

The **BARRED OWL**

Newsletter of the Baton Rouge Audubon Society

Volume XXXVIII, Number 4

4th Quarter, 2011

A New Generation of Birder

Preface from Jane Patterson: Alex was one of the first kids to come to my fledgling bird club for kids, Kids Who Bird. Others have come and gone, but he's stuck it out for over three years. Makes me think he might be serious about this bird business. He has participated, along with his dad George, in the Baton Rouge Christmas Bird Count for at least 2 of those years with me. In fact, I remember the first year his dad was ready to leave by 1pm and Alex was upset at having to leave. His dad had to promise him they could do more birding when they got home! Alex is a great spotter and has learned a great deal from when he first started birding. He's not especially fond of early mornings, but he's made it to the last two BRAS bird walks, so he's willing to do what needs to be done! This summer, Baton Rouge Audubon and LA Ornithological Society bestowed upon Alex a wonderful opportunity for him to attend an ABA Young Birder's camp in Colorado. As a condition of this gift, we asked Alex to report back to us about what impressed him about the camp. Below is his first report. Those of you who attend the fall LOS meeting will hear from Alex and please also join us for the December BRAS program to hear more from Alex about his trip (and you may very well hear from other young birders as well!) We're very proud of Alex as a representative of our new generation of birder!

I am a proud member of the following birding clubs and organizations: Kids Who Bird, BRAS, LOS, National Audubon Society, and ABA. From June 25 to July 2, I got the special opportunity to attend the 2011 Young Birders' Camp in Woodland Park, Colorado sponsored by ABA. My trip was possible due to the generous grants from BRAS and LOS. Our group was made up of about 10 boys and girls from around U.S. with exception of one from Costa Rica. Our three highly trained counselors were Jennie Duberstein, Bill Schmoker, and Chip Clouse. We camped each night at the Catamount Institute's Mountain Campus in tents. We went bird watching in many unique terrains like Chico Basin Ranch, Garden of the Gods Park in Colorado Springs, Hayman Fire of 2001, Arkansas River Valley, Nature Conservancy's Medano-Zapata Ranch, and Pueblo Reservoir to name some highlights. I saw a total of 151 species of birds on this trip. About 70 of which I had never seen in the wild before. I can't list them all in this article but my favorites were the Scaled Quail, Brown-capped Rosy-Finch, Blue Grosbeak, Black-headed Grosbeak, Western Tanager, Green-tailed Towhee, Curve-billed Thrasher, Chihuahuan Raven, Pinyon Jay, Western Scrub-Jay, Lewis's Woodpecker, Burrowing Owl, Flammulated Owl, Prairie Fal-



**Alex and fellow Young Birder campers.
Alex is third from the right.**

con, and a Golden Eagle. I hope many birders get to see the beautiful birds that I and the other campers saw. It was fun to make new friends and share all our pictures and memories with others. I am really happy I got the chance to go on this trip and look forward to going on another birding camp adventure next summer!

~ Alex Haun, 9th grader in Baton Rouge, LA

Bird the Bogue Chitto!

Contributed by Janine Robin

Bogue Chitto State Park is the southern portion of Washington Parish near Franklinton and is easily accessed from Hwy 25. The park is about an hour and forty-five minute drive from Baton Rouge. It contains almost 1800 acres of beautiful hardwood forest with a gorge running through it. The gorge has a boardwalk with steps leading down to it. The drop is about 150 feet. This area is good for warbler watching during mi-



View from the ridge out over the gorge forest

gration and features several species of breeding warblers -- Hooded, Kentucky, Swainson's, and Worm-eating. Several species of woodpeckers also make it their home year round. The park features a variety of habitats from drier oak forest near the gorge, to stands of pines, to cypress swamp and marshy low-lying areas; all of which means it features a variety of birds!

A year long birding survey has just been completed with a species list of 140 birds. Some of the highlights are Common Goldeneye, Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Wilson's Snipe, Solitary Sandpiper, Philadelphia Vireo, Cliff



One of the many small lakes on the property



A stunning boardwalk leads down into the gorge

Swallow, Veery, and both Louisiana and Northern Waterthrushes.

The park loop drive is 4 miles long and has several side roads and ponds. Some of the side roads lead down to the river and others go to camping and group meeting areas. There are also several marked walking trails. All of the side roads are excellent for seeing anything from bobwhites to ospreys. The roads are not paved, so if you want to go birding, the best time is during the week when there is less local traffic in the park or go after a rain. Of course, mornings are always the best time to go birding! Rest rooms are available at the entrance building as well as at a few other locations in the park. The park also offers cabins, fishing, boat ramp access to the river for kayaking and canoeing, horseback riding trails, and picnicking areas. An entrance fee is charged.



The clear, sandy-bottomed Bogue Chitto River

All photos by Jane Patterson



You can join this citizen science project to understand regional shorebird populations

Audubon Coastal Bird Survey Expands into LA

by Melanie Driscoll

According to the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan, no breeding or migratory shorebird in North America is considered “not at risk.” The eastern Red Knot (“*rufa*”) population is crashing before our very eyes, having declined by about 75% in the last 10 years. The existing data are not as clear for other species, but clear enough to recognize that many shorebird populations are declining.

There has been a gap in consistent, targeted surveys for the Gulf Coast resulting in limited information about regional population trends. The lack of clear and consistent information for the Gulf Coast prior to the Deepwater Horizon oil disaster hampered response efforts and will make it more difficult for scientists to calculate the magnitude of the injury to these populations. Understanding population trends can help direct conservation dollars to important strategies and better allow Audubon to conserve and stabilize these populations. Such information is vital in an ecosystem facing a variety of threats, including coastal marsh loss, frequent oil spills, and human disturbance or development of beaches.



In response to the Deepwater Horizon oil disaster, Audubon started the Audubon Coastal Bird Survey (**ACBS**), a citizen science volunteer program to document oiled birds and to gather data on coastal shorebird and water bird populations during the fall, winter, and spring. ACBS began last summer in MS and AL, and volunteers conducted 247 surveys across 24 sites, documenting more than 60,000 individual birds of 160 different species!

Audubon is expanding ACBS to coordinate timely survey coverage of coastal areas across the northern Gulf. The survey protocol aligns well with the International Shorebird Survey (ISS), established by Manomet Center for Conservation Science, which is the predominant tool for understanding migratory shorebird populations. ISS coverage along the Gulf Coast has been historically lacking and Audubon Coastal Bird Survey data will help fill that gap.

In Louisiana, we have 8 sites available to survey: 2 on Grand Isle, 1 on Elmer's Island and 5 in Cameron Parish. These are sites that many of you already enjoy birding. If you'd like to learn more about the ACBS or volunteer to get involved, please check out the links below to get more information and register.

To find out more about the program, including the first annual report, protocol, and data sheets, go to:
<http://gulfoilspill.audubon.org/audubon-coastal-bird-survey>

If you would like to participate in this program, please register at:

<http://www.audubonaction.org/acbs>
or contact Dustin Renaud
Volunteer Program Manager
Gulf of Mexico | Mississippi Flyway
drenaud@audubon.org

BRAS is looking for someone to be our new Conservation Chairperson. I ideal person would be someone with excellent communication skills and a passion for conservation causes.

**Please contact Jane Patterson -
President@braudubon.org**

Baton Rouge Audubon

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PROGRAMS UPDATE:

Recent Successes & Future Events

by Jared Wolfe

During the 2010/2011 Monthly Presentation Series BRAS invited world-renowned speakers to impart their expertise to our community in an easily accessible and entertaining format. Participants learned about bird coloration, Louisiana's unique grassland bird communities, Amazon bird conservation, transpacific-migrations and oiled-bird monitoring.

The 2011/2012 BRAS presentation series line-up is proving to be equally impressive. Our first presentation detailed the fate of the recently released Whooping Crane propagule in Louisiana. In October, Dr. Jay Huner will present a synopsis of Louisiana's wetland bird communities. November will feature Dr. Fred Sheldon who will be discussing the ecology, evolution, and conservation of birds in Borneo. Other upcoming presentations will include Jane Patterson's summary of the successful 'Kids Who Bird' program, Rusty Blackbird conservation by Luke Powell, Waterfowl conservation and biology by Dr. Frank Rohwer and a highly anticipated talk by Dr. John Rappole, former Smithsonian Research Coordinator.

Please remember that all presentations will be held at the Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center and dates are subject to change. Admission is free to all BRAS members and \$2 for all non-BRAS members. As a BRAS member, please RSVP by contacting Jared Wolfe (programs@braudubon.org) indicating which presentation you will be attending and how many guests you will be bringing. Refer often to <http://braudubon.org> for current program schedules, changes and updates.

In addition to the monthly presentation series, BRAS continues to monitor local bird populations and educate the next generation of bird advocates. For example, this past summer BRAS partnered with LDWF and BREC to educate hundreds of local children about conservation, avian natural history and bird monitoring at BRAS' Bluebonnet Swamp bird banding site. Volunteer bird banders continue to work several times a month safely capturing, banding, and releasing wild birds thereby collecting demographic data that is used by agencies to better manage bird populations. Within the past year, BRAS' bird monitoring activities have produced several scholarly articles and an annual report that is now available for download via BRAS' website. Most recently, 'Western Birds', a peer-reviewed ornithological journal accepted an article detailing Indigo Bunting plumage succession largely based on Bluebonnet Swamp banding data. BRAS' successful citizen science oiled-bird monitoring project also produced an immense database that resulted in several well-received presentations at professional meetings. In collaboration with National Audubon, the oiled-bird monitoring database is currently being analyzed to provide insights into the impact of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill on Louisiana's coastal bird communities.

BRAS Programs looks forward to continuing to serve our community by providing world-class speakers, educational opportunities, bird monitoring and conservation initiatives.



Two New Members to the Gulf of Mexico/Mississippi Flyway Team!

by *Melanie Driscoll*

Please join me in welcoming Dr. Erik Johnson to his new position as the Gulf of Mexico/Mississippi Flyway Conservation Biologist. Erik joins Audubon fresh from finishing his Ph.D. at Louisiana State University, for which he examined effects of forest fragmentation on Amazonian bird communities.



Dr. Erik Johnson

In his new role, Erik will work to understand baseline populations and trends of birds of conservation concern in the Gulf of Mexico and the Mississippi Flyway. He will also be an integral part of the conservation team working on conservation planning and implementation for this vital region. Erik is working out of

Audubon's Baton Rouge, Louisiana office.

During the Deepwater Horizon oil disaster, Erik worked with Jared Wolfe, another Louisiana State University researcher, to organize a citizen science monitoring program in Louisiana to track the extent and frequency of oiling of water birds. Audubon expanded a modified version of the survey protocol as the Audubon Coastal Bird Survey - these combined efforts have created the only independent dataset of oiled bird survey data from the Gulf oil spill.

Erik has also conducted research on effects of fire on the winter ecology of Henslow's Sparrows in Louisiana and habitat associations of Bachman's Sparrows in fire-dependent longleaf pine forests in the southeast. He has long been a birder and conservationist, having conducted field studies from Pennsylvania and Louisiana to Australia, Costa Rica, and Brazil. He can be reached at ejohnson@audubon.org or 225-768-0820.

I am also pleased to announce that Dustin Renaud has joined Audubon's Gulf of Mexico/Mississippi Flyway team as our volunteer program manager. Some of you know Dustin already from his work as Mississippi volunteer coordinator over the last year.

With this promotion, Dustin will be responsible for coordinating and engaging people in conservation strategies aimed at stabilizing and increasing Gulf Coast bird populations of conservation concern. Many of these activities, including beach-



Dustin Renaud

nesting bird colony stewardship and the Audubon Coastal Bird Survey, are ones that Dustin has helped develop and implement in some locations already, and we are looking forward to the greatly expanded coordination and implementation that his new role will allow him to achieve in partnership with Audubon chapters, centers, and volunteers across the Gulf and existing strong programs in Texas and Florida.

Dustin is a son of the Gulf Coast – born and raised in Biloxi, Mississippi – and has had a lifelong interest in birds and the outdoors. He holds a bachelor of arts in speech communication from the University of Southern Mississippi, and before coming to Audubon during the BP oil disaster last year, he worked with Habitat for Humanity of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, where he coordinated outreach and community relations for Hurricane Katrina recovery.

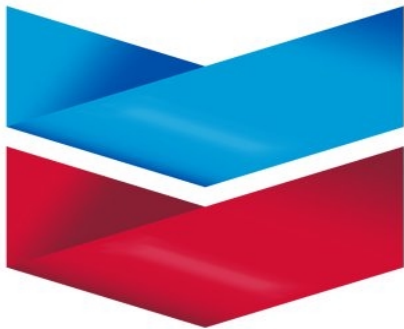
Dustin will be working from southern Louisiana but mobile across the Gulf Coast. He can be reached at drenaud@audubon.org or 228-209-2194.

Welcome, Erik and Dustin!

Erik Johnson photo by Luke Powell.
Dustin Renaud photo by Jillian Rubio.

Baton Rouge Audubon thanks

Chevron



for their sponsorship of our education programs!

BRAS EMAIL LIST

If you would like to be informed of upcoming Baton Rouge Audubon events via email, send a request to Education@braudubon.org and you'll be added to the BRAS email list.



Peveto Woods Sanctuary Update

by Dave Patton, Sanctuary Chairman

Much welcome rains reached Peveto Woods Sanctuary as storm bands from Tropical Storm Lee wrapped around to southwest Louisiana. The hot dry summer has been particularly harsh in the southwestern part of the state, and stress from these conditions is evident as you walk the trails of the sanctuary. Some plants were added this past winter, but the harsh summer was more than many could tolerate. New plants from the previous year fared better as their root systems were well established. Many of the Mulberry Trees from two years ago are looking good.



September 2010

The most obvious effect of the dry summer is the ragweed. Last summer was much wetter and by September, the Giant Ragweed was towering and lush along the trail edge. The drought of April, May, and August has resulted in stunted growth of the ragweed. It is a very important plant for migrating and wintering species of birds in Louisiana providing both cover and food. Recent rains have been helpful and there are some patches to be found along the trails. However, the overall feel of the sanctuary is much more open than last fall because of the lack of thick green vegetation in the understory.

Good news is that seeds gathered last fall from the Honey Locust trees have produced some healthy small trees ready for planting in the sanctuary this winter. Also, the early fall birding has been good. My last two trips found Olive-sided Flycatchers, and Mourning Warblers. Other fall migrants are starting to move through as well, and cooler weather conditions are making birding in the sanctuary much more enjoyable. Included are two photographs taken from the same vantage point of the picnic table on the same day, one year apart. The difference in ragweed can be seen along side the trail.



September 2011




Baton Rouge Audubon Society

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The Baton Rouge Audubon website has had a facelift!
Visit today to see what's new! www.braudubon.org

BRAS wishes to acknowledge
Downtown Kiwanis Club
of Baton Rouge
for their support of our
Education Programs



Thank you so much!

Upcoming Birding Events

Orleans Audubon Society & CRESCENT BIRD CLUB

Fall 2011 Field Trips

Bring binoculars, field guides, bug spray, rain gear, sunscreen and refreshments. Boots and walkie talkies may be useful. Snacks and drinks are recommended. A Wild Louisiana Stamp is required for field trips to LA Wildlife Refuges. The stamp can be purchased at Walmart, Puglia's Sporting Goods, 1925 Veterans Blvd., 504-837-0291 or directly from the LA Wildlife and Fisheries. For in-depth trip information, see <http://www.jjaudubon.net>.

Sat. Oct. 1

Grand Isle (all day trip)

Sat. Oct. 15

Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge (half day)

Sat. Oct. 15

Wild Things at Big Branch NWR

Tues. Oct. 18

CBC/OAS Banquet at the Imperial Room of Five Happiness Restaurant

Sat. Oct. 22

Louisiana Nature Center (half day)

Fri/Sat. Oct. 28-29

Louisiana Ornithological Society fall meeting in Cameron, LA

Sat. Nov. 5

Lower Coast Algiers (half day)

Sat. Nov. 12

Caernarvon Flycatcher Spot and St. Bernard State Park (half day)

Sat. Dec. 3

Fontainebleau State Park, east of Mandeville on Hwy 190 (half day)

Sat. Dec. 10

Bonnet Carre Spillway (half day)

3RD ANNUAL YELLOW RAILS & RICE FESTIVAL

by Donna L. Dittmann

A birding festival like no other... the 3rd Annual YRARF is a partnership between birders, rice farmers, conservation organizations, and local communities - the ultimate goal to highlight the importance of, and help preserve Louisiana's "bird-friendly Working Wetlands." By participating, not only will you (hopefully) have fun seeing Yellow Rails and lots of other birds, you will also help support this cause - the YRARF combines ecotourism with agri-tourism. Our Yellow Rail viewing opportunities occur during normal farming activities associated with the harvest of "second crop" rice so there is no "deliberate" mechanized harassment of Yellow Rails or other birds specifically for the purposes of the festival. Last year we saw unprecedented numbers of Yellow Rails, including as many as 125 per day and a grand total of 566 combined on eight dates 31 Oct-20 Nov - we are keeping our fingers crossed weather and rail numbers will be as good this year.



One of the best opportunities to see the elusive Yellow Rail (inset) is at the YRARF. During YRARF 2010, birders (and festival facilitators in colored vests) watch for rails from onboard a combine and in the rice fields. Of course, capturing a good image of a fleeting rail is very challenging!

Photos by Donna L. Dittmann.

Mark your calendars and join the fun: Thursday-Sunday, 26-30 October 2011. New this year are photo workshops with C. C. Lockwood and Dennis Demcheck...

Use the following link for information, registration details, and a schedule of events:
<http://tinyurl.com/3sorh8f>

If you have questions, then please contact Donna Dittmann at:
yellowrailsandrice@gmail.com

All fees, donations, and any other proceeds collected for the festival by non-profit Avian Events Support Team go towards supporting festival-related expenses and promoting agri-tourism.



2011 LOS FALL MEETING

**Friday and Saturday, October 28-29
Cameron**

Friday Evening: First Baptist Church
in Cameron on Marshall Street

6 P.M.-7 P.M. Registration:
Light snacks will be provided by the
Cameron Parish Tourist Commission.

7 P.M.-8 P.M. Meeting and Evening Program
Alex Haun-winner of Jane Patterson's
"Kids Who Bird" scholarship

What Bird? Where? Linda Stewart-Knight and a group of birder/naturalists headed to Kenya for a 2 wk whirlwind tour in early June. Lead by a very skilled Steven Easley, they bumped along the roads, (much reminiscent of some of our Louisiana pot-holes and rutted routes) across the Masai Mara (the northern tip of the Serengeti). They boated through the hippo infested waters of Lake Naivasha successfully finding the African Fish-eagle and Giant Kingfisher, stayed in tent camps with full showers and flush toilets, stared at hosts of strange sounding and looking birds such as long-claws, cisticolas, bustards, hoopoe, fiscals, bee-eaters, sun-birds. The famous shallows of Lake Nakuru did not disappoint. It had the pink glow of thousands of flamingos. The contrast of the arid plains of the Samburu Game Reserve with the river beds full of life giving water attracting both game and birds. The photos of this adventure will be from Carol Foil's collection, so you know you will be seeing these animals and birds as though you are there. There are even photos of one of the rarest mammals in the country that they were fortunate enough to observe resting in the shade.

Saturday Morning

7:00 A.M. Field Trip Meet in the parking lot of the Cameron Motel. Ed Wallace will lead a field trip to the Cameron Parish hot spots.

Saturday Evening:

First Baptist Church
in Cameron on Marshall Street

6:00 P.M.-6:30 P.M. Registration at the Creole.

6:30 P.M.-7:30 P.M.

Dinner- chicken/sausage gumbo by the 4-H Club

7:30 P.M. Meeting and Evening Program Louisiana's grassland birds: History and future prospects presented by Phil Stouffer. Most Louisiana birders are familiar with our state's sometimes-elusive grassland specialists, like Red-cockaded Woodpecker and Bachman's Sparrow. But what if we take a broader view of grasslands, and a longer view in time? What birds have we lost? Our coastal prairies were once home to Prairie Chickens and Whooping Cranes. The Whoopers may be on the way back, but what species might be slipping away, maybe through sea level rise, fire suppression, or urbanization? Conversely, what birds might have benefited from the changes in

Louisiana's grassland landscapes over the past several centuries? We'll take a look at grasslands and their birds forward and backward, and from top to bottom of Louisiana.

Phil Stouffer is a professor in the School of Renewable Natural Resources at LSU, and a researcher for the LSU AgCenter. He has been in Louisiana since 1993, but remains nostalgic for Pennsylvania, where he grew up, and New Jersey, where he went to graduate school at Rutgers. Anyone who has been to Hawk Mountain or Cape May probably knows why.

Cameron Accommodations:

The phone number for the Cameron Motel is 337-775-5442. The Cameron Motel also has sites available for RV campers. Several eating places (in trailers) are open in Cameron. Other accommodations can be found in Sulphur or Lake Charles.



Pre-registration Form LOS 2011 Fall Meeting October 28-29 Cameron/Creole, LA

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Number registering for:

Meeting _____ at \$10.00/person= \$ _____

Number registering for:

Saturday's dinner _____ @ \$6.00/person=\$ _____

Membership Dues \$ _____ enclosed

Total \$ _____ enclosed

**Please make check payable to LOS, and mail to:
Judith O'Neale,
504 Whitebark Drive, Lafayette LA 70508
jloneale@aol.com**



Magnificent Storm Birds!

It's always with a combination of trepidation and excitement that we anticipate storms in the Gulf. Recent experience has taught us that "battening down the hatches" is not just a colorful colloquial expression -- we've learned where the hatches are and how to batten them! Tropical Storm Lee was a large, slow-moving storm. It came right into the coast of eastern LA and dumped a lot of rain (badly needed rain, at that!). The winds were serious but not deadly, so the stores were not emptied of batteries and bread, and for the most part I'm willing to bet hatches were unbattered. Remarkably there were quite a few people out and about in the midst of the storm as it passed that particular weekend. Including a group of birders at the Capitol Lakes. James Maley reported them first; a group of Magnificent Frigatebirds blown inland by the storm. A group of 45 frigatebirds! Perhaps the largest group that our lakes have hosted. And what an awesome and slightly eerie sight as these large prehistoric-looking birds floated and wheeled over the lakes! Adult males with their bright red gular patches deflated now that the breeding season is over. Juveniles in various configurations of mottled plumage. They seemed to favor a particular corner of the big lake -- there is more of a bank there so perhaps the updraft from the east wind helped to keep them aloft. Birders came from all over the city to see them. They stayed 4 or 5 hours and then most of the group peeled off to the west, leaving 3 birds behind. Those lingered a while, and then were gone, too. We hope they all made it back to the coast. And I know that it's because I'm a birder now and pay attention to such things but I couldn't help thinking the strangest event of the day was the fact that so many joggers and walkers passed right underneath these magnificent birds and didn't even once glance up...

Photos by David Ringer

~ Jane Patterson

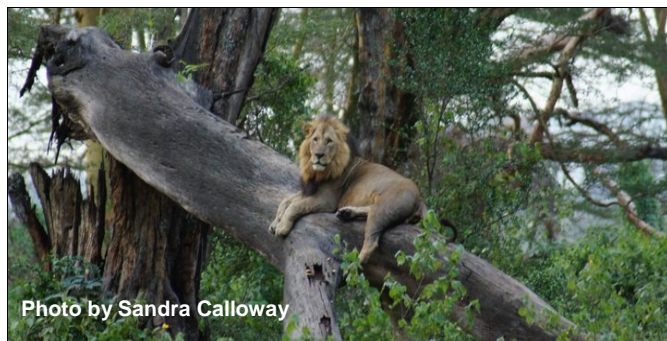
INTO AFRICA WITH HARRIETT POOLER

I've always dreamed of going to Africa, probably as a result of seeing my parents' National Geographic magazines as a child. It finally happened this past June. Kenya was a trip of a lifetime, and one I'd recommend to any birder who loves birds, mammals and traveling.

I organized the trip working with Costa Rica Gateway (CRG) for the itinerary. Steven Easley was our guide extraordinaire, and he works for CRG, which is owned by his brother Kevin. When Steven was in high school, his missionary/birding parents (I sort of envision them as the Brady Bunch with binoculars) moved to Kenya. Steven lived there for five years and has returned every year for the last 15 years, sometimes three to five times per year, leading trips. Steven knows the country, customs, birds, mammals and reptiles like the back of his hand. I saw 444 new species of birds, and of course, Stephen knew all their calls.

Other Louisiana birders on this trip included Linda Stewart Knight, Eva Lydick, Carol Foil, Ann Ingram, Sandra Calloway, Ann Gaiennie, Jim Mire, and Murrell Butler. Melissa Ingram and Ronda Moore, friends of Louisiana birders also joined us. Getting to Kenya wasn't too fun but we arrived safely with our luggage after 24 hours or so of flight time.

We landed in Nairobi at night and stayed at the Hotel Jacarunda. The hotels in Kenya have a custom of greeting their guests with a glass of fresh fruit juice and a clean, cold (in the highlands these were warmed) washcloth to wipe your face and hands. Of course, we birded along the way there, spotting Sacred and Hadadad ibis in the trees on the neutral grounds. I also saw my first group of elephants on the side of the road and about jumped out of my seat with excitement; however, this herd ended up being bronze and never moved.



The next morning we went to Nairobi National Park where we spent the whole day riding in the classic safari van with the pop-up roof where you stand to see all things Africa. The roads in Kenya are rough at best, so riding in the van was an adventure unto itself. The habitat varies here from montane forest to grasslands to small lakes with rocky ravines. We saw a large troop of Olive baboons hanging out along the road and many Masai Giraffes, Cape Buffalo, Coke's Hartbeest, Thomson's and Grant Gazelles and Impalas. Highlights included the endangered Black Rhino and two lions (lions have been killed off in the park by ranchers fearing for their livestock). A few birds that were seen included the Grey crowned Crane, Long-tailed Fiscal, African Pygmy Kingfisher, Hartlaub's Bustard and White-headed Barbet.

The next day we visited Limuru pond outside of Nairobi where we saw Purple Swamphen, African Jacana, White-faced Whistling Duck, Spur-winged Geese and the local White-backed Duck. We continued on to Gatamayu Forest, a semi-protected montane forest where we got the endangered Abbott's Starling, Fine-banded Woodpecker, Grey Cuckoo-Shrike, and many other beautiful warblers. Several Black and White Colobus Monkeys were in the forest canopy. We were getting into bird overload!



Lake Naivasha was our next stop and it was the site where the movie "Out of Africa" was filmed. We stayed at Lake Naivasha Country Club and birded around the grounds until time for the boat ride. A few Common Zebras and Wildebeasts were wandering around the grounds, and beautiful Hildebrant's Starlings were everywhere. So were Lilac-breasted Rollers, both of which became ho-hum birds to us about after a short time. The staff did warn us not to leave the cabins after dark because the Hippos come up from the lake at night to feed on the vegetation. Last year a man had disregarded these instructions and was cut in two by a hippo. Hippos cause more deaths in Africa than any other animal. The boat ride around Lake Naivasha was a birding paradise. It is a freshwater lake in the Rift Valley where Giant and Pink-backed Pelicans mix with African Spoonbills, Hottentot Teal, Giant Kingfishers and Black Crakes. African Fish Eagles were seen at the tops of trees along with a Pearl-spotted Owllet. Malachite Kingfishers were darting here and there and are absolutely stunning! Watching out not to bump into a hippo and turn the boat over, we saw a huge congregation in the middle of the lake which resembled lumps of mud since they are mostly submerged. A few hippos lumbered up onto the bank, looking incredibly agile for their immense size.

Driving to the Masai Mara we saw towns that were so full of trash, it was painful to look at. Areas in Kenya where the tourist dollar isn't factoring into daily life show the poverty and hardships of the country.

Once we arrived at the Mara, mammals dominated the savannahs and there were many hot air balloons overhead in the sky. I got to see my first real herd of elephants with tusks and a baby. We also saw Eland, Spotted Hyena, Black-backed Jackals, Topi, Antelope, Cape Buffalo, Common Zebras, Wildebeasts, and a few different types of Mongoose. Mongooses like to hang around termite mounds which can

(Continued on page 11)

INTO AFRICA WITH HARRIETT POOLER

(Continued from page 10)

reach up to four feet high. Apex predators were more common here and we saw a few prides of lions, and several cheetahs. Nature's cleaners, the Vultures became a part of this landscape with five different species.

Some of the birds of the Mara we saw were the striking Secretary Bird, Rosy-throated Longclaw, Southern Ground Hornbill, and the Ostrich. Driving through the western escarpment we saw colorful birds such as the Schalow's and Ross's Turacos. Bateleurs were numerous in the sky, and we also saw Martial and Tawny Eagles, with one was eating an African hare.

We stayed at the Kichwa Tembo Luxury Tented Camp which had warthogs hanging around the grounds like squirrels. Kichwa is located in the heart of the Masai tribe and we saw their primitive huts covered with cow manure and dirt. Herds of cows with bells on their necks grazed the Mara with a Masai shepherd close by. The Masai warriors came to the camp that evening to perform their tribal dance, which probably hasn't changed in a hundred years. They pulled folks from the audience (read me and Ann Gaiennie) to dance with them. After the dance each warrior offered their handmade goods for sale.



Photo by Murrell Butler

We left the Mara and drove a long way to Lake Nakuru National Park, a bird-rich soda lake in the Rift Valley. When we arrived, several of us had to pinch ourselves to make sure we weren't in a dream, the scenery was so out of this world. The lake was surrounded by mountains on one side and yellow-barked Acacia trees on the other side. The Acacia forest was home to Vervet monkeys, African Fish Eagles, and we spotted a Leopard walking stealthily along the foliage. Near the shore, the lake had thousands of Lesser and Greater Flamingos with Great and Pink-backed Pelicans, and Black-winged Stilts. At the end of one side of the lake were two White Rhinos grazing on the vegetation with Grey-headed Gulls. And to top it off, I saw a Black-necked Spitting Cobra cross the road!

After leaving the park we headed to the high hills of Mt. Kenya. We came to a grassy area where there were displaying Long-tailed Widowbirds. The Widowbirds are named as such because the male loses his long tail and distinctive coloring after breeding season, which makes him look exactly like the female. These flocks appear to have lost their males, hence the flock appears to be all females. The male would flutter across the water to the other side and then the females would follow suit. Seeing that long tail flutter in the air was both beautiful and entertaining. We also stayed at the Mountain Lodge Serena in the montane forest which puts out a mineral salt lick

to attract different mammals including the Giant Forest Hog. Unfortunately the hog never showed up but at 7,000 feet in altitude the view was beautiful.



Photo by Jim Mlre

In Samburu Game Reserve (home of the lion Elsa) we got to see the Vulturine Guinea-fowl, White-headed Mousebird, Somali Bee-eater, Cut-throat Finch, African Pygmy Falcon, Lichtensteins' Sandgrouse, Bare-eyed Thrush, and the gorgeous Golden-breasted Starling. Mammals we saw were the endangered Grevy's Zebra, Beisa Oryx, and the unusual looking Gerenuk. We also were treated to the sight of a pack of African Hunting Dogs which are extremely endangered and found in only six countries in Africa. These dogs hunt in packs and are the most successful predators of all mammalian hunters in Africa. Introduced domestic dogs brought the disease of distemper which has wiped out most of the packs. The dogs have been killed by farmers protecting their herds. Our guide Steven said he had only seen them three times in fifteen years.

The Samburu Simba Lodge had a large pond off the dining room where bait is thrown at night to attract different animals. A large crocodile cooperated and so did a Genet cat. In addition several bats fluttered around the light and hung on the light post. During the morning we could see Red-billed Hornbills and Yellow Hornbills on the trees. And the daily Kenyan coffee was a great way to start the day.

Kenya is a land of extreme beauty with its rich diversity of wildlife, and extreme poverty and hardships for the people. We left Kenya after two weeks and it was hard to say good-bye to the charming and friendly Kenyan people. After visiting Kenya I can see why Africa is called the cradle of life. For an exhaustive look at the birds and mammals we saw, you can look at Carol Foil's website: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/dermoidhome/?v=1>



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Baton Rouge Audubon Society

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