

# Bird-watching intrigues kids

## Fourth-graders visit wildlife refuge

By Marci Elliott

DEMOCRAT STAFF WRITER

Alex Haywood didn't know much about birds before a special project began at his school.

Now the fourth-grader has learned a lot about the feathered critters — and looks forward to learning more.

"I like the bird project because ... now I am having a terrific time learning about different birds, their habitats and what they eat," said Alex, a fourth-grader at Ruediger Elementary School. "Last time we went to the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, we got to see a bald eagle in its nest."

Alex was one of 90 Ruediger fourth-graders who went to the wildlife refuge Tuesday with their teachers and Sandy Beck, education director for the St. Francis Wildlife Association in Tallahassee.

Beck led the students and four teachers — Jacquelin Bartlett, Christine Welke, Elizabeth McMahon and Mary Southerland — on one of three field trips to St. Marks, where children identified the birds, sketched them and wrote about them in a project called "Wild Words for Wild Wings."

In the classroom, Beck taught the students bird-watching skills and poetry-writing.

"Many of these students had never seen the coast before or held a pair of binoculars, so this project is particularly exciting and eye-opening for them," Beck said.

Several students said it was indeed eye-opening.



SCOTT HOLSTEIN /Special to the Democrat

Ruediger Elementary School fourth-grader Sydney Hadsell, 9, left, sketches a bird that Angelina Mitchell, 9, center, points out to Alea Walker, 10, during their bird-watching outing Tuesday to St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge.

**"(The) bird project is awesome because I enjoy looking at, sketching and learning about different birds. Now I can identify the osprey, the anhinga, the snowy egret and more."**

**Shai Roberts**  
fourth-grader

"Ms. Beck's bird project is awesome because I enjoy looking at, sketching and learning about different birds," Shai Roberts said. "Now I can identify the osprey, the anhinga, the snowy egret and more."

Jasmine Myers said she learned how to study birds.

"What I learned about birds is to be quiet when you see a bird, look at its shape and size, listen to its sound, look at its movement," she said.

Beck, a wildlife expert who gives lectures at local schools, received funding

for the "Wild Words for Wild Wings" project through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Nature of Learning grant program.

She is working with all fourth-graders at Ruediger on the project. Students will use their original drawings and poetry to produce a field guide to the birds at St. Marks.

The students' project will be showcased at the Pinewoods Birding Festival at Pebblehill Plantation on April 14. It can also be viewed at [www.wildclassroom.net](http://www.wildclassroom.net).

Many of the students said the project changed the way they look at wildlife and nature.

"I learned that birds are important to the environment, and we have to keep them safe," Antonio Lee said. "I liked it when I saw a bird dive in the water and come back up with a fish, and then I saw a dolphin play in the water."

■ Contact education reporter Marci Elliott at (850) 599-2382 or [melliott@tallahassee.com](mailto:melliott@tallahassee.com).