

The **BARRED OWL**

Newsletter of the Baton Rouge Audubon Society

Volume XXXX, Number 1

1st Quarter, 2013

Ballons Blow: Don't let them go!

by Jane Patterson

A popular practice for celebrations is releasing helium balloons into the air en masse. The sight of thousands of balloons floating and flying over our heads into the nether regions is truly a sight to behold. It used to be common practice for car dealerships all over the country to tie helium balloons to the cars on the lots and cut them loose every evening. These harbingers of happiness float up, up, up, and out of our sight, and out of our minds. We don't give a thought to the fact that these balloons come back down. They come back down into our lakes, and creeks, and roads, and rivers, and often, eventually up in the ocean. Sometimes they pop; if they ascend high enough to freeze and shat-

ter, the pieces that fall may be small. But many don't make it high enough to shatter and come down virtually intact. A helium balloon looks an awful lot like a jellyfish when it floats under water. An unsuspecting turtle goes in for a bite, and chokes on latex. Diving birds may do the same, or may get tangled in the balloon strings. I've read that both cows and deer eat them and can choke. Basically, these celebratory events are mass littering campaigns. I want to hope that the people that organize these events would be horrified if they knew the damage they were doing. I want to think that it really is this "out of sight, out of mind" mentality that allows this to continue and if they just realized. In a recent exchange about this subject on Facebook, when a post was made about balloons being dangerous for birds, one of the comments from a reader was "Why do helium balloons cause problems for birds, can't they just fly around them?" It was a sincere question, not a flippant one. And some would say "oh, how stupid was she!" but it is quite seriously how people think...that somehow helium balloons float away into

space and disappear into thin air. Indeed, this idea is promoted by the balloon industry (www.balloonrelease.com). But the fact is that many don't disappear and end up as litter that is both unsightly and harmful. Recently, I found an Anhinga at the Capitol lakes in downtown Baton Rouge with a balloon and strings caught around its bill. This is a problem that is both universal and close to home.

Some of those who realize that balloons do come down on the other side, will try to minimize the problem by saying that latex balloons are biodegradable. It's true, technically they are. But do you know how long they take to degrade? Proponents of the balloon industry claim they will biodegrade in the same length of time as an oak leaf, or about 6 months. This experiment was done by the Marine Conservation Society in the UK that shows that balloon was just beginning to break down in 6 months (<http://www.marineconservation.org.uk/balloon%20experiment.html> or Google "balloon experiment marine conservation") The problem is com-

(Continued on page 5)



Photo by Angie Ledbetter

Who Moved My Hummingbird?

by Jane Patterson

Have you seen a hummingbird lately? Chances are, the answer's no. Our Ruby-throated Hummingbirds leave the U.S. by September or October each year. But if you answered yes, then you have a very special bird! Several species of hummingbird that breed in the western or southwestern part of the U.S. are showing up with regularity along the Gulf Coast to spend the winter. The most common of these western species is the Rufous Hummingbird. The male is bright rust color with a red-gold gorget. The Black-chinned Hummingbird would be second most prevalent; they look very similar to our Ruby-throats except the adult male gorget is royal purple! The Buff-bellied hummer is almost 6 inches long and definitely can't be mistaken for any of our other hummingbirds. Other rarer species include Calliope, Broad-tailed, Allen's, Anna's, and Broad-billed.



Female Rufous Hummingbird



Buff-bellied Hummingbird

On Jan. 18, 2013, we'll hear from one of our local hummingbird aficionados, Dennis Demcheck, about each of these species of hummer, and we'll also learn what we can do to attract these birds to our yards. Please join us at Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center on January 18 at 6:30-8:00 pm for our program. Registration is required as space is limited. Send an email to President@braudubon.org to register. Admission is free for Baton Rouge Audubon members (with registration) and \$3.00 for non-members.

Then, on Jan. 19, we will have our annual BRAS Winter Hummingbird Tour. Again, registration is required so that we know how many people will be participating and how many trip leaders we'll need. We'll meet at 7:30a.m. at Brew Ha-Ha Coffee house at 711 Jefferson Ave in Baton Rouge. We'll travel by carpool to at least 4 homes in the Baton Rouge area to see the special winter visitors. The tour should wrap up about noon. There is no charge for this event. Always a fun time, so be sure to sign up now!

Hope to see you at one or both of these special events!



Female Anna's Hummingbird

An Update on Dr. Jay Huner's Big Year:

The Final Push

With the year quickly coming to a close, so is Dr. Jay Huner's Big Year of birding in Louisiana. With every new species, his total ascends more slowly as he has seen basically every bird one would expect so to see in a year of birding in Louisiana. The challenge now is in finding the absurdly unusual species.

With some recent help from Van Remsen and Terry Davis pointing Dr. Huner on some hard-to-find species, he has recently seen Common Goldeneye, Eared Grebe, and Bewick's Wren. On November 23 in Caddo Parish, Terry Davis and Charlie Lyon found an apparent Dusky-capped Flycatcher, a Myiarchus like Great Crested and Ash-throated Flycatchers. The bird luckily stuck around for Dr. Huner to track down a couple days later. So, how absurdly rare is this species you ask? Well, it breeds in southeastern Arizona, through Central America and northern South America...and there isn't a single proven record of this species having been observed in Louisiana. So if the record is accepted by the Louisiana Bird Records Committee (the group that reviews rare species records and manages the official state checklist of Louisiana birds), it would Louisiana's first ever documented Dusky-capped Flycatcher. Congrats to Terry and Charlie for finding the bird, and to Jay for seeing this wayward vagrant.

Currently Dr. Huner's list stands at a whopping 344 species, the third highest ever found in a calendar year in Louisiana. As of writing this on 10 December, just as the Christmas Bird Count season is about to start, he has 3 more weeks to build upon the list. The Christmas Bird Count season is when dozens of observers (including Dr. Huner) around the state "beat the bushes" counting birds and looking for rare species, which helps scientists and conservationists understand bird population trends. Let's all wish Dr. Huner the best of luck to break the 350 mark.

Funds raised through Dr. Huner's Big Louisiana Year will help support the Yellow Rails and Rice Festival, which takes place each year in late October, and the majority of the donations will be used to establish a land acquisition fund that will be used to purchase, restore, and protect important bird habitat near Baton Rouge that will be accessible to bird watchers and nature enthusiasts.

If you want to support Baton Rouge Audubon's goal to acquire a bird sanctuary near Baton Rouge, please help support Dr. Jay Huner build his list by immediately reporting unusual bird sightings to Baton Rouge Audubon leaders, LABird, or directly to Dr. Huner. One can visit <http://braudubon.org/jays-big-year.php> to keep up with his progress and to pledge a donation for ever bird that he finds in 2012 to support Baton Rouge Audubon Society's mission to protect important bird habitat.

Erik I. Johnson

What Our Friends Are Doing

ORLEANS AUDUBON SOCIETY

Half-day Field Trip
Saturday, January 12
To Audubon Park
Time: 8:00 a.m.

Meet in the parking lot off
Magazine St. (St. Charles side of
Magazine) near the golf club house.

Leader:
Mary Joe Krieger
866-3396 (home)

Baton Rouge Audubon Officers

President

Jane Patterson 225/753-7615
president@braudubon.org

Vice-President

Erik Johnson
vice-president@braudubon.org

Past President

Eric Liffmann
eliffmann@gmail.com

Treasurer

Jay Guillory
treasurer@braudubon.org

Secretary

Donna LaFleur
secretary@braudubon.org

Committee Chairs

Conservation

Vacant

Education

Jane Patterson
education@braudubon.org

Fieldtrips

Daniel Mooney
fieldtrips@braudubon.org

Membership

Heather Mancuso
membership@braudubon.org

Newsletter

Steve Mumford
newsletter@braudubon.org

Programs

Jared Wolfe
programs@braudubon.org

Sanctuaries

Dave Patton
sanctuary@braudubon.org

Webmaster

Daniel Patterson
webmaster@braudubon.org

At Large Members...

National Audubon:

Gulf Coast Dir. of Bird Conservation

Melanie Driscoll
mdriscoll@audubon.org

Richard Gibbons
rgibbo3@yahoo.com

The Barred Owl

is published quarterly by the
Baton Rouge chapter of the NAS.
Submissions should be emailed to
newsletter@braudubon.org

Changes of address and other official
correspondence should be sent to:

Baton Rouge
Audubon Society
P.O. Box 67016
Baton Rouge, LA 70896

Amazon Bird Banding Adventure . . .

. . . Made Possible by BRAS

Singing Collared Puffbirds greeted bleary-eyed students while instructors prepared equipment for another morning of bird banding in the predawn hours of a central Amazonian rainforest. Coffee and bread was quickly devoured as eager students assembled into groups and began navigating primitive trails towards one of four mist-net arrays. This scene was repeated for five consecutive days during the recently completed bird banding course conducted at the famed 'kilometer 41' campsite, or Camp 41, where vast tracts of lowland



tropical rainforest served as classrooms and the dizzying-array of resident bird species functioned as study material. The course was precedent setting in Brazil and was made possible by the efforts of BRAS Officers and course instructors, Dr. Erik Johnson and myself, Jared Wolfe, and our counterpart in Brazil, Dr. Gonçalo Ferraz at the National Institute of Amazonian Research. The majority of the equipment used in the banding course was on loan and laboriously transported from BRAS's Bluebonnet Bird Monitoring Project in Baton Rouge.

The course began on 14 of October in Manaus, the capital of Amazonas state in Brazil, at the National Institute of Amazonian Research (INPA) where instructors, assistant instructors and students, 24 people in all representing six different countries, began their journey several hours north to Camp 41. The location is ideal for a banding course because it offers unparalleled opportunity to capture birds from an unspoiled tract of primary rainforest; from Camp 41 a person can walk west through forest and reach the Colombian border after crossing only one road near Manaus, similarly, one can repeat the venture north through forest until the Guianas.



Each morning, bird banding sessions focused on teaching students the necessary techniques to safely and accurately collect meaningful data from wild birds. Proper holds, measurements, band application, extracting birds from nets and data recording were practiced continually throughout the course. Additionally, students were introduced to the fascinating life-history of resident avifauna that resides in one of the most biodiverse ecosystems in the world. Gasps of amazement were heard each morning as participants worked with extremely rare species such as the Wing-banded Antbird, a taxonomically unique species that is renowned for its reliance on large tracts of unaltered rainforest. Blue-crowned Motmot, White-throated Manakin, Rufous-throated Antbird, Amazonian Royal Flycatcher, Lined Forest Falcon and the plentiful White-plumed Antbird were also popular captures among course participants.

After banding activities

concluded, participants returned to camp where they ate lunch and took-part in various workshops and lectures: band removal, bird first-aid, station management, banding ethics, mist-net management, bird topography, ageing, sexing, molt, disease ecology and auxiliary markers. Unique to this course was access to the recently completed central Amazonian age and sex guide, authored by Erik Johnson, which provided students the opportunity to learn and apply known age-categorization criteria to captured resident tropical birds – a rare opportunity outside of North America and Europe.



After five consecutive days of field work, lectures, and workshops, each student was given an exam and anonymous questionnaire to determine how successfully knowledge was disseminated to the participants. Based on these results, the instructors concluded that students with no experience conducting ornithological field-work departed with a firm understanding of bird banding techniques, the avian life-cycle and a knowledge of the necessary criteria to separate age and sex classes. In total, we safely captured 430 birds representing 59 species in five consecutive days. We had a total of 17 students hailing from Universities, Museums, and Government Agencies throughout Brazil, Peru, and Colombia. We look forward to conducting an equally successful course next year!

--Jared Wolfe

BRAS Programs

A Look Ahead To 2013

This past fall speakers at BRAS's monthly presentations have taught audiences about Humboldt Penguins in Peru, Saddlebacks and Robins in New Zealand, endemic birds of Costa Rica and Hummingbird banding in Louisiana. Upcoming presentations will be just as exciting and informative starting in January when Dr. Jay Huner, a retired professor from University of Louisiana at Lafayette, will provide highlights from his epic year-long challenge to see as many birds as possible in the great state of Louisiana. Jay's Louisiana big year goals include raising money to support Baton Rouge Audubon Society's mission to protect habitat for Louisiana's birds.

In February, Dr. Sammy King will summarize years of scientific exploration into the natural history of Louisiana's cryptic marsh bird community. In March, Karl Mokross will present on the fascinating behavior of mixed-species tropical-bird flocks. Finally, in May 2013, renowned bird watcher and bird artist, David Sibley, has agreed to present a public talk and conduct a 1-day advanced bird watching course in and around Baton Rouge. More details about David Sibley's visit will be available shortly on the Baton Rouge Audubon website: <http://www.braudubon.org/>.

See you at the next presentation!
Jared Wolfe

Ballons Blow

(Continued from page 1)

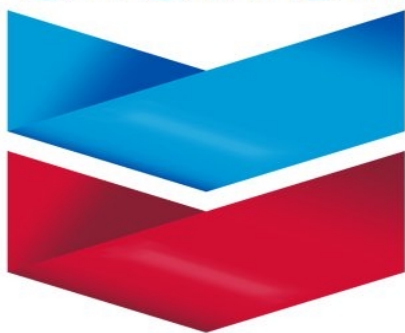
pounded by the fact that the balloons often have strings attached made from various materials, often plastic, which may stay around longer than the balloons themselves. They provide plenty of tangling opportunities for wildlife. And mylar balloons? A deadly combination of metal and plastic that will stay around for years to come. Did you know that helium is a finite natural resource? And that there is concern that we may be depleting the earth's supply at an alarming rate? An internet search reveals dozens of articles about this concern.

But even aside from the danger to wildlife aspect, this is just littering plain and simple. Are any of us proponents of mass littering? Would it be ok to throw hundreds or thousands of pieces of paper out into our cities, neighborhoods, parks...justified by the fact that paper is biodegradable? I don't know about you, but I was taught from an early age that littering is unacceptable. Unfortunately, judging by the fact that I see so much litter everywhere I go (and not just in Louisiana, by the way) I am not sure we all were taught the same lessons. Plastic litter, in particular, is becoming a horrific problem for the whole planet...the marine debris garbage patches cover thousands of square miles of ocean (see marinedebris.noaa.gov).

Let's focus on the balloon problem for the moment though. What can we do about this? First, if you're affiliated with an organization that is planning a mass balloon release, speak up and let them know it's not a good idea and tell them of the dangers. Suggest an alternative, such as a candle vigil for a memorial service, or a butterfly release for a daytime event. Avoid mylar balloons altogether! Education and information are key -- as always! Visit balloonsblow.org on the web or Facebook for more information on this subject.

Baton Rouge Audubon thanks

Chevron



for their sponsorship of
our education programs!

Baton Rouge Audubon Society



Baton Rouge Chapter of the National Audubon Society

Baton Rouge Audubon Society

P.O. Box 67016

Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70896

"Address Service Requested"

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Baton Rouge, LA
Permit No. 29

Keep Your Membership Current!

If your membership expires, you will no longer receive *The Barred Owl*. Well, eventually we take your name off the list. It is expensive to produce and membership dues help to cover that cost. Please see the expiration code on the first line of the label above your name. The month and year in which your membership expires are indicated after your membership organization (e.g., BRAS DEC 09 for BRAS-only members and NAS DEC 10 for NAS members).

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*.

BRAS Only Membership

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
- \$50 Wood Thrush Membership
- \$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.)
- Electronic version **only** of newsletter (do not mail)

Name: _____ Ph: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

E-mail: _____

MAIL COMPLETE FORM TO:
Baton Rouge Audubon Society; PO Box 67016; Baton Rouge, LA 70896