
Red Bellied Woodpecker
Fish Crow
Tufted Titmouse
Black Vulture
Mississippi Kite
Northern Cardinals
Blue Jay
Carolina Wren

Dauphin Island Questions

- #1. The four rivers that the delta of Alabama drains through are the Mobile, Tensaw, Blakely, and Apalachee rivers.
- #2. The non-native bivalve that threatens to help eliminate threatened species is the Zebra Mussel.
- #3. This non-native species is so successful because there are no natural predators.
- #4. SMZ stands for Streamside Management Zones.
- #5. Three ecologically important aspects of Streamside Management Zones are that they filter surfaces and subsurface waters, maintain a large diversity of plants and animals, as well as prevent erosion.
- #6. The major rivers that drain into Mobile Bay are the Mobile, Tensaw, Warrior and Tombsbee.
- #7. A jubilee is when a lack of oxygen occurs, and forces thousands of animals to crawl towards the beach.
- #8. Sand dunes are formed on barrier islands by the wind piling sand, which has previously been stabilized by plants.
- #9. Five species of plants characteristic of sand dunes are *Panicum amarulum*, *Cakile constricta*, *Hydrocotyle bonariensis*, *Uniola paniculata*, and *Ipomea stolonifera*.
- #10. Swamps and Marshes are similar in that they are covered in a thin layer of water full of decaying plant matter.
- #11. The characteristic that allows plants, such as *Batis*, to tolerate high salt concentrations in the soil is the production of potassium to counteract the high sodium level.
- #12. Savannas differ from Midwestern prairies because interspersed in the savanna area are species of pine whereas in natural midwestern prairies there are small oaks that occur interspersed.
- #13. 5 Herbaceous plants that are common to both the gulf coastal region and Kansas are: Spiderwort, Dewberry, Dandelion, *Lamium*, and Wild Onion.
- #14. Estuaries are important to humans because they act as a living filter and provide an abundant food source.
- #15. 8 woody plants that are characteristic to both of the coastal region and Kansas are the oak, pine, cedar, magnolia, and chestnut trees along with the redbud, pawpaw, and sassafras.
- #16. 5 birds that are characteristic of the gulf shoreline are the greater and lesser yellowlegs, dowitchers, willets, pelicans,
- #17. 5 Invertebrates characteristic of the gulf region are the Lightning Whelk, Calico scallop, Conch, Spiny Jewelbox, and the Pen.
- #18. Marshes may smell like rotten eggs because dead plant matter gives off fumes of prosopteris as it rots.
- #19. 8 animals, mammals and birds that are common to both the gulf coastal region and Kansas are the Horned Owl, Great Blue Heron, Bald Eagles, White Pelican, Pileated Woodpecker, Raccoon, Squirrel, and Cardinal.
- #20. The adverse effects of bulkheads are that they reflect wave energy causing removal of beach and deepening of water, which speeds up the removal of plants and sediments.