

# The **BARRED OWL**

Newsletter of the Baton Rouge Audubon Society

Volume XXVIX, Number 2

April / May 2003

## President's Message by Dorothy Prowell

I've been using this column to update our members on what's been going on in BRAS. Things have slowed down a bit due to health issues on my part but we're back on track again. The board retreat to discuss goals and directions for BRAS will happen in May. We're putting some of our spring energy into working on our showcase, the Peveto Woods Sanctuary (see Victoria's Sanctuary Report). 'Tis the season to be birding down there. On the bookkeeping front, I've updated and culled the membership database to reflect current NAS and BRAS members to increase efficiency. Our membership is at about 600 now. The website is always being updated so check it out. There are some nice photos from our sanctuary workday. I'm still working on a couple of property options with Richard Martin and Nelwyn McInnis at the Louisiana Nature Conservancy. We expect the land deals to come through in the next couple of months. They will result in protection of many hundreds of acres in the Baton Rouge area and on our coast.

A big event for Louisiana Audubon Chapters is coming up in May. BRAS and Orleans Audubon have been working with National Audubon on Louisiana coastal issues since the Audubon Coastal Wetlands Committee was formed in January 2003. We have scheduled a reception for May 8<sup>th</sup> (see details on page 2) for several purposes. First, we want to increase awareness of the threats to our Louisiana coastline. Second, we want publicize the latest plans for restoring the coast. After talking with Len Bahr and Karen Gautreaux from Governor Foster's office, I was impressed by the momentum and energy going into coastal restoration since I last checked in. Lastly, we wanted to make public Audubon's interest in protecting the coast by publicizing our position on it as it relates to birds, our primary targets. We have invited Audubon members as well as other environmentally oriented groups and interested parties. The gathering will be informal, informative, and interesting. Please join us! (If you'd like to car pool down there, send one of us an email or call.)

## Calendar

**April 4 - 6** Audubon Country Bird Fest

**April 4 - 7** Bird photography presentations by Arthur Morris (see page 6)

**April 10** BRAS Board/Membership Meeting (7 p.m. at Dorothy Prowell's house). Agenda includes voting on new board members.

**April 10 - 12** Southwest Louisiana Migration Sensation

**April 10 - 13** The Great Louisiana Bird Fest

**April 11 - 13** Grand Isle Migratory Bird Celebration

**April 25 - 27** Louisiana Ornithological Society (LOS) Spring Meeting

**May 8** Coastal restoration reception (see page 2)

**May 18** BRAS Board Member retreat at Dorothy Prowell's cabin in St. Francisville from 9:30 a.m. until 1 p.m. (this is being held in lieu of May's monthly board meeting).

**May 24** Saturday Field Trip to Lake Martin Rookery

**June 12** BRAS board meeting at Dorothy Prowell's house (7:30 p.m.)

**June 14** Saturday Field Trip to Whiskey Bay Road in the Atchafalaya Basin.

**October 9** Pot Luck / Nature Art Sale (location to be announced).



## Audubon Reception on Restoring Louisiana' Coast

Please join Audubon, the Governor's office, policy makers and friends of conservation for this free reception and discussion of Audubon issues, with a special focus on Louisiana's plan to restore our disappearing coastline. The event will be held on Thursday, May 8 at 6:00PM, at Metairie Park Country Day School, 300 Park Road, Metairie, La. For more information and directions, call Audubon's toll free number at 1-800-659-2622 or email [audubonaction@audubon.org](mailto:audubonaction@audubon.org).

## Nominations for Officers

We will be voting on new officers and board members at our April meeting which will be a joint meeting of the board and membership (see Calendar). The entire slate of officers for this year was nominated for the coming year. Open positions include:



### Programs

Audubon Adventures

Birdathon Coordinator

Electronic Communications

Bird Seed Sales

3 Board Member at Large Positions



If you are interested in a position or know someone you would like to nominate, please give me a call (923-1070) or send an email ([dprowe@lsu.edu](mailto:dprowe@lsu.edu)). We would love to have some new faces and some choices for our voting.

## Southwest Regional NAS Board Member Elections

There are two candidates for our SW Region's board position, Robert A. Thomas (nominated by Orleans Audubon) and John A. Whittle (nominated by Golden Triangle Audubon in Texas). Bob Thomas spoke with the board at our March meeting. He currently holds the Loyola Endowed Chair in Environmental Communications at Loyola University. Many of you may know him from his many years as Director of the Louisiana Nature Center, which he founded. If elected Bob

would promote coastal environmental issues, help start the Louisiana state office, lend expertise to Audubon programs in Latin America, and support development of a more supportive network for Audubon nature centers. John Whittle is a chemistry faculty member at Lamar University in Beaumont, TX. John is concerned with Chapter/NAS relationships. He feels that NAS needs to repair its relationship with Audubon chapters by providing for significant chapter and other grassroots input into policy formation. In short, NAS needs to behave as the membership organization that it is.



### Conservation Report by Mark Skinner

Folks, remember you can learn about conservation issues through Audubon Advisory, a biweekly publication that summarizes important bird conservation issues. You can receive a copy in your email or regular mail by calling 1-800-659-2622 or emailing to [audubonaction@audubon.org](mailto:audubonaction@audubon.org). Audubon Advisory makes participation in conservation advocacy easy, so please have a look. You also might want to consult the web at <http://www.capitolconnect.com/audubon/> for updates and information on other conservation issues and how you can help. You can also sign up for Audubon Advisory at this website.

#### Elmer's Island Is For The Birds

Elmer's Island is a diverse beachfront just across Caminada Pass from Grand Isle in Jefferson Parish. For many years it has been open to the public but the recent tragic death of Dr. Jay Elmer closed Elmer's and it is now for sale.

see "Conservation" on page 3

## Conservation *(continued from page 2)*

What's different about Elmer's? For one thing, sand. Most of southeastern Louisiana had muddy beachfronts but old, eroded vanguards of the Mississippi River such as the Chandeleur Island chain in Breton Sound and the Timbalier Islands to the west of Elmer's have generally lost their silt and are now sandy barrier islands or beaches. In fact, before it was closed, Elmer's was probably the longest stretch of sandy beach with public vehicle access in southeastern LA. Behind that sand is a strand of interesting native plants, then bayous and salt marsh dominated by smooth cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*). Open bays offer variety, and clumps of wax myrtle (*Myrica cereifera*) hide birds, raccoons, and coyotes. The tattered remnant of Chenier Caminda, mercilessly destroyed by the great hurricane of 1893—the second deadliest in US history—meanders across the horizon to the north.

Why do we care what happens to Elmer's Island? Mostly because it is 1700 acres of great fishing and camping and it's packed with birds. Rookeries teem with waders of all types. At dawn the night shift comes to roost as the Black-crowned Night-Herons croak their way back to the myrtle stands, and the day shift of Great Blue and Tricolor Herons, Common, Snowy, and Reddish Egrets, and White Ibis drift forth by the dozens to the marsh and sand flats. In the evening the commuters cross each other again on the rebound, the ibis back from a day of eating delicious snails in the small cordgrass (*Spartina patens*) flats, the night herons off to skulk through the marsh for a crab and fish dinner. Both species of bitterns stalk the marsh, where Clapper Rails are common and their nasal clanking ubiquitous. White and Brown Pelicans rule overhead, and in the spring and fall beaches and sand flats are overrun with sandpipers, curlews, godwits, plovers, and oystercatchers, and sometimes even the endangered Piping Plover. Caspian, Royal, Sandwich, Black, Forster's, Least, and Common Terns are everywhere. Look hard and you'll see ospreys, and in the summertime crane your neck for juvenile Magnificent Frigate Birds, often cruising so high they are mere pinpricks. Skimmers not only skim but they nest, as do Wilson's Plover and the endangered Least Tern. In the winter find the rare Snowy Plover on the beach with Willets and perhaps a flight of spoonbills flashing their way to another muddy bar where their weird table manners will once again be on display. Elmer's Island truly is for the birds.

The BRAS board has sent a letter supporting the acquisition of Elmer's Island by the State of Louisiana, and we urge you to contact Governor Foster to add your voice to the chorus. The Governor supports protecting Elmer's but has yet to identify state funds—estimated at 4-6 million dollars—to complete the sale. Meanwhile it remains on the block and some parts have already been sold for beachfront development. If this continues public access will be curtailed or eliminated, and precious habitat will be destroyed for condominiums and beach houses. Please get involved! More information, a sample resolution, and a sample letter to legislators (from kids) is available from [www.elmersisland.org](http://www.elmersisland.org). Or visit the BRAS website Conservation corner for another sample letter better suited to adults (I hope!). Or write your own letter:

The Honorable Murphy J. Foster  
Governor of Louisiana  
P.O. Box 94004  
Baton Rouge, LA 70804

Please also write to your district representative and senator. You can find contact information for all your state and federal legislators at <http://senate.legis.state.la.us/senators/ByAddress.htm>.

## Atchafalaya Basin Field Trip Report

by Al Troy

Despite a gloomy morning and the certain prospect of heavy rain at some point during the trip, 30 die-hards still showed up on Saturday, February 15, 2003, to bird at Sherburne WMA's South Farm Complex, roughly 1.5 miles north of the I-10 Ramah exit in the Atchafalaya Basin.

The trip was a joint venture between the BRAS and Louisiana Birders Anonymous (LABA) of Lafayette. Members of the Sierra Club, Terrebonne Bird Club, Louisiana Hiking Club (LHC), and the Louisiana Ornithological Society (LOS) also participated. There was a good bit of cross-membership among these organizations. The birding expertise of the group ranged from casual novice to serious expert with the majority mostly in-between.

Organized by BRAS and LABA member Al Troy, hosts for the event were the LA Department of Wildlife & Fisheries (LDWF) Sherburne WMA Manager Tony Vidrine and US Army Corps of Engineers Park Rangers Dave Fisher and Dan Sammon. Don Thibodeaux of LHC, Dennis Demcheck of BRAS, and Jay Huner of LABA assisted as guides. As it turned

see "Basin Field Trip" on page



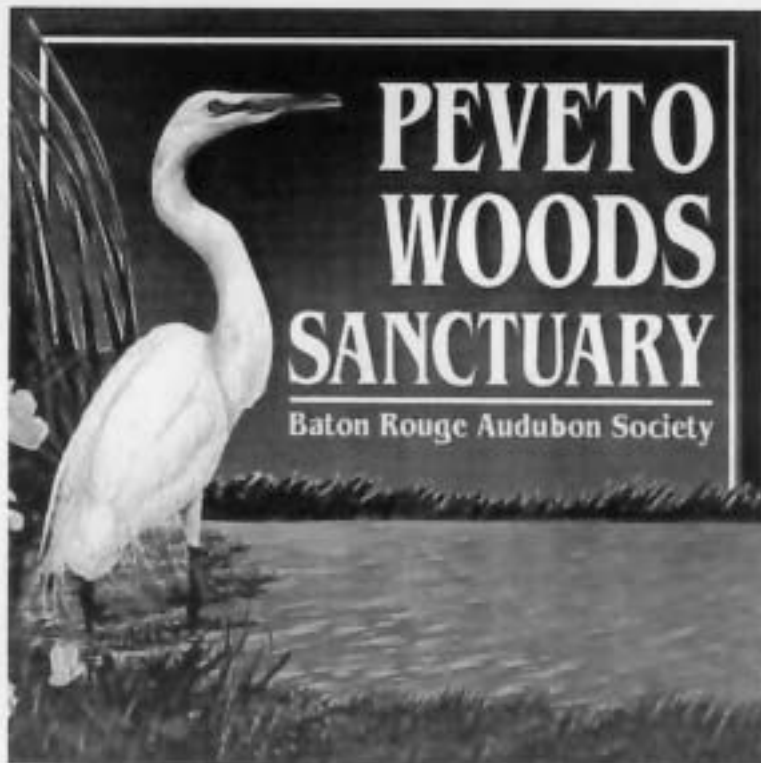
## Sanctuary Report by Victoria Moseley Bayless

Spring is fast arriving at Peveto Woods and migration is underway! We had a work day (in the rain) on Sunday March 16. Ron and I, Harriet Pooler, and Dorothy Prowell from Baton Rouge, along with William Evans from Lake Charles, cut back honeysuckle vines and did some trail maintenance until the rain finally became too much for us and we packed it in. Thanks guys for sticking it out for as long as you did! There were quite a few birds in the trees and I was able to make out a black and white warbler through the rain drops but not much else. I confess to not getting my binoculars out, I was trying to focus on the clippers in my hand.

Al Heath continues to maintain the trails well and has done a great job with building a small dam to try and keep our little pond with a satisfactory level of water. Of course all this rain helps with that, but it sure makes the trails wet. If you go down for a visit, be sure to bring your boots.

Work on the signs is progressing nicely. We contracted with Sign-a-Rama to build our highway sign. Josh Milton did an awesome job of taking our ideas for a sign and turning them into a work of art (see below). The sand-blasted sign will not retain the detail but it will still be quite beautiful. We are hoping it will be finished and installed before the end of April. The interpretive panel is going slow because I am still trying to determine what things we want to emphasize, etc. But when it is finished it too will be fantastic.

Thanks are in order for all of you who put donations in the donation box at the sanctuary. We appreciate your support. If anyone is interested in helping with trail maintenance or any other aspect of Sanctuary management please contact me at: [vmosele@lsu.edu](mailto:vmosele@lsu.edu) or 225-757-1769. Hope you all enjoy the upcoming Spring migration.



## Basin Field Trip (cont.)

out we got in about two hours of birding before the downpour began, and the trip had to be cut short. Without the assistance of our hosts shuttling us to and from the interior of South Farm, it is unlikely we could have gotten any birding in at all. They could not have been more accommodating.

Tony gave a short talk on the history of South Farm before we started birding. His revelation that South Farm was under 10 feet of water during the 1993 flood made us realize that few, if any, "permanent" structures are likely to be built in the floodway and was a sober reminder that the primary mission of the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway System (ABFS) is flood control with recreation as lagniappe.

The Corps acquired South and North Farms in 1989 and began reforestation in 1993 (North Farm is a smaller tract about a mile north of South Farm and is not accessible to the public). Both Farms lie within LDWF's Sherburne WMA and are managed by LDWF. Wetland restoration at North Farm was completed in 1995 and at South Farm in 1996. Water level control structures are used to draw down the ponds in July resulting in exposed mud flats that attract huge numbers of wading birds. It is not unusual to see a thousand Wood Storks up close in July and August. In the winter South Farm is host to wintering waterfowl, but this year as elsewhere in South LA, these birds, especially ducks, were scarce, and we didn't see very many.

Because the group was so large, it was split into three smaller groups that were supposed to cover three separate areas at different times. Each group had at least one spotting scope. However, each group was able to cover only one area before the rains came about noon. Nevertheless, a



## Basin Field Trip (continued from page 4)

combined total of 57 species were seen by all three groups. Group #1 led by Jay Huner (LABA) saw 55 species, Group #2 led by Al Troy saw 36 species, and Group #3 led by Don Thibodeaux (LHC) and Dennis Demcheck saw 24 species. Group #1 probably saw more species because Jay began birding an hour or so before the rest of us. Group #3 saw the least because their area was the smallest, but they were the closest to the covered barn and didn't get soaked.

### BIRD LIST: BRAS/LABA Field Trip Saturday, February 15, 2003

- |                               |                               |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Double-crested Cormorant   | 30. House Wren                |
| 2. Anhinga                    | 31. Marsh Wren                |
| 3. Great Blue Heron           | 32. Golden-crowned Kinglet    |
| 4. Great Egret                | 33. Ruby-crowned Kinglet      |
| 5. White Ibis                 | 34. Blue-gray Gnatcatcher     |
| 6. Turkey Vulture             | 35. Eastern Bluebird          |
| 7. Wood Duck                  | 36. American Robin            |
| 8. Hooded Merganser (cripple) | 37. Northern Mockingbird      |
| 9. Red-tailed Hawk            | 38. European Starling (Ramah) |
| 10. Killdeer                  | 39. American Pipit            |
| 11. Greater Yellowlegs        | 40. Orange-crowned Warbler    |
| 12. Lesser Yellowlegs         | 41. Yellow-rumped Warbler     |
| 13. Wilson's Snipe            | 42. Pine Warbler              |
| 14. Mourning Dove             | 43. Palm Warbler              |
| 15. Belted Kingfisher         | 44. Common Yellowthroat       |
| 16. Red-bellied Woodpecker    | 45. Eastern Towhee            |
| 17. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker  | 46. Vesper Sparrow            |
| 18. Downy Woodpecker          | 47. Song Sparrow              |
| 19. Northern Flicker          | 48. Swamp Sparrow             |
| 20. Pileated Woodpecker       | 49. White-throated Sparrow    |
| 21. Eastern Phoebe            | 50. White-crowned Sparrow     |
| 22. Blue Jay                  | 51. Northern Cardinal         |
| 23. American Crow             | 52. Red-winged Blackbird      |
| 24. Fish Crow                 | 53. Eastern Meadowlark        |
| 25. Purple Martin             | 54. Common Grackle            |
| 26. Tree Swallow              | 55. Brown-headed Cowbird      |
| 27. Carolina Chickadee        | 56. American Goldfinch        |
| 28. Tufted Titmouse           | 57. House Sparrow (Ramah)     |
| 29. Carolina Wren             |                               |

## Field Trips by Harriett Pooler

**May 24 - Lake Martin Rookery (near Breaux Bridge, Louisiana):** Meet at Coffee Call (College Drive at Interstate 10) at 6 a.m. Join Harriett Pooler to see different types of egrets and herons (maybe Roseate Spoonbills) nesting at the Rookery. We'll take a walk around the lake and look for birds such as Indigo Buntings, Prothonotary Warblers, and Bluebirds. Bring bug spray and shoes/boots for some walking. We'll break around noon and stop for lunch on the way back to Baton Rouge. Call Harriett at 225.291.0077 for information.

**June 14 - Whiskey Bay Road, Atchafalaya Basin:** Meet at Coffee Call at 6 a.m. Join Harriett Pooler to walk/drive down Whiskey Bay Road to look for nesting birds. Species which might be seen include Yellow-breasted Chat, Kentucky Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Swainson's Warbler, Painted Bunting, and Swallow-tailed Kite. Bring water and a hat. We'll break by noon and stop for lunch on the way back to Baton Rouge. Call Harriett for info.

## BRAS Directory

### Officers

#### President

Dorothy Prowell . . . . . 923-1070

#### Vice-President

Dan Hendricks . . . . . 757-1593

#### Secretary

JoAnn Fryling . . . . . 766-3120

#### Treasurer

Fred Sheldon . . . . . 763-6113

#### Immediate Past President

Donna LaFleur . . . . . 892-4492

## Committee Chairs

### Conservation

Mark Skinner . . . . . 201-0078

### Education

Chris Carlton . . . . . 344-9635

### Field Trips / Activities

Harriett Pooler . . . . . 291-0077

### Legal

Doris Falkenheiner . . . . . 346-8761

### Membership

Elaine Kilgore . . . . . 667-3206

### Newsletter

Ron Bayless . . . . . 757-1768

### Publicity

Donna LaFleur . . . . . 892-4492

### Sanctuaries

Victoria M. Bayless . . . . . 757-1768

## LAC Representatives

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Charles Fryling . . . . . 766-3120

Donna LaFleur . . . . . 892-4492

## The Barred Owl

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March 15 for the April/May issue  
May 15 for the June/July issue  
July 15 for the August/September issue  
September 15 for the Oct/Nov issue  
November 15 for the Dec/Jan issue.  
Submissions may be sent via e-mail to bayles\_r@bellsouth.net or mailed to:

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Changes of address and other official correspondence should be sent to the mailing address shown above.

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## A Bird Photographer's Story

Arthur Morris ([www.birdsart.com](http://www.birdsart.com)), one of our nation's premier bird photographers, will be in the Baton Rouge area April 4 - 7. On Friday, April 4 he will be giving a free presentation titled "A Bird Photographer's Story". This presentation will take place from 7:30 - 9:00 p.m. at the Wildlife and Fisheries Building (2000 Quail Drive). The following day, Mr. Morris will conduct a day long seminar titled "The Art of Nature Photography - It Ain't Just Birds" (cost: \$75). On Sunday and Monday (April 6 & 7), Mr. Morris will lead a field workshop at Lake Martin near Breaux Bridge, Louisiana (the cost of the workshop will be \$200 per person). To register or to obtain more information on these events, you can contact Arthur at his web site ([www.birdsart.com](http://www.birdsart.com)).

### BATON ROUGE AUDUBON SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP FORM

Membership Type	Amount	2003 Patch?	Total
___ National Audubon Society (new members only)	<u>\$20</u>	___ Yes ___ No	___
___ Baton Rouge Audubon Society (local chapter only)	<u>\$20</u>	___ Yes ___ No	___
___ Continuing National Audubon Members "BRAS patch option only" (must be a paid member of National Audubon Society)	<u>\$10</u>	___ Yes ___ No	___
___ Extra 2003 patches (for members only)	<u>\$10</u>	___ Yes	___
___ Additional Contribution	<u>\$</u>		
<b>GRAND TOTAL:</b>			<u>\$</u>

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_  
 E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Local Chapter Code: **7XCH8 K01**

Please send this form to (and make your check out to): **Baton Rouge Audubon Society**  
**P.O. Box 82525**  
**Baton Rouge, LA 70884-2525**