

The **BARRED OWL**

Newsletter of the Baton Rouge Audubon Society

Volume XXXIX, Number 1

1st Quarter, 2012

ONE YEAR LATER

LA WHOOPERS

It's been almost a year since LDWF along with partner organizations returned Whooping Cranes to the state for the first time since 1950. There have been ups and downs but a tremendous amount has been learned.

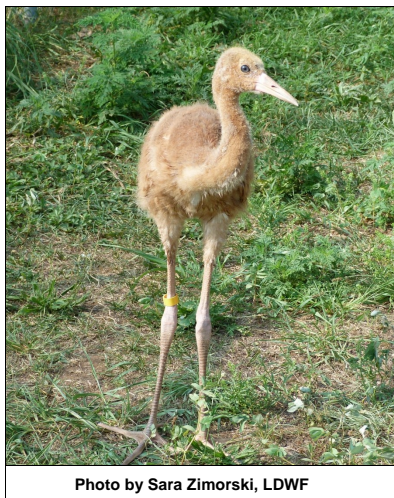


Photo by Sara Zimorski, LDWF

A year and a half after LDWF first began planning this project 10 juvenile Whooping Cranes were transported to a release pen built in the White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area (WLWCA) on February 16th. The cranes were in great shape after their flight from the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, MD and after a brief exam they were placed in a

smaller top-netted pen within the larger 1.5 acre open release pen. They had no trouble adapting and were seen catching and eating crawfish the very next morning. Several days after they arrived each bird was handled so their permanent bands and transmitters could be attached. Each bird received a solar powered GPS satellite transmitter on one leg, a unique combination of smaller color bands on the other leg and a metal USFWS band. While it sounds like a lot, the unique color combinations allow us to identify each individual and the transmitter collects GPS locations three times every day allowing us to know where the birds are and assess the habitat they are using at those different times of the day.

After a month the birds were getting antsy and we were ready to release them into the open pen and let them fly free for the first time in their lives. While ultimately successful the actual release day didn't go quite as we expected. Several birds were reluctant to walk through the narrow doorway into the open pen so the door was left open allowing them to come out when they were ready which took several days for a few of them. Additionally L1-10, the oldest bird in the group came out and flew but disappeared and didn't reappear until 4 days later, causing quite a bit of worry. We still don't know quite what happened to her, where she went or why but she looked great when she came back and never left again. And finally L5-10, one of the birds reluctant to walk through the doorway on the first day, apparently had, had enough of the pen and the other birds because once she came out of the top-netted pen she flew outside and never came back to the pen. She moved north in the marsh and after just a short while there she moved to crawfish fields in Acadia Parish.

The initial plan was to encourage the birds to roost in the pen at night to keep them safe from predators while they still learned the ways of the marsh. This worked for the first few nights but after that the birds had other ideas. We continued trying to encourage them to roost in the pen but night after night they would fly out at sunset and roost at a location of their choosing. Initially this had us worried but each day all 9 of them would return. Food was provided in the pen through early May after which time it was removed to encourage the birds to disperse away from the pen. And disperse they did, visiting 7 different parishes (not including Acadia where L5 was already settled and Vermilion where they had started from) and SE Texas on their first weekend away from the pen. After that adventure they all returned to

(Continued on page 5)

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Christmas Bird Count

National Audubon's 112th Christmas Bird Count will take place for the Baton Rouge circle on January 2nd, 2012. If you are interested in participating, please contact our Count Compiler Jeff Harris at jwharris30@gmail.com. You will be assigned to a team and each team will have a territory within the count circle. All are welcome -- even if you're not an experienced birder you can help by spotting birds. Baton Rouge Audubon Society is paying the fee for all participants.

At the end of the count day, we will gather at Jeff's house to tabulate totals. The address is 1967 Tulip Street, Baton Rouge, LA 70806. We will probably begin the evening with a potluck meal at about 6:00 PM -- please bring something to share. Jeff said he will also provide a non-meat alternative entree for the vegetarians in the group.

You can help with other Christmas Bird Counts around Louisiana as well. Here is a list of the counts that have been scheduled so far. Visit the LA Ornithological Society (www.losbird.org) website to find compiler contact information.

Crowley - 14 Dec
Claiborne - 15 Dec
Lacassine/Thornwell - 16 Dec
Sabine NWR - 17 Dec
Catahoula NWR - 17 Dec
D'Arbonne - 17 Dec
Vicksburg* - 17 Dec
Sweet Lake/Cameron Prairie -
18 Dec
Grand Isle - 21 Dec
Creole - 23 Dec
New Orleans - 26 Dec
Reserve/Bonnet Carre - 26 Dec
Northshore/Slidell - 27 Dec
Venice - 28 Dec

Lafayette - 30 Dec
Natchez* - 30 Dec
New Iberia - 31 Dec
Pine Prairie - 2 Jan
Baton Rouge - 2 Jan
Bossier-Caddo - 2 Jan
Tensas River - 3 Jan
Cheneyville/Lecompte - 4 Jan

To Be Determined:

Johnson Bayou
Natchitoches
Shreveport
St Tammany

**portion of count is in Louisiana*

If you're new to the Christmas Bird Count and wish to learn more,
visit the National Audubon web page at
<http://birds.audubon.org/get-involved-christmas-bird-count>

You can also view results from previous Baton Rouge CBC's
by following the link on that page.

See you all on January 2nd!

World-class Presentations and Bird Monitoring in Baton Rouge

by Jared Wolfe

What do Whooping Cranes, Crawfish, Birds of Borneo, and Kids Who Bird have in common? They were all topics this past fall during BRAS's ongoing monthly presentation series. Our upcoming winter and spring presentations promise to be equally exciting. For example, Dr. Frank Rohwer is a renowned waterfowl scientist who currently serves as Program Leader in Wildlife and Fisheries at LSU and Scientific Director for Delta Waterfowl. On 26-January, 6:15pm at the Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center, Dr. Rohwer will be drawing upon his decades of experience to provide our community with an exciting overview of Louisiana Waterfowl (Duck and Goose) natural history and current conservation efforts. On 16-February, 6:15pm at the Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center, biologist Luke Powell will present on LSU's on-going research focused on the ecology of Amazonian bird communities. Mr. Powell has spent years working in the Western and Central Amazon studying various facets of tropical ornithology including parrot behavior and the effects of fragmentation on understory birds. Mr. Powell's presentation will include a photographic overview of tropical bird natural history accompanied by a brief review of conservation efforts in the Central Amazon. In addition to entertaining and informative presentations this winter and spring, we have tentative agreements from world-renowned naturalists such as David Sibley for presentations late next year. BRAS programs remains focused on providing bird enthusiasts with enlightening presentations from world-renowned bird experts.

In addition to presentations, BRAS Programs continues to expand bird monitoring initiatives in and around Baton Rouge. Through partnership with LSU and BREC, the Bluebonnet Bird Monitoring Project (BBMP) routinely monitors our local bird community thereby providing unparalleled outreach to Baton Rouge children and unique insights into avian natural history. For example, in part-

nership with the Institute for Bird Populations biologist Peter Pyle, BBMP banding data was recently used in a study documenting novel plumage transitions in Indigo Bunting. The work will be published in an upcoming edition of *Western Birds*. Based on the formative success of BBMP's Baton Rouge bird monitoring program, BBMP has partnered with Real Nature Environmental Farm in Jacksonville, Louisiana, to start an organic farm bird monitoring program. BBMP and our partners are excited to expand bird monitoring to agricultural areas because we believe such efforts will inform wildlife-friendly farm practices in Louisiana; follow Real Nature Environmental Farm's bird monitoring project online: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Real-Nature-Environmental-Farm/195611243812212>. Our two bird monitoring stations in Jacksonville and Baton Rouge will continue to prepare the next generation of bird advocates, provide insights into avian natural history, and monitor local bird populations to make sure our common birds remain common.



Dr. Frank Rohwer
Photo courtesy of Delta Waterfowl

Winter Hummingbird Tour



Maybe it's defective radar, maybe it's a strategy we don't quite understand, but whatever the reason, dozens of hummingbirds that should be going to Mexico or Central America are spending the winter along the gulf coast instead. These are species of hummingbirds that may be new to us – Rufous, Buff-Bellied, Black-chinned, or Calliope, to name just a few. Most are very different from our familiar Ruby-throat. If you'd like to see these different and wonderful hummingbirds, look for an announcement for our annual Winter Hummingbird Tour in Baton Rouge around mid-January. We'll visit 3 or 4 houses that host different types of hummingbirds – hopefully you'll get to see at least one of each species!

Photo: Female Rufous Hummingbird resting after being marked and banded by Nancy Newfield



Audubon Coastal Bird Survey Tracking Shorebird Populations

by Erik I. Johnson

Much of coastal Louisiana has been recognized as a globally Important Bird Area for many species of conservation concern, including Piping Plovers, Wilson's Plovers, Black Skimmers, and Brown Pelicans. Given the immense pressures that Louisiana's coastline faces, these and other coastal water bird populations are at great risk to human disturbance, pollution (like oil spills), and land loss.

Audubon Coastal Bird Surveys (ACBS) have been developed to capture local population data for coastal water birds in such a way that regional population and trend estimates can be estimated for the northern Gulf of Mexico. This past fall, eight stretches of coastal beach in Louisiana were surveyed two to six times each by dedicated and hard-working volunteers, contributing to efforts already underway in Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi.

ACBS will continue this winter with surveys being conducted from 10 January to 20 February and this spring from 20 March to 30 May at sites that many of us already go birding, including Grand Isle and Cameron. Each survey takes about 1 to 2 hours to complete, and generally involves a nice walk along our beautiful beaches.

In addition, we are working with Manomet Center for Conservation Science to put together shorebird identification and ACBS training workshops. If you are interested in attending an upcoming workshop or volunteering for ACBS, please let us know.

More information about the program, including the first annual report, protocol, and data sheets can be found at:
<https://gulfoilspill.audubon.org/audubon-coastal-bird-survey>

If you would like to participate in the program, please register at:
<http://www.audubonaction.org/acbs>

or contact Dustin Renaud, Volunteer Program Manager
Gulf of Mexico | Mississippi Flyway
drenaud@audubon.org



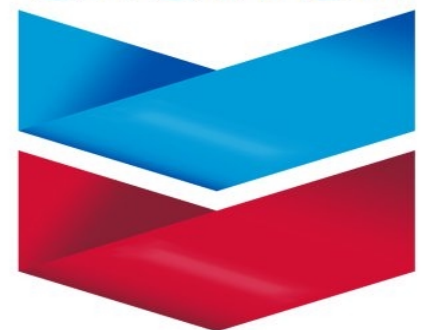
BRAS wishes to acknowledge
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for their support of our
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Thank you so much!

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KEEP AN EAGLE EYE OUT

Folks are reporting regular looks at Bald Eagles in the Baton Rouge area again this year. Not only are they being seen near downtown and LSU by the lakes, but also near much smaller bodies of water, such as subdivision lakes. It stands to reason that if we're seeing Bald Eagles this time of year there may very well be a nest close to Baton Rouge. There are reports, but no confirmation, of a nest south of LSU near the Mississippi River. The nest that we watched last year off the Ramah-Maringuin exit of I-10 near Sherburne WMA South Farm is active again – the female is sitting on the nest and the male flies in periodically to check on her. That nest fledged two young in the spring of this year; here's hoping they have the same success again!

It's always a thrill to see a Bald Eagle in the wild. For more than your fair share, you can plan to attend the Cajun Coast Eagle Expo in Morgan City, LA from Feb. 9-11. In addition to lectures and exhibits, you will have your choice of boat tours that will take you out into the bayous and swamps to view nesting Bald Eagles. It's quite an experience! Visit the festival website at: <http://www.cajuncoast.com/public/events/eagleexpo/>



Photo by
Doug Robert

Louisiana Whooping Crane Update

(Continued from page 1)

the pen site one last time before breaking up into smaller groups and moving to other areas.

Three birds, L2, 4, and 7 remained in the marsh but moved to the west side where more water was present. Four birds, L1, 3, 8, and 10 moved to a rice field in Evangeline Parish and remained there for almost two months. This left L6 and L9, independent females who moved to separate locations on their own.

Mortality is expected and shortly after the birds moved away from the release pen we experienced our first mortalities. In late May data from L9's transmitter indicated a likely mortality but the area was inaccessible due to flooding until early summer at which time the area was investigated and her transmitter as well as a small amount of remains were found confirming our suspicions. Around the same time L6's transmitter stopped functioning, the data had looked normal until it just stopped working. We searched the areas she had last been on the ground and from the air but never found anything. She is considered missing but presumed dead since there has been no data or sightings of her since that time. Additionally in mid-June a local landowner north of White Lake contacted us to report that L7 was injured. She was captured and placed in the top-netted pen so she could be evaluated and treated. Unfortunately she was quite sick and after two weeks of treatment and two trips to the vet school there was not much improvement and she had developed a respiratory infection so the decision was made to humanely euthanize her.

During the summer the remaining 7 birds were mostly settled in their locations and our focus shifted to collecting data on the habitats the birds were choosing to use. As the agricultural areas that 5 of the birds were using changed, with rice maturing and being harvested and water being drawn down and other fields being re-flooded the birds began moving around making it more challenging to keep track of them.

Sadly in early October L8 and L10 were shot and killed by two juveniles in Jefferson Davis Parish. L1 who had been with them disappeared at the same time and has not been seen since then reducing the number of surviving birds to likely only 4. While a disappointing setback for the project we are moving forward with doing more education and outreach to try and prevent this from happening again in the future.

Recent donations for education and outreach materials from the Orleans and Baton Rouge Audubon Societies will be a tremendous help as we continue to spread the word and garner excitement for the return of Whooping Cranes to the state! We are excited to end the year with the arrival of 16 new cranes that will soon be calling Louisiana home! Please stay tuned and keep your fingers crossed for a healthy and happy 2012 for the cranes!! For updates on the project please visit the department's website at: <http://wlf.louisiana.gov/wildlife/whooping-cranes>

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Keeping your membership current is important!

BRAS and National Audubon Membership

You may join NAS by going to their website (audubon.org) and you automatically become a member of both NAS and BRAS. You will receive the quarterly award-winning *Audubon* magazine as well as the quarterly BRAS newsletter, *The Barred Owl*.

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If you want all of your dues to support local conservation and education, join BRAS only. You will NOT receive the *Audubon* magazine. You WILL receive *The Barred Owl* and a free sanctuary patch. You may join on-line at any level by visiting our website www.braudubon.org, or send this form with your check to: BRAS, P.O. Box 67016, BR LA 70896.

If you would prefer to receive the newsletter in electronic form only rather than a printed version, please email our Membership chair and let her know! Membership@braudubon.org

Patches Extra sanctuary patches or patches for NAS members are \$10 each and can be ordered by mailing the form below. If you are joining BRAS and want a free patch, you must put "1" in the blank.

Baton Rouge Audubon Society (BRAS)

Please enroll me as a member of BRAS! Enclosed is my check for:

- \$25 Individual Membership
- \$30 Family Membership
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- \$100 Rose-breasted Grosbeak Membership
- \$250 Louisiana Waterthrush Membership
- \$500 Painted Bunting Membership
- \$1000 Cerulean Warbler Membership
- \$ _____ Additional Contribution
- # _____ of patches (indicate 1 which is free with BRAS membership; additional patches \$10 each; NAS member patches @ \$10 each; no patch will be sent if there is no indication.)
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