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GEORGIA COAST HOSTING 6th ANNUAL BIRDING & NATURE FESTIVAL

In the fall the Georgia coast is positively throbbing with thousands of feeding birds, butterflies and other unique coastal wildlife. We invite you to experience this spectacle in the company of other beach-loving outdoor enthusiasts, expected to flock again to Georgia's Colonial Coast Birding & Nature Festival held on Jekyll Island October 9-13, 2008. The sixth annual festival offers a variety of entertainment and educational activities including a keynote speech by Pete Dunne, internationally renowned birdwatcher and author of numerous birding guides. On Saturday, October 11, a FREE Nature Day event is planned for youngsters and families. Nineteen seminars and 53 field trips will highlight coastal Georgia's abundant natural beauty and wildlife. The Jekyll Island Convention Center will serve as the hub for festival activities, and field trip excursions will include many of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) Colonial Coast Birding Trail sites.

"The Birding Trail provides excellent places for birding and cultural exploration," said Jim Ozier, DNR's Program Manager for the Wildlife Resources Division – Nongame Conservation Section. "This festival will offer first time and repeat visitors to Georgia's coast a myriad of opportunities to see amazing bird life and other natural resources."

Throughout the weekend, festival-goers, young and old, will have the opportunity to enjoy FREE beginner birding field trips; beach and marsh walks; live reptile displays; and special presentations on topics such as animal tracking. Seminars will also be offered by some of the Southeast's foremost naturalists and will include topics ranging from gardening for wildlife to basic nature photography.

Festival participants will be able to learn more about Georgia's magnificent coastline at "The Rookery," an interactive exhibit center located in the Jekyll Island Convention Center's Atlantic Hall. Georgia's coastal environment will be showcased at information stations hosted by authors, artists, and conservation-based organizations. Experts will be on hand to help with the selection of birding binoculars, scopes, high tech birding equipment, birdfeeders, bat and bird houses, as well as guidebooks for wildlife identification. On Saturday afternoon in The Rookery, master falconer Steve Hein will present two live raptor shows (noon and 5:00 P.M.) starring a collection of hawks, falcons, and owls from Georgia Southern University's Center for Wildlife Education and Lamar Q. Ball Raptor Center. All Rookery activities are free and open to the public.

The festival features trips to outstanding natural areas such as Little St. Simons Island, the Altamaha Waterfowl Management Area, St. Catherine's Island, and four National Wildlife Refuges (Blackbeard Island, Harris Neck, Okefenokee, and Wassaw). A unique four-hour journey through tidal creeks and St. Simons Sound by shrimp boat will conclude with a Wild Georgia Shrimp Boil lunch. Guided by expert naturalists, field trippers will visit diverse habitats such as longleaf pine forests, barrier island beaches, and tidal freshwater marshes in search of birds ranging from the endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker to the elusive Sora. Several

kayak trips will offer the chance to spy on secretive rails and the endangered Wood Stork. Beach excursions may provide sightings of flocks of shorebirds and possibly close views of the endangered Piping Plover.

“Sites along Georgia’s coast are recognized internationally as important bird areas,” said festival director Lydia Thompson. “This festival will give birders of all skill levels a chance to visit unique habitats and observe a wide variety of coastal birds and other wildlife.”

The festival’s keynote speaker, Pete Dunne, is expected to draw the largest crowds to his Saturday evening program (October 11, 6:45 – 9:00 P.M.) when he will recount “Twenty Five Things That Changed Birding.” He will reflect upon institutions, ideas, initiatives, and products that changed birding, making it one of the most popular wildlife-oriented activities in the country today. Pete Dunne is a field birder with an international reputation. He has served on the board of the American Birding Association and the Roger Tory Peterson Institute, and is the director of the famed Cape May (New Jersey) Bird Observatory. An authority on the optical needs of birders, Dunne has served as a marketing and product advisor to Nikon, Zeiss, Leica, Swarovski Optik, and Bausch and Lomb. Among the books he has authored are *The Wind Masters*, *Hawks in Flight*, and *The Essential Field Guide Companion*. In addition, Dunne contributes to publications such as *Birding*, *Bird Watcher’s Digest*, *Birder’s World*, *American Birds*, and *Living Bird*. The Dunne keynote address will follow a dinner catered at the Jekyll Island Convention Center (tickets required).

The 2008 festival organizers include the Coastal Georgia Audubon Society, the Georgia Ornithological Society, Jekyll Island-Georgia’s Jewel, Wild Birds Unlimited of Jekyll Island, Ogeechee Audubon Society, Georgia Department of Natural Resources-Wildlife Resources Division, and the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

If you’re thinking, “Just tell me how to sign up already!” Registration for the festival begins on Saturday, August 23 at 9:00 A.M. (EST) and ends on September 22. To register for festival field trips and seminars, or for more detailed information, visit the festival website at www.coastalgeorgiabirding.org or call 1-877-4JEKYLL.

