

The **BARRED OWL**

Newsletter of the Baton Rouge Audubon Society

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3rd Quarter, 2018

Warblers Dripping From the Trees

by Jane Patterson

"Warblers dripping from the trees...at eye level!"

This was a promise from Kenn Kaufman when he came to visit us a couple of years ago. "Come to northwest Ohio in the spring" he said "You'll be impressed." Now, Louisiana birders are pretty darn proud of spring migration on our coast. It can be downright epic. I know for me, it's very very hard to leave Louisiana in April any longer because I want to see ALLLL the birds as they arrive from their wintering grounds. And the Gulf coast is the place to be! We were in Cameron parish in mid-April and then on Grand Isle for most of the third week in April. There were so many Indigo Buntings and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks we were getting tired of looking at them! OK, not really :) We loved each and every one. But there were LOTS. And LOTS of catbirds and LOTS of



Black-throated Green Warbler

thrushes. And there were a few plentiful warblers...like Hooded Warblers, for example. But warblers were certainly much less numerous and definitely harder to see as many of them stay up in the canopy and you get that warbler crick in your neck trying to find them. So Kenn's words had been rattling around in my brain for a while and going to the Biggest Week in American Birding festival in northwest Ohio was definitely on my list-of-things-to-do-when-I-retire.

The name of the festival is a double entendre; not only is the festival 10 days instead of seven, but the folks in Northwest Ohio are convinced you're going to see more birds here than anywhere else. It generally starts the first week of May. We arrived in Ohio on May 3rd, and I thought "*oh no, this is going to be disaster!*" There were NO leaves on the trees. It looked like Louisiana in late January or very early February, when the only signs of spring are the Japanese Magnolia trees and Redbud's flowering out! I thought: "*If there are no leaves, there are no insects, and if there are no insects, there won't be any birds!*" But, I needn't have worried. The birds were there, and incredibly easy to see on trees with no leaves! It was remarkable, too, how much the trees leafed out in the 10 days we were there. They really went from just budding out to 90% green in that space of time.

This festival is organized by the Black Swamp Bird Observatory. It's the brain child of Kenn Kauf-

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Warbler Migration Tracking - a Five-Year Update

In summer of 2013, intrepid biologists and volunteers led by Jared Wolfe, and funded through the Baton Rouge Audubon Society deployed the first migration tracking devices on Prothonotary Warblers. Of the two birds carrying geolocators that went south that winter, one returned the following spring, carrying back 0.5-grams of data that revealed daily locations over the previous nine months. A geocator records light data, allowing us to determine the timing of sunrise and sunset on any given day, which in turn provides an estimate of latitude and longitude. Using these data, we learned that this dogged warbler named "GeoDad" by John Hartgerink (who first spotted the bird when it returned to Bluebonnet Swamp in March 2014), had traveled a total of 5,000 miles to and from northwestern Colombia. This bird spent about 4 months of its year on the move in migration, revealing for the first time how many different stops along its route are critical to its success.

This opened the door to additional geocator deployments, and by working with partners across six states through what we called the Prothonotary Warbler Working Group, a total of 33 geolocators had been recovered by the summer of 2017. Many Baton Rouge Audubon Society members and other private donors in south Louisiana helped fund the purchase of some of these geolocators, and for that we are truly grateful! The summary of these data will be revealed soon, and as they are currently in peer-review at a prestigious scientific journal.

Audubon Louisiana continued with another deployment of geolocators in 2017, and a total of six more have been recovered this summer. These maps will be used specifically for education and outreach programs with the National Parks Service and National Geographic Society, as well as to inform conservation planning for the annual needs of Prothonotary Warblers, a species that has declined by 40% in the last 50 years.

This summer, Audubon Louisiana and Baton Rouge Audubon volunteers will deploy 80 nanotags, which is funded through a State Wildlife Grant with the LA Department of Wildlife and Fisheries as well as an Animal Migration Grant through the National Geographic Society. A nanotag sends a uniquely coded VHF radio signal that can be detected up to 15 km away by stationary receiving stations strategically placed along the Gulf Coast as well as through Latin America. We anticipate that this information will give us more precise information about stopover location and duration, especially along the northern Gulf Coast, which will help confirm our suspicion from geolocators that Prothonotary Warblers fly across the Gulf of Mexico not only in the spring, but also during fall migration.

The next warbler on which we are focusing is the Swainson's Warbler. This relatively rare and secretive species is still relatively numerous in Louisiana swamps, but are outnumbered by Prothonotary Warblers by 10 or 20 to 1.

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Fall Birding Classes

The next round of beginning Birding classes will ramp up in September. For all classes, loaner binoculars and field guides will be offered.

For those of you in the Hammond/Ponchatoula area, classes will start on September 12th at 9am at the Ponchatoula Area Recreation District center at 42074 N. HOOVER RD. PONCHATOULA, LA 70454. The first class will start in the classroom with an introduction to binoculars and field guides. Then, on the following 3 Wednesdays, class will start with a bird walk around the park at 7:00 am, with class following in the classroom from 9-10:30. Check with PARD at www.pard1.com for registration information. There may be a nominal fee.

Two classes will be offered in Baton Rouge through the LSU Continuing Education system. The Leisure classes will begin on Monday, September 24 from 6:30-8:30 pm. Classes will follow on Oct 1, 8 and 15th at the same time.. But I can only tell part of the story in the classroom. For the real education, you should plan to participate in the field trips which will be held on the weekends following each class at a birding destination around Baton Rouge. Please visit <http://www.outreach>.

lsu.edu/Leisure for registration information. A fee is charged for this course.

Birding Basics will also be offered as an Osher Lifelong Learning Institute course. For the first time, this class will be held at the LSU AgCenter Burden Museum and Gardens on Essen Lane in Baton Rouge. The first class will be on September 24 at 7:30 am with an introduction to binoculars and field guides, A short bird walk will follow on the grounds. For the following 3 weeks (Oct 1, 8, and 15), class will start with a bird walk at Burden at 7:30 am and then be followed up with a classroom session from 9-10:30 am. Please visit the OLLI at LSU website for more information <http://www.outreach.lsu.edu/Enrichment/OLLI-at-LSU> A fee is charged for this course.

For more information on any of these classes, please contact Jane Patterson (education@braudubon.org) Also watch our website and Facebook page for more information about new Birding Beyond the Basics courses coming up in the fall!

BLOOD SAGE

by the nature dude
(Bill Fontenot)

[The following is an excerpt from Bill's "the nature dude" blog from September 2012. The full link is <http://thenaturedude.blogspot.com/2012/09/louisiana-hummer-plants.html>]

First and foremost is Tropical Sage (*Salvia coccinea*), native to the immediate Gulf Coast and southern Atlantic Coast from Texas eastward through South Carolina, where it resides in coastal forests, often in association with coast live oaks (*Quercus virginiana*). In garden settings, tropical sage often verges on weediness; but that's precisely what hummingbird/butterfly gardeners need. And ultimately, it is so shallow-rooted that pulling it up is a snap.

This species grows 12-60" depending on sunlight exposure, soil type, soil moisture, genetic strain, etc. The cool thing about it is that you can maintain it at any height you want. I've seen it maintained as a ground cover beneath live oaks; kept at 4-6" via weedeater, and happily blooming away. As with most all New World salvias, the more you deadhead (prune off the spent bloom spikes) the more they bloom. Tropical sage is happy in just about any sunlight regime, from full sun to rather deep shade; and most any soil type except highly acidic (pH < 6) soils.

True native strains (from seeds or cuttings collected in the wild) of this species are prolific self-seeders; so this plant will travel about your garden. To control it, simply pull it up where you don't want it, and allow it where you do want it. Note that several cultivars (horticultural selections) of tropical sage are offered in the nursery trade. For the most part, these are various color forms of the species, are rather short-lived, and do not self-perpetuate in gardens via seeding.

Down at my latitude (cusp of zones 8b & 9), tropical sage blooms at least nine months per year – 12 months(!) in years with warmer winters. In this regard, it simply cannot be beat. Ask any hummer.



Band Of Birders

by Dan Mooney

Volunteers at the Louisiana Bird Observatory's Bluebonnet Swamp banding station invested over 900 hours to gather data on 503 birds captured there in 2017. The Louisiana Bird Observatory is a project of Baton Rouge Audubon.

As usual, one out of every 5 birds captured was a Northern Cardinal. A total of 40 different species found the nets. Carolina Wren, Prothonotary Warbler, White-throated Sparrow, Brown Thrasher, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Blue Jay, White-eyed Vireo, Acadian Flycatcher and Carolina Chickadee round out the top ten in terms of numbers captured.

In toto, 281 new bands were applied and 201 birds were captured that were already banded. Fourteen birds were captured and released without bands. Two were hummingbirds which we are not permitted to band. We captured one Broad-winged Hawk but we are not permitted to band them either. The other 11 birds were just too slippery for us and they escaped before we could get a band on them!

BRAS sincerely appreciates the recent donations made in loving memory of Hope Norman. Thank you:

Cheryl & Owen Floyd
Nancy & Benjamin Hillman
(S.E. Mixon Family)
Myrna Thomas and Gerald Koonce
Perry and Anne Rosen
Mel White
Steven Davison & Pat Yates

A brief message from
Hope's daughter:

Hope J. Norman and her husband, Tom D. Norman (also deceased), loved birding in Cameron Parish, and had a birding camp near the Peveto Sanctuary. Hope said, "my own interest in birds, which has brought me such lifetime joy, grew from my 4th grade teacher at the old Ouachita Parish Grammar School [in Ruston], and that we had studied birds all year and the teacher had even taken us across town -- how did she do it-- to visit Dr. Lowery's mother and see her son's bird collection. It must've been about 1937."

What is "O. E."?

By Linda Auld, "BugLady"

The Monarch butterfly is our national insect and it is in trouble. Habitat destruction, neonicotinoid chemicals and weed killers, mixed with a heaping helping of parasites, and diseases spell a disastrous recipe for certain doom. It's a wonder that any could live amidst this array of life challenges. And yet, these tiny, fragile creatures have persevered and continue to amaze us with their beauty and their unique ability to migrate over two thousand miles from as far as Canada all the way to Mexican forests to over-winter.



Monarch caterpillars are very picky eaters! They will only eat leaves of the milkweed plant. For decades Monarch caterpillars growing up in our state of Louisiana have been eating Tropical Milkweed, *Asclepias curassavica*, also called Mexican Milkweed, Scarlet Milkweed, or Silky Gold. This species of milkweed has naturalized itself in our state and has become the Monarch caterpillars' mainstay diet over our Louisiana native milkweeds because it is very easy to grow, sprouts and grows quickly, plus Monarch caterpillars love to consume it! Tropical milkweed contains high levels of toxins that make the Monarch caterpillar distasteful to predators such as lizards, wasps, birds, etc. In the insect world, the caterpillar's yellow, black and white stripes it sports are a signal to predators that "I taste bad!"

For years, the national conservation group Monarch Watch has sponsored the Monarch Tagging Program which studies the Monarch butterflies' migration habits. Interesting graphs and other findings can be viewed on their website, which shows all of the over-wintering population areas and their annual migration routes. Their sister website, Journey North, allows citizen scientists to post their Monarch sightings online to share with other interested folks who like to follow their annual flights.

I personally can report that my raising Monarchs records go as far back as 1983 when I was participating in the Monarch tagging program started by Dr. Fred Urquhart in Toronto, Canada. (Dr. Urquhart is the person whose tagging program helped North Americans discover the Mexican over-wintering grounds back in 1975.) Raising Monarchs year round, from January through December, has been and still is common here in New Orleans, using tropical milkweed. In fact, for as long as I can remember, tropical milkweed seeds and plants have been the only milkweed variety readily available in our local garden centers and plant nurseries. My mentor, Frances Welden, has raised Monarch caterpillars on tropical milkweed since the mid 1950's, also using tropical milkweed. These many years, well-meaning gardeners have created an unnatural situation in which the resident

Monarch butterfly population does not migrate. Our tropical climate allows the tropical milkweed plants to grow year round and the female butterflies continue to lay eggs as long as they can locate the plants. This year-round activity is interrupted only occasionally by hard freezing winters that none of the Monarchs can survive, as happened last winter 2017-2018.

In the Spring of 2014 NBC's bleak report that over-wintering Monarch populations had reached an all time low shocked and alarmed the nation. Was this caused by global warming? Or was it the new array of neonicotinoid pesticides that caused colony collapse in honey bees? Or was it the destruction of habitat due to cutting of the special Mexican forests? In response to the crisis, butterfly specialists, citizen scientists and naturalists from all over the world rushed to give their ideas and theories to help figure out why this was happening.

When the headline that we might lose our Monarch migration hit the evening news, gardeners and naturalists over the entire United States were spurred into action, questioning "What must we do to remedy this?" The answer was, "Plant milkweed--use native whenever you can--but, plant milkweed." We all immediately trotted over to the garden center, and what plants were available? The tropical milkweed!

Before we go any further, let's discuss the dreaded parasite and its relationship to the tropical milkweed. O. E. (*Ophryocystis elektroscirrha*) is a bacteria in spore form that is spread from one Monarch butterfly's body to another during mating. Males and females can be carriers of the spores without becoming infected, shedding spores on other butterflies and also onto plants they touch. When the female lays her eggs, she unknowingly transfers the spores onto the eggshell and surrounding leaf. When the caterpillar hatches, it always eats the eggshell as its first meal. This is how the caterpillar becomes infected. The spores activate when they reach the caterpillar's gut. The spores multiply, and then it's pretty much a sure thing that the creature will not finish

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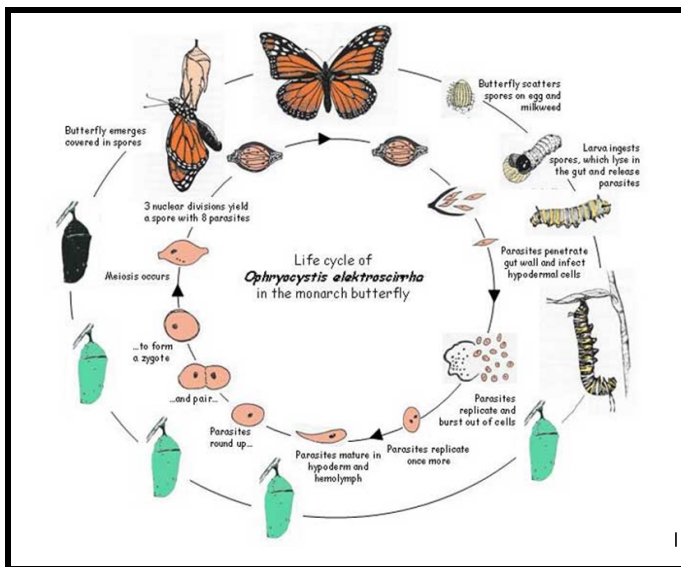
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its cycle properly. How long the spores are multiplying in the gut determines how serious an OE infection will be. A fifth instar caterpillar that eats a few spores on a leaf just before forming a chrysalis will have a minor infection compared to a caterpillar that ate spores on its egg-shell and is bursting with them by the time it is ready to pupate.

What really clarified the severity of this issue for me was a conversation I had with Christen Steele, a Tulane researcher working locally on the O.E. issue. Christen told me that last fall she monitored 40 gardens in the Uptown-Carrollton-Garden District of New Orleans. Her data showed that our Monarch population was 97.37% sick with O.E. I was totally shocked. I was always in the opinion that, if we did lose our main Monarch migration, wouldn't it be good that we have a separate resident population overwintering here in New Orleans? Well, if 97.37% is sick with O.E., how could this be good?

Many folks who have raised Monarchs have witnessed the different stages of O.E. infection but were unaware of what it was or what it meant.



Christen invited me to her Tulane laboratory and showed me how to test the Monarch butterfly for O.E. infection. Holding the live adult butterfly with its abdomen and legs pointing up toward you and the wings pointing down, gently and softly press a piece of clear tape to the abdomen then peel it off. Under a microscope the long oblong objects are the butterfly scales. Dots that look like pepper are the O.E. spores. At high magnification, the spores are shaped like footballs. Any butterfly that tests positive for O.E. should not be released into nature.

All of this information can be viewed online through MonarchHealth.

Those of us living in the New Orleans metropolitan area are in a transition period now with understanding the link between Monarch butterflies, O.E. and varieties of milkweed. Acting as citizen scientists, we can contribute scientific study to investigate whether tropical milkweed is sheltering and fostering the O.E. parasite by keeping it alive and well through the winter months, thus causing the Monarchs to stay year round in our area instead of migrating to Mexico.

Three years ago, I purchased nine different Louisiana native milkweeds and began experimenting in growing them. I discovered that each one requires different site-specific growing conditions. For instance, the "Butterflyweed", *Asclepias tuberosa*, prefers a sunny spot with very good drainage. By trial and error, growers have found that pine bark and sand is its perfect mixture. Aquatic milkweed, *Asclepias perennis*, as well as the Swamp milkweed, *Asclepias incarnata*, prefer wet roots. I have seen the Aquatic actually growing in standing water during field trips to the Bonnet Carre Spillway and at Honey Island Swamp. This past winter's frigid temperatures did not faze the Aquatic milkweed plants, whereas the tropical froze to the ground.

As gardeners, many of us have a bed of tropical milkweed and no native milkweed plants. As we transition to the more desirable native plants, what are our options in regards to our established tropical milkweed? My recommendations, like so much in nature, are evolving, but here is what I currently think are the best options:

1. Keep it but cut it down to the ground in June and October,
2. To prevent "egg-bombing", get tomato cages and cover the tropical plants with netting so that Monarchs cannot overload the plants with eggs,
3. Remove and replace tropical with native milkweed.

Cutting down the tropical milkweed in June and October forces it to grow on the same cycle as the native milkweeds and the Monarch migration. Personally, after much contemplation, I have chosen to dig up the tropical milkweed and replace it with multiple patches of Aquatic and Butterflyweed at both my home and work gardens. I potted up the tropical milkweed plants and quarantined them in my greenhouse to see if the Monarchs will use the native plants. Most of these tropical plants died back with this past winter's freezes. The new growth in spring was free of spores since our resident population was killed by the 22-degree temperatures

What is "O. E."?

By Linda Auld, "BugLady"

and the migration had not flown through our area yet. Many of my friends are using the netting process to either stop Monarchs from using the existing tropical milkweed plants--keeping leaves uncontaminated for use in raising caterpillars-- or controlling the number of eggs laid on the plants in their gardens.

Because of the high rate of O.E. found in our area and the fact that the spores are extremely easy to spread in home Monarch raising operations, I am personally recommending, this year, that my "Caterpillar Mamas" join me to leave their Monarch caterpillars in the yard and not bring them indoors to raise. Only the strong shall survive! I admit it influenced me when I realized the work it would take to make indoor raising hygienic. O.E. spores cannot be controlled by ordinary cleaning agents and the spore life is longer than one year. Winter doesn't kill it. Anyone who feels they must raise Monarchs indoors should be willing to run a sterile operation and should follow specific guidelines set by Monarch Watch to avoid contributing to the Monarch demise.

1. First, caterpillars must be raised singly, only one caterpillar per container, because one infected caterpillar will infect all of the rest. Wooden containers are difficult to keep sterile--glass or plastic is better.
2. All milkweed plant material fed to caterpillars must be sprayed with a 10% Clorox bleach solution, then triple rinsed and thoroughly dried before offering it as food to your caterpillar.
3. Clean all raising containers at least once daily--twice is better--of frass and uneaten plant material.
4. Each container and all equipment and surfaces must be thoroughly cleaned after each caterpillar completes its chrysalis--20 minutes soaking in the 10% Clorox bleach solution, triple rinse and dry--before housing another critter.

Now that you have read all of this information, think it over and decide how you will attack this issue in your own garden. Here are some positive steps you can take:

1. Replace your tropical milkweed with native plants. I sell the Aquatic milkweed at my retail store -- Barber Laboratories located at 6444 Jefferson Highway in Harahan. (504-739-5715 --call me with any questions) You can ask your local garden center to order the native milkweed plants for you. Plants are available through Monarch Watch Milkweed Market online.
2. Participate in the Monarch butterfly monitoring process to help prove or disprove the link between O.E. and the tropical milkweed.
3. Talk to your friends, relatives and neighbors who raise Monarchs to inform them of this issue.
4. Raise other butterfly species that do not have these parasites and issues. There are about 135 species of butterflies in Louisiana that are equally as amazing and exciting to watch as they go through their metamorphosis.

In closing, I ask each of you to accept the gardening challenge to grow Louisiana native milkweeds which will not only strengthen your yard's eco-system by providing a fuel stop of nectar for a variety of insects but will also help

provide the proper diet Monarchs need to survive. If the tropical milkweed is the cause of this O.E. issue, we have the power to change the situation. You won't see tropical milkweed growing out in the wild when you are hiking our local forest trails. Tropical milkweed exists in our gardens where we planted it. If we will join together to choose your method (s) by cutting it down in June and October, covering the plants with netting to prevent "egg-bombing", replacing the tropical milkweed with Louisiana native milkweeds, and leaving the Monarch caterpillars in the garden, we can make a difference to

Help Bring Back the Monarchs!

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

Annual Wood Stork & Wading Bird Event

July 28, 2018 — 7:00 am to noon

The annual Wood Stork and Wading Bird event is held at Sherburne WMA South Farm, just west of Baton Rouge. This is "come on your own" field trip. Gates will be open at 7am and remain open until noon, but EARLY IS BEST. Representatives from BR Audubon will be there as soon as the gates open and will stay on the observation platform until noon. Scopes will be available for use. Bring sunscreen, hats, and water; chairs are optional. Use the restroom on the way in. Rides will be offered to and from the observation platform. (see more logistics info under "Directions" below). RSVP is not necessary and there is no fee, but you should have your annual LDWF Wild Louisiana Stamp or a valid hunting/fishing license (ages 16-60).

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. 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 as many as 2500 Wood Storks have been counted 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.

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/Maringuoin 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 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 observation platform. Please stay in the platform area 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 our Field Trip Coordinator Dan Mooney at dan@fieldtrips@braudubon.org

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man's wife Kimberly. She is all about supporting and promoting bird conservation and the festival is a way to really showcase this area of Ohio when it comes to birds. With the popularity of the festival, it's easy to show the economic benefit of birds and birders to the political powers that be in the area as well. Not everyone stays for the entire 10 days of the festival, but registered attendees number over 2000. The festival offers guided tours, free bird walks, "celebrity" bird walks with the likes of Kenn Kaufman and Richard Crossley, educational seminars of all descriptions, research reports, and inspiring daily keynote presentations. One of their more popular events is a bird tattoo contest! The fee to register is minimal, and you choose which events you want to participate in. There is a lot of "giving back" associated with the event. For example, BSBO donated copies of Kaufman's field guide to North American birds in Spanish on behalf of each person who attended his keynote presentation.



The area associated with the festival is between Toledo and Cleveland on the shore of Lake Erie. There are many different places to bird in northwest Ohio, including sanctuaries, refuges, and the excellent Toledo area parks. We decided to take the guide-led trips this time since we were unfamiliar with the area. A benefit of the festival is that private land is also accessible by

the various field trips so you get to see areas you normally would not. We got to see the NASA testing facility in the area and hear all sorts of stories by the land manager, who is a specialist in prairie habitat maintenance.



But the jewel of the crown in this area is "The Boardwalk". Now don't be fooled; there are other boardwalks around. But when people mention "The Boardwalk" in hushed, reverent tones, they are referring to the Magee Marsh boardwalk. The board walk is less than 2 miles long but on any given day, THOUSANDS of people may be on it any given time. It really is elbow to elbow birding. The up side: if something special is found, you are likely to know about it pretty quickly as folks like to share! The down side; it can be a bit claustrophobic for those inclined to such things. Sometimes you don't even have to go on the actual boardwalk; we had an excellent couple of hours just working the edges of the parking lot!

The specialty for this whole area are warblers. Billed as the "**Warbler Capital of the World**", the presence of warblers, particularly at the Magee Marsh boardwalk where the vegetation is fairly low, can be just stunning. Since this part of Ohio is on the shore of Lake Erie and many of these warblers are headed hundreds more miles north to the Boreal forest in Canada to breed, this is an important stopover. Many of the birds start out across the very large

great lake system and then decide they need more fuel for the journey and come back to Ohio. They will forage and bulk up as best they can before they continue their perilous journey. Hence, it's not unusual to see hundreds or thousands of birds on a single day. I recall that there was a single adult male Cape May warbler on Grand Isle that birders were all rushing to see. On the boardwalk, in one morning, a guide said they counted over a hundred Cape May Warblers! Chestnut-sided, Magnolia, Yellow-rumped, Black-throated Green and BT Blue were all very common here, and some so close you could almost reach out and touch them. There were other wonderful sightings as well that are uncommon for Louisiana birders, such as the Woodcock hanging out a few feet from boardwalk and entertaining everyone with his foraging dance. But the most special was definitely and unexpected (this is in MAY, y'all!) Snowy Owl!



Migration in Louisiana is pretty darn special. And there can be days on the coast where you can tally hundreds of birds. But to extend that spring migration experience, I highly recommend a visit to northwest Ohio in May!



Warbler Migration Tracking a Five-Year Update

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Working with LSU researchers Vitek Jirinec and Phil Stouffer, and funded in part by Baton Rouge Audubon Society and Friends of Palmetto Island State Park, we are deploying 10 geolocators this year.

This is an exciting period in ornithology, as only in the last five years have tracking devices become small enough to be used on small warblers. Who would have guessed that about 75% of Prothonotary Warblers tracked from Wisconsin, Arkansas, Louisiana, Ohio, Virginia, and South Carolina end up together in a relatively small region of northern Colombia. This kind of work will and already has spawned a generation of strategic conservation planning and implementation throughout Latin America, and hopefully one day in the future we can look back and say that Prothonotary Warblers have increased by 40% over the last 50 years.

By Erik I. Johnson
Board-Member-at-Large/Director, Louisiana Bird Observatory
Director of Bird Conservation, Audubon Louisiana



John James Audubon Prints Vivid, Crisp, and Yours for Free

You don't have to be a multi-millionaire to bring home *The Birds of America*. When a rare first edition copy of John James Audubon's magnificent work recently went to auction, it brought in a staggering \$9.6 million—with every dollar of the sale price to be devoted to conservation.

Too pricey for most of us bird lovers, for sure, no matter how worthy the cause. So we have good news: You can hang Audubon's prints in your home for free! Browse all 435 vibrant images from *Birds of America*, then download your favorites in crisp, clear high resolution—ready to be printed, framed, and enjoyed.

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The Barred Owl

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

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