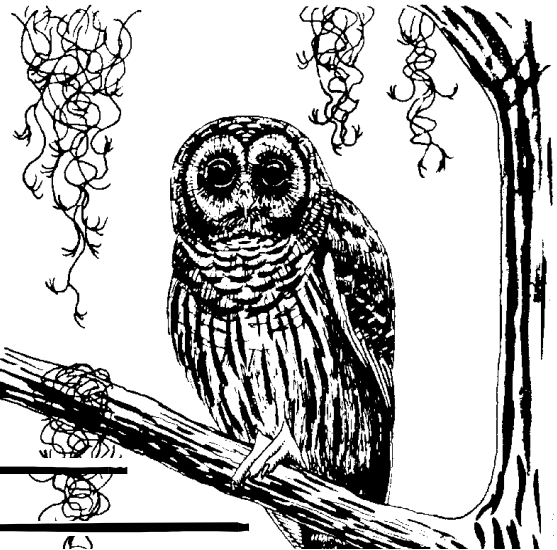


The **BARRED OWL**

Newsletter of the Baton Rouge Audubon Society

Volume XL1, Number 3

3rd Quarter, 2014



WADING BIRD BONANZA

by Jane Patterson

Mark your calendars for July 19, 2014 and when the day comes, set your alarm for really-freaking-early. You'll want to be at Sherburne WMA South Farm by 7:00 am that day. Why, you ask? Because that is the day of the annual Wood Stork and Wading Bird event!

Sherburne South Farm is arguably the best birding spot within 30 minutes of Baton Rouge. It's has enough habitat variety to attract not only the forest birds, but shorebirds in the fall, waterfowl in the winter, and it's a wading bird mecca in the summer. The refuge features several large crawfish ponds that are managed for wintering waterfowl. This means the

ponds are slowly drawn down beginning in July. By the latter part of July (depending on rainfall) the pond levels are down significantly, making them "wade-able" and most attractive to herons, egrets and the like, as the fish are concentrated into smaller areas. Also attracted, sometimes in great numbers, are Wood Storks! These large wading birds have a fairly limited population in the U.S. They breed in small numbers in north Florida and Georgia. But it's believed that the birds that we see here in Louisiana are of Mexican origin. They seem to be post-breeding wanderers that come up around the Texas bend and seem to follow the major rivers like the Mississippi. On July 19th, for this event, they will open the gate that is normally closed and LDWF allow you to drive to the ranger station and then provide rides to various tents located on the compound so you don't have to walk in the heat. A definite plus! The activity tends to spook the birds a bit, so do come early if you plan to attend.

If you want to see these birds another time at South Farm, the best way is to walk into South Farm before dark (bring a flashlight, it's seriously dark) and get to levee or the observation platform by the time it's light. That way you are less likely to spook the birds who will definitely move away. One some mornings I've counted as many as 2500 Wood Storks here, as well as hundreds of Great, Snowy, Cattle egrets, White Ibis, and hundreds of Roseate Spoonbills. It's quite a treat! Do plan ahead, however, because it's a 3-mile round trip walk. Walk in the main road...turn left, then, at the dogleg, continue south along the levee and then turn right at the first levee and you'll see the observation town out in the middle. Bring water, sunscreen, a hat, etc.



(Continued on page 3)

BRAS President's Report

We've had a busy year at Baton Rouge Audubon. We recently held our end of year meeting, held officer elections, and recognized special volunteers that helped out in outstanding ways this year. May basically represents the end of our year. Regarding elections: this year's slate of officers was collected and presented by Beverly Smiley. The nominated officers were **Jane Patterson** - President, **Erik Johnson** - Vice President, **Kimberly Lanka** - Treasurer, and **Donna Lafleur** - Secretary. The slate was accepted by the membership, no nominations were added, and the new officers were voted in with a unanimous vote. The additional board members for BRAS as it now stands, are as follows:

- **Eric Liffmann** - Past President
- **Heather Mancuso** - Membership chair
- **Richard Condrey** - Conservation chair
- **Dave Patton** - Sanctuary chair
- **Dan Mooney** - Field trips chair
- **Beverly Smiley** - At large
- **Melanie Driscoll** - At large
- **Vacant** - Programs chair

These board members are appointed by the President (with consensus of the rest of the board). We are currently looking for a Programs chairperson. If you would like to organize our monthly programs and you are interested in serving on the BRAS board, please contact me at President@braudubon.org and we can discuss. This is such a critical need; Jared has done such a WONDER-

Our new Treasurer, **Kimberly Lanka**, is an avid birder and nature-lover. She started contributing to Audubon Society in her teens while working on her Zoology degree at LSU. She enrolled her son in Jane's *Kids Who Bird Club* five years ago when he was four and they have both been bitten by the birding bug since then. Supporting Audubon has long been a dream of hers. She was Hospitality Chair for the past two years and was excited at the opportunity to become Treasurer. With her background including running her two businesses, Creature Comforts and Aquarium Solutions, as well as having been a stockbroker and investment advisor, her abilities are well-suited to filling the position of Treasurer. Kimberly also currently holds the position of LOS Newsletter Editor. She hopes to help BR Audubon Society continue its wonderful work of helping birds, the environment, and protecting land for those efforts.



FUL job organizing speakers and presentation the past couple of years and we *must* keep up the effort. We encourage any potential board members to visit our monthly board meetings for several months before jumping into serving on the board. Our board meetings will resume in September after the summer hiatus. Speaking of Jared... alas, he is leaving us! With graduation comes the need for salary, and Jared has been hired by the US Forestry service in California. So he'll be going home in July, and we are surely going to miss him! We want to commend him highly for the great work he did as the BRAS program chair.

You will also notice that we have a new Treasurer this year. We bid adieu to Jay Guillory as a board member. Jay has served unselfishly for many years a Treasurer but has decided that it's time for him to truly retire. We thank him immensely for his years of service to BRAS. Our new Treasurer is a Kimberly Lanka. (Please see insert for more info about Kimberly).

We also handed out gift certificates to show appreciation to several deserving folks, without whom we could not have had such a successful year. Soodong Lee, for participating in *every* banding session at all 3 locations all year; and Carol and Jeff Newell and John Hartgerink for helping to lead field trips and Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center and for showing everyone all the good stuff. Major thanks to all!

Regarding our land acquisition project: we are still waiting for final word regarding price from BREC for the parcel of land adjacent to the Frenchtown Conservation area. We are still hopeful that we'll be able to partner with BREC and BREC Foundation to be able to purchase it. We did acquire another lot near our sanctuary in Cameron Parish. Several of the lots in the Little Florida subdivision were auctioned and we purchased one of the lots. We are also (hopefully) about to resolve an issue with the Cameron Parish Assessor's office; they do not recognize our status as a tax exempt organization and have dunned us for property taxes for 2013. We believe the issue is resolved though we do not have the final word on it yet. We will keep you posted.

Monthly bird walks (and possibly other field trips) will continue during summer. Be sure to check the Calendar on the braudubon.org website! I will also be teaching a summer class called Backyard Birder and a fall Beginning Birder class -- please pass along if you have friends or family that might enjoy (sign up via the LSU Leisure Class website).

See y'all in the woods!

Jane Patterson
President

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Initially called the Bluebonnet Bird Monitoring Project, this program's name was recently changed to Louisiana Bird Observatory (LABO) to reflect the expansion of bird monitoring initiatives to Palmetto Island State Park (near Abbe44.5hll9^(ng 2(M)16.1(a(ye44.548 13 (lan))-12.W)-2j)9.n o)19.nd olas Conser^(be44.5ancye44.54((36(6(nea6)2.2())TJ T* 0.0 thisvie7(s)-9.

WADING BIRD BONANZA

(Continued from page 1)

Now, please do realize that although we time this event and *plan* to see lots of birds, the forces of nature don't always work with us! Some years there are thousands of birds, another year we saw a total of 3 Wood Storks. There are things we cannot control!

Directions: When traveling west on I-10, take the Ramah/Maranguoin exit 135. Turn right at the stop sign and then take the first available left and then the first right which takes you through the small community of Ramah. Cross the recently repaired bridge over the bayou. Turn right to go north on the side-levee road. It's about 2 miles to South Farm; look for the sign on the left. Turn right at the South Farm sign

to go over the levee to the parking area. The yellow gate will be open and you can drive into the refuge and park by the ranger station. ATV's or trucks will take you to the tent areas. Please stay in the tent areas so as not to spook the birds; be mindful of others who wish to come see the birds. Scopes will be available for use. Note to photographers -- it's very likely the birds will be some distance away and we ask that you not approach the birds to try for photographs; they will certainly fly away.

If you have questions about the event, please email me at President@braudubon.org



Three Louisiana Birders View the Last Natural Delta of the Mississippi River

by Richard Condrey

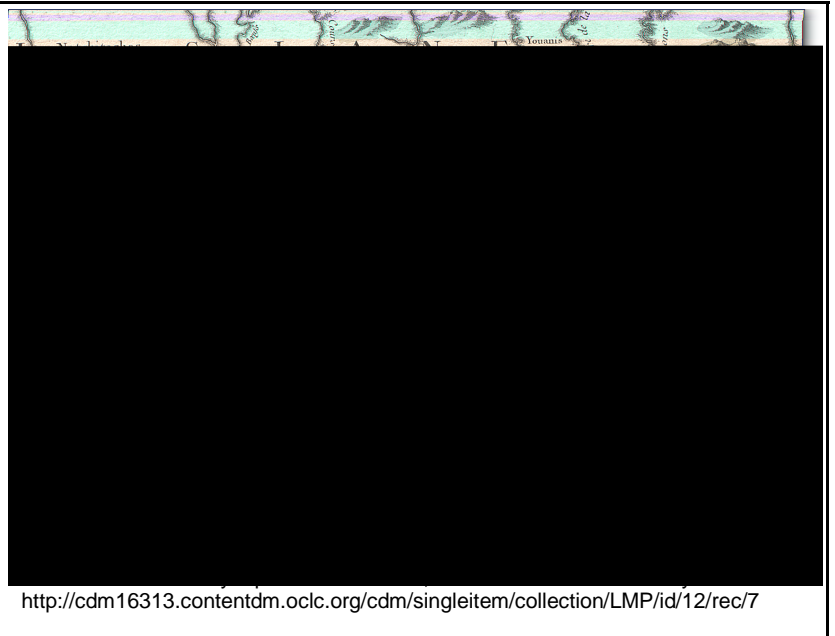
Three Louisiana birders view Louisiana's coast through the eyes of 15-19th century scientists in a newly released book. They find a robust and amazingly broad Delta, filled with parakeets and bison, advancing into the Gulf of Mexico (GoM). Vast offshore oyster reefs and majestic drift trees from North America's virgin forest are some of the organic forces building and maintaining the coast, while impeding navigation.

The birders are D. Elaine Evers, Baton Rouge Audubon; David Muth, Orleans Audubon; and myself. Our findings are found in Perspectives on the Restoration of the Mississippi Delta: The Once and Future Delta (Day et al. 2014), a recent volume in Springer's Estuaries of the World series. I'll review the chapter by Elaine, LSU's Paul Hoffman, and myself here and David's chapter in our next newsletter. The abstracts for both chapters are available at http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-94-017-8733-8_4 and http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-94-017-8733-8_2.

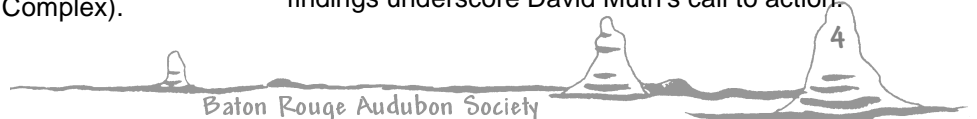
In our chapter we analyze the sailing logs of Chaves (ca. 1537), Barroto (1686), Iberville (1699), Evía (1785), and Dumain (1807) for a description of the last naturally active complexes of the Mississippi River Delta (Delta) – the most appropriate basis for informed restoration efforts. We find that these diverse and largely independent accounts form a remarkably consistent pattern and describe a system which dwarfed our expectations.

The active Delta extended across all of coastal Louisiana from the eastern edge of the Chenier Plain to the southern shores of Ship Island, Mississippi. During the spring flood, it was characterized by sheets of freshwater which began spreading out over the face of the land near Baton Rouge and by four distributaries carrying the flood for miles into the GoM. These once vital distributaries are now the Atchafalaya, Plaquemines, Lafourche, and Mississippi. The coast of the Delta was nearly continuous, full of shallows and reefs, and contained only shallow inlets. The main offshore oyster reefs extended from Ship Shoal to Chenier au Tigre, where it formed an important offshore harbor for 15th and 16th century Spanish sailors attempting to enter the Río del Espíritu Santo (the western most of the Mississippi's four distributaries; now the Vermillion/Atchafalaya Bay Complex).

We can see this Delta in the authoritative maps of cartographers like Jacques Bellin who had access to living witnesses. In the detail of Bellin (1764; below) we can see the interconnectivity of the Atchafalaya (Riv. du Vermieu), Plaquemine (Riv. Plaquemine), and Lafourche (Riv. Chetis); the all season connections of the Mississippi to Manchac (R. de Iberville), Plaquemines, and Lafourche; the nearly continuous coast full of reefs and narrow inlets; fresh water discharges through Barataria and Bastian Passes (Riv. Barataria, R. au Bastien); the narrow and shallow Chandeleur Sound and the extensive Isles de la Chandeleur; and we begin to understand why Evía and Dumain were sent to map the Delta's extensive offshore oyster reef as an aid to navigation.



Our findings suggest that coastal restoration efforts are "necessarily going to fail unless the natural flows of the Mississippi through and across the LNDM are sufficiently restored so as to support Louisiana's barrier islands and coastline against the forces of the GoM". In support of this argument, we present statistical analyses of the current land loss data. These analyses reveal that Louisiana has been losing coastal land at a rate of 69.1 km² / yr (1.47 football fields/hr) from 1932 through 2010.8 and coastal islands at a rate of 0.703 km² /yr from ca. 1855 to 2005. Our analysis of these data finds no statistically significant impact of completed restoration projects, variations in recent hurricane activity, or a '1950-60 land-loss peak'. As I'll discuss in our next newsletter, our findings underscore David Muth's call to action.



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SPECIES PROFILE: SWAINSON'S WARBLER

by Erik Johnson

Secretive and specialized, the Swainson's Warbler is one of the top conservation priority species in the southeastern United States. Although this bird is most commonly found in large tracts of bottomland hardwood forests with dense tangles in the understory, such as the extensive Atchafalaya, Sabine, or Pearl River Basins. Perhaps surprisingly they can also be found nesting in dense un-thinned pine plantations between 7 and 24 years of age (Henry 2005, Bassett-Touchell and Stouffer 2006).



Bluebonnet Swamp does not have enough bottomland hardwood forest area to support breeding populations of this species, but Swainson's Warblers occasionally fall into our nets there during spring and fall migration, indicating it is used as stopover habitat. At Palmetto Island State Park, we have found five territories over an area of about 120 acres thoroughly surveyed within this 1300-acre preserve. Indeed, this species typically maintains large territories, sometimes over 10 acres, and more open understory areas of otherwise suitable-looking forest may go unoccupied.

This species may have been substantially impacted by extensive bottomland forest clearing in the late 1800s and early 1900s, like the Bachman's Warbler that never recovered. Since 1966 when the Breeding Bird Survey began, this

species appears to have been recovering. Even so, the low population size of this species is under great risk as changes to hydrology, a pressing issue in Louisiana, can flood out nesting habitat. Remember back to 2011 when extremely high Mississippi River water was diverted into the Atchafalaya Basin, flooding much of the basin between its levees. It is reasonable to believe that many Swainson's Warbler nests were impacted by these high water levels.

How will climate change and associated changes in the timing, intensity, and amount of rainfall across the Mississippi River basin increase the risk of high water in south Louisiana? Some experts believe flood events like in 2011 will not only become more regular, but also more typically peak in late spring. This timing is a shift to later in the calendar year compared to decades ago when river flood stages often peaked earlier in the year (late winter to early spring) often before the nesting season began for many migratory songbirds.

It is also important to note that the winter habitat of this migratory species appears more or less restricted to the Yucatan Peninsula and a few Caribbean islands, like Jamaica, Cuba, and the Bahamas. What will come of this species with the increasing threat of development and habitat loss in these regions?

ARTICLE FROM SPRING 2014 LA BIRD
OBSERVATORY NEWSLETTER, REPRINTED
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Note from Jane Patterson: You don't have to travel far to find the elusive Swainson's Warblers but they are scarce. The only remaining areas to support Swainson's Warblers in East Baton Rouge Parish are in the Wad-dill State Wildlife Refuge on N. Flannery Rd and BREC Frenchtown Conservation area.



Baton Rouge Chapter of the National Audubon Society

Baton Rouge Audubon Society

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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.

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