

The **BARRED OWL**

Newsletter of the Baton Rouge Audubon Society

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3rd Quarter, 2015

Our Birds Are Under Attack!

What would Louisiana be without its iconic wading birds? Wonderful birds like the Great and Snowy Egrets, Great and Little Blue Herons, and the wonderful neon Roseate Spoonbill. But a hundred years ago these birds were being lost at an alarming rate. They were hunted for their feathers, usually during breeding season, which accelerated their demise. Fortunately, concerned citizens rallied to their defense and the Audubon Society was formed and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act was put into place in 1918. The meat of the MBTA is this: *"The MBTA provides that it is unlawful to pursue, hunt, take, capture, kill, possess, sell, purchase, barter, import, export, or transport any migratory bird, or any part, nest, or egg or any such bird, unless authorized under a permit issued by the Secretary of the Interior. Some regulatory exceptions apply. Take is defined in regulations as: 'pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or attempt to pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect.'*"



Simply put, the MBTA protects birds from people. And it's due for an upgrade. There are new threats to birds, such as towers, solar power collectors, wind turbines, and power lines. The law needs to be updated and the USFWS is working to do just that.

In a recent article, National Audubon said that *"According to USFWS estimates, power lines kill up to 175 million birds a year. Communications towers rack up up to 50 million kills, and uncovered oil waste pits account for up to another 500,000 to 1 million. Data on wind turbines are harder to come by, but current estimates hover at about 300,000 bird fatalities a year."* It's not an insignificant problem, and one that will be incredibly complex to solve.

On the heels of this, a new threat appeared this month. Representative Jeff Duncan (R-South Carolina) added verbiage to a budget appropriations bill that could effectively take the teeth out of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Basically, it says that no funding from the bill can be used to enforce the MBTA. Kill a Bald Eagle? No penalty. Slaughter hundreds of birds for a few feathers? No Penalty. Kill a bunch of Ibis, Spoonbills, and Yellow-crowned Night Herons and cook them up in a roux for a festival? No penalty. Build a wind farm on the Gulf Coast where millions of songbirds fly during migration? No penalty. Raze a forest where hundreds of birds are nesting? No penalty. Our birds are already under incredible pressure with loss of habitat, climate change, and large scale disasters like the BP oil spill. What will happen if the primary tool of stewardship is rendered useless? I shudder to think.

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BRAS President's Report

- The Year in Review -

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 Richard Condrey. 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:

Heather Mancuso
Membership Chair

Richard Condrey
Conservation Chair

Dave Patton
Sanctuary Chair

Dan Mooney
Fieldtrips Chair

Melanie Driscoll
at large

Crystal Johnson
Programs Chair

These board members are appointed by the President (with consensus of the rest of the board). We did have a resignation this year. Beverly Smiley has decided to resign as a Board-member-at-large. We are sad to see Beverly go; she served as a membership chair as well as "at large" board member and was a valuable, contributing member to our board. We would like to replace Beverly on the board, and are currently looking for another "at large" board member. If you would like to serve on the BRAS board, please contact me at President@braudubon.org and we can discuss. 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.



Regarding our land acquisition project: we are still waiting for final word from BREC regarding partnering for the purchase of the parcel of land adjacent to the Frenchtown Conservation area in east Baton Rouge parish. We are still hopeful that we'll be able to partner with BREC and BREC Foundation to be able to purchase it.

We were also able to resolve an issue with the Cameron Parish Assessor's office this year. They informed us that they do not recognize our status as a tax exempt organization and dunned us for property taxes for 2013 to the tune of \$10,000 plus. We paid the taxes under protest, and then were fortunate enough to engage the services of Mr. Andrew Wilson to contest the assessment. It took several months to resolve but the net result was that we were refunded the tax assessment, with interest. We owe a great debt of gratitude to Mr. Wilson and also honored him at our end of year gathering with a gift.

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 "Creating a Bird Friendly Yard" and a fall Beginning Birder class -- please pass along if you have friends or family that might enjoy (sign up via the LSU Continuing Education class website).

See y'all in the woods!

Jane Patterson
President

BRAS would like to extend a special thank you to our high-level contributors for their generous support in the 2nd quarter of 2015.

Cerulean Warbler Membership

John Stovall, Jr.

Louisiana Waterthrush Membership

Helen & Curtis Sorrells
Wayne & Becky Watkins

Rose-breasted Grosbeak Membership

Keith Gibson
Barry & Gail Kohl
Beverly & Lamar Jones

Additional LABO Donations

John Erffmeyer
Barbara & Frances Guglielmo
Christine Resweber

Thank You!





Help the Baton Rouge Eagles!

In case you haven't heard, Tubal-Cain intends to build a barge cleaning operation on the Baton Rouge levee right where the Bald Eagles are nesting, just south of LSU and Farr Park. It's very possible the company can avoid issues of infringing on the nest by staying just outside the required perimeter, but we have no way of knowing if the eagles will tolerate the additional activity in the area and decide to move their nest. Worse yet, they may decide to start nesting and then abandon the nest after the eggs are laid or the chicks are born next year. Since Bald Eagles are no longer endangered, it's not likely the USFWS will have a case to defend this action. But there is opposition from BREC, from LSU, and from the residents in the area, and if we add a voice for the Bald Eagles, it might just be enough to effect a positive outcome.

There is a public hearing on July 14, 2015 at 6:00 pm in the Galvez building in downtown Baton Rouge (602 N. 5th St.) on the subject. If you're so inclined, please join us in adding your voice.

Please contact me with any questions,
Jane Patterson, president@braudubon.org

Do we have your email address?

Keep up to date with all of Baton Rouge Audubon Society's events and programs by joining our email list! We won't inundate you with spam, we promise! Simply send a request to president@braudubon.org and ask to be added to the e-list!

AND If you would prefer to receive the BRAS "*Barred Owl*" newsletter in electronic form **ONLY** (rather than the printed version thereby lessening your carbon footprint) please email our Membership chair and let her know! Drop her a line at membership@braudubon.org

Also please follow us on Facebook at
www.facebook.com/BRAudubon

BIRDS UNDER ATTACK!

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But it's not over yet. Yes, the House has passed the bill with this language, but the Senate has yet to vote, and they may not include this language in the bill. And if it does include, the executive branch can veto the bill.

The time is now to contact your Senator and let him know two things:

- that you **SUPPORT ADDITIONAL PROTECTION IN THE MIGRATORY BIRD TREATY ACT**
- and that it's **CRITICAL** that he act to remove the language from the budget appropriations bill that would undercut protections of the MBTA.

A quick web search for "*who is my senator*" will yield a link to a web page that you can use to write a quick email. National Audubon has made it even easier with this page: <http://www.audubon.org/news/against-bird-killer-amendment>.

Please take a few minutes to act now!



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The Barred Owl

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newsletter@braudubon.org

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correspondence should be sent to:

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

Prothonotary Warblers Need a Helping Hand Too!

Did you know that Louisiana supports about 25% of the world's breeding population of Prothonotary Warblers!? These little yellow gems bring Spring with them each year singing their "sweet-sweet-sweet-sweet" song. Being the only cavity nesting warbler in the eastern U.S., and only one of two in the entire wood warbler family, these birds depend on crevices created naturally in broken branches or dug out by other species, like woodpeckers and chickadees, in which to lay their eggs and raise young. It turns out that you can increase local nesting densities and increase nesting success with a strategic placement of boxes protected by predator guards. Super-volunteers John Hartgerink, Carol and Jeff Newell, and Dan Mooney have been documenting this at Bluebonnet Swamp since putting out boxes starting in 2013.

On June 6, Audubon Louisiana hosted a Prothonotary Warbler nest box building program at Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center with the help of the Swamp/Audubon super-volunteers. At the workshop, 20 participants of all ages learned

about the amazing ecology and migration of these swamp warblers. The group even got a sneak-peak at a map showing the first Prothonotary Warbler ever tracked to and from its wintering grounds, a project spearheaded by Baton Rouge Audubon former board member, Jared Wolfe. Afterward, the group built a bunch of bird boxes, including several that will be donated back to BREC properties to benefit Prothonotary Warblers here in Baton Rouge!

If you are interested in building your own nest box for Prothonotary Warblers or other local cavity nesting birds, please visit la.audubon.org/birdhouses for designs and instructions. Here you can also learn how to gather information on nesting Prothonotary Warblers that will help scientists at Audubon develop conservation initiatives for this species and their habitats.

Erik I. Johnson

**Director of Bird Conservation,
Audubon Louisiana**

**Vice President,
Baton Rouge Audubon Society**

Annual Wood Stork and Wading Bird Event

August 8, 2015 7:00am to 10:00 am

Sherburne WMA South Farm



See www.braudubon.org/Calendar for details

Come visit Africa with me!



In February 2015, I was fortunate enough to travel to Africa with a group of friends, my daughter, and world-renowned nature photographer and a random dude from Norway. This was a Big Cat photography safari to the Maasai Mara in Kenya Africa. The



Mara is a reserve just north of the Serengeti, which you have probably seen in photos and films. It's the epitome of "big cat" country and we were not disappointed. This was not a birding tour, but it just so happened that "Henry" our driver was also a birder and was great at finding and identifying local species of birds. So I racked up about 100 species of birds to add to my life list while I was in Africa, in addition to seeing other amazing animals.

On August 13, 2015, we will have a "lagniappe" BRAS program. I will present my photos as well as some of my friends' photos and talk about our adventures in Africa. Please join me. 6:30 – 8:00 pm.



- Jane Patterson

Need Some Help With Bird Identification? *Ask the wizard - Merlin!*

Give this a try:

If you have a smartphone, Cornell Lab of Ornithology has created an app just for you. "**Merlin**" helps with identification of over 400 North American birds.

Answer five simple questions about a bird you are trying to identify and **Merlin** will come up with a list of possible matches. You can then scroll the pictures of birds that it deduces might match your bird and you can choose your bird. **Merlin** keys off your location as well as the time of year along with bird appearance to come up with its possible matches. It's amazingly accurate.

Another great tool for your computer is the **Merlin Photo ID** app for your computer. Visit this website: <http://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/photo-id-help/> and enter a photo of a bird you are trying to identify in the box. You tell it the location the photo was taken and the date. It then gives you instructions to mark the tip of the bill, the eye, and the tip of the tail to get proportions. The application will search a vast library of photos to attempt to match your photo with birds. Obviously the better the photo, the more accurate, but the trials I did yielded remarkable results. And with so many folks walking around with cameras these days (i. e., smartphones) there's a good chance you'll be able to snap a photo of the bird you are trying to identify.



Baton Rouge Chapter of the National Audubon Society

Baton Rouge Audubon Society

P.O. Box 67016

Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70896

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Keep Your Membership Current!

If your membership expires, you will no longer receive *The Barred Owl*. We'll eventually 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.

Patches!

Extra sanctuary patches or patches for NAS members are \$10 each and can be ordered by using the form to the right. 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
- \$ _____ Total remitted with form

#____ of patches (indicate 1 which is **free** with BRAS membership. Additional patches are \$10 each; NAS member patches @ \$10 each; no patch will be sent if there is no indication.)

- Electronic version of newsletter **only** (do not mail)
- Add me to the BRAS email list (to be informed of field trips, etc.)

Name: _____ Ph: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

E-mail: _____

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