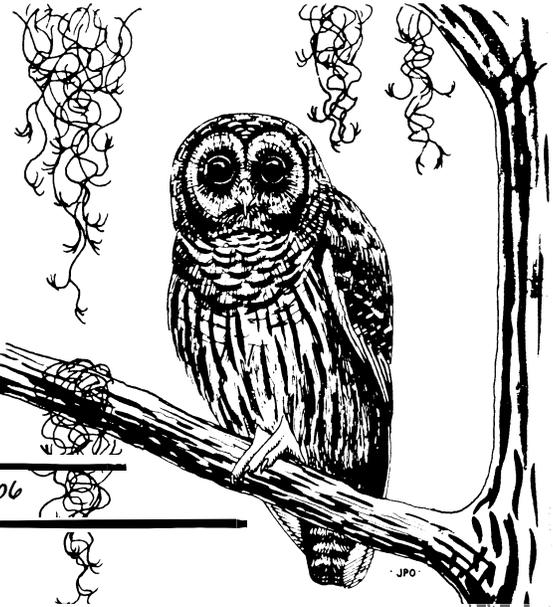


The **BARRED OWL**

Newsletter of the Baton Rouge Audubon Society

Volume XXXIII, Number 1

1st Quarter, 2006



Welcome to Melanie Driscoll New Coordinator of the Important Bird Areas Program in LA!

by Dorothy Prowell

For the first time ever the National Audubon Society (NAS) has a presence in the state of Louisiana. Through joint efforts of Baton Rouge Audubon, Orleans Audubon, and the State Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, a coordinator has been hired for the NAS Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program in Louisiana. After a national search, we successfully recruited Melanie Driscoll for this position. Melanie is currently working in the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, where she has been studying the decline of House Finches. She also helped with the search that led to the rediscovery of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker. Melanie has a B.S. from the Centre College in Kentucky, and a Master's degree from the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry. She will be working closely with the LSU Ornithology Lab, and will be housed in the Bird Resource Center in the Museum of Natural Sciences. She begins her new position on February 6th.

The IBA program was initiated by BirdLife International in Europe in the 1980's. BirdLife International is a global coalition of more than 100 country partner organizations. National Audubon is the U.S. partner and administers the program in our country. Their effort was launched in 1995 and now has programs in 46 states with more than 1800 sites encompassing over 69 million acres.

As provided under program guidelines, a technical advisory committee working with Melanie will determine scientific criteria for site consideration and evaluate nominated sites. Louisiana is an important state for birds because of our vast wetlands, its location on migratory routes, and the large variety of inland habitats. The identification of IBAs is an important first step in larger conservation initiatives. IBA inventories provide a scientifically defensible method for prioritizing conservation activities and allocating limited conservation dollars. Formalizing an IBA

(Continued on page 3)

Sanctuary Report

by Victoria Bayless

The last report I received from Peveto Woods is that the live oaks are leafed out. With this good news, I remain optimistic about the recovery of the cheniers. As I write, Bill Eley, Conservation Science Director at the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory (www.gcbo.org) is preparing a grant to ConocoPhillips for the restoration of both Peveto Woods and the recently purchased Grand Isle Woods (see article, page 5). Because Traveler's insurance paid 100% on the Peveto House and contents, we will be able to use the donations received from our spring fundraiser as a match for the grant. These funds will allow us to do some of the more expensive restoration projects, such as ensuring fresh water, beach sand protection, exotics control and native replanting. At the last BRAS board meeting we discussed possibilities for the future but our priority now is removing debris and assessing the loss of trees and understory. Peveto Woods and the Grand Isle properties are part of Louisiana's disappearing coastline and provide critical habitat for migrating birds. We consider their restoration to be an important mission. Thanks to everyone for their offers of help.

We will need it before long.

January Hummingbird trip report

by Robert McLaughlin

Many thanks to Dennis Demcheck for leading us on a very successful search for wintering hummingbirds. About 25 of us followed Dennis to the homes of Carol Foil, Scott Knaus and Dennis's home. Thanks to Carol, Scott and Dennis for opening their homes to strangers. Hummingbirds that were seen include rufous, buff-bellied, black chin, calliope and ruby throat. The only bird we missed was an anna's hummingbird. Maybe next year.

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Sanctuaries

Victoria Moseley-Bayless
225/757-1769

Newsletter

Cathy Coates 225/767 9074

Programs

Charles Fryling 225/766-3120

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is published quarterly by the Baton Rouge chapter of the NAS. Submissions should be made to Cathy Coates by email at cabr32@yahoo.com. Changes of address and other official correspondence should be sent to:

Baton Rouge Audubon Society
P.O. Box 82525
Baton Rouge, LA 70884-2525

Desk top publishing:
Steven Mumford

LOS Winter meeting in Shreveport

by Victoria Bayless

The Louisiana Ornithological Society held its winter meeting in Shreveport on Jan. 27-29. My mother, Jeannette Moseley, who lives in Shreveport attended the meeting with me. It was a really great meeting and we had a such a good time, saw good birds, and visited with so many nice folks. I think everyone from the local club, The Shreveport Society for Nature Study, must have helped in some way. Thanks to them and the LOS officers the meeting which had been rescheduled from New Orleans to Shreveport, was a great success.

The birding was good in spite of the rain that set in on Saturday afternoon. It was almost a complete wash out, but Mother and I donned our raingear with a group of about 10 people and went to Red River National Wildlife Refuge Bayou Pierre Unit south of the city. Nancy Menasco had a Barn Owl family staked out for us and we were pretty excited about the opportunity to see them. We couldn't believe it-- they were not home! We did get to look closely at some fresh owl pellets and tried to identify the creatures by their skeletons and fur. It was so dark from the impending rain storm that they were

probably out hunting. We then went to a site where a Couch's Kingbird has been seen for several weeks, but the rain pouring down my jacket into my boots kept me from being very enthusiastic. Of course this bird had more sense than we all did and was not attempting any flycatching in the rain so I missed that one.

Overall there were 125 species seen on Saturday. I heard many compliments about the organization of the field trip and the excellent quality of the leaders. I wish I could have gone on all the trips. However, I did get to go on the trip to the Shreveport Regional Airport on Sunday (a beautiful sunny warm day) where Terry Davis had previously gone to great lengths to get permission for us to bird. The highlight was the wonderful Smith's Longspurs. We saw three, and had great looks through a scope. This was a life bird for me and I was so grateful for all the people in our group who worked together to flush these birds but not scare them away and who brought scopes for us to see them up close. What a great day! For more information on LOS visit their website www.losbird.org or information on the Shreveport organization at www.birdstudygroup.org

BRAS ACTIVITY SCHEDULE

March-April

No BRAS trips are planned. This is a good time to participate in one of the area birding festivals. See www.birdlouisiana.com for a listing.

May 20 Whiskey Bay Rd.

Join Harriet Pooler in the Atchafalaya Basin on Whiskey Bay Rd. to look for nesting birds. Species which might be seen include the Yellow-breasted Chat, Kentucky Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Swainson's Warbler, Painted Bunting and Swallow-tailed Kite. We will meet at Coffee Call at 6 a. m. Bring water, a hat and lunch if you'd like to eat on the way back. The trip will end around noon. Participation is limited to 15 people. Please pre-register by calling Robert McLaughlin during business hours at 926-2223 or by e-mail at rmclaughlin@sterneagee.com.

President's Report

by *Chris Carlton*

Since our sanctuary initiative at Peveto Woods has been temporarily put on the back burner thanks to Hurricane Rita, I have had an opportunity to reflect on how BRAS might direct some of that energy towards increased involvement in local events and causes that are relevant to our birding and conservation community. Events at the state and regional level are moving along nicely with the hiring of Louisiana Important Bird Area Coordinator Melanie Driscoll (see related column) and establishment of the Louisiana Bird Resource Center with Richard Gibbons as the new Coordinator.

I believe BRAS could benefit by becoming more of a presence at community and parish level. Most of us have full time jobs and family commitments, leaving little time in our schedules for volunteer activities. On the other hand, we have ~700 members, including many dedicated conservationists and community leaders. So this is a call for those of you who are able and willing to take the lead on helping BRAS become more involved in community affairs. Need something to do? Here are a couple of timely items that have come to my attention just over the past week.

Henderson Lake Management Plan. I was contacted by Mr. William Hawn, of Southern University, who is part of a group contracted by the Corps of Engineers to develop a management plan for Henderson Lake Water Management Area, on the east edge of the Atchafalaya Floodway. They are seeking input from as many stakeholders and users as possible and are actively seeking our input as one of the area's leading conservation and wildlife advocacy organizations.

Please consider providing input to this group if you have technical knowledge that would assist with implementation of an environmentally progressive management plan OR you have information on wildlife communities that should be given special consideration to ensure long-term viability. Referrals to individuals who might be in a position to provide knowledgeable input would no doubt also be appreciated. Their plan will consider effects outside of the immediate Water Management Area, will include private and public concerns, will be sustainable, and will preserve habitat for resident and migratory wildlife. Please contact me via e-mail (ccarl@lsu.edu) with any questions, comments, or specific recommendations. I'll forward those to Mr. Hawn or put you in direct touch with him for further information.

BREC Baton Rouge Zoo activities. Baton Rouge Zoo is hosting several events in the coming months and Education Curator Ellen Buntyn has requested our participation. The first event (1-2 April) is Zippy Zoo Daze and will feature an area where visitors can learn about ways to become involved in community conservation organizations and how to participate in activities that bring them closer to wildlife. The second event is International Migratory Bird Day (13 May, www.birdday.org). In addition to having a BRAS display, Ellen would like someone to lead a "mini guided bird walk" to acquaint visitors with some of the local species and learn what birding is all about. These are IDEAL opportunities to introduce birding to members of the community that likely have only heard about the activity on Discovery Channel, if at all, and potentially enlist new members to BRAS. Please let me know if you would be interested in helping out with either or both of these activities. This is an easy, rewarding way for you to be a community activist in the most productive possible way--educating the public about birds and the need to maintain a healthy ecosystem. You may contact Ellen at EBuntyn@BRZOO.ORG to volunteer or for more information.

Thanks to our Members and Donors!

Baton Rouge Audubon is appreciative of one and all who make it possible for us to send you this publication, maintain our sanctuaries, and the other projects we undertake on behalf of conservation and birds. We can't do it without you!

November 1, 2005 – January 31, 2006

Cerulean Warbler (\$1000) Paul Dixon, Shreveport, LA

Painted Bunting (\$500) Cornell & Janice Tramontana, River Ridge, LA

Rose-breasted Grosbeak (\$100) Crystal B. Chatelain, Baton Rouge, LA; Evelyne Clinton, Aspen, CO; Doris Falkenheiner, Baton Rouge, LA; Jay Huner, Boyce, LA; Dave Patton, Lafayette, LA

Wood Thrush (\$50) J. A. Bennett, Monroe, LA; Peter Craig, Blanchester, OH; Joseph & Joanne Kleiman, Baton Rouge, LA; Sybil McDonald, Baton Rouge, LA; John Smith, Hattiesburg, MS; Anton Szabados, Barrington, IL; William & Jean Wilcox, Baton Rouge, LA

Activism is welcomed in all forms. We hope BRAS offers interesting opportunities for members to help the birding and conservation communities.

Melanie Driscoll

(Continued from page 1)

program in Louisiana fills a gap in the protection of birds nationally and in state environmental programs. More information about the IBA program can be found at

www.audubon.org/bird/iba.

Louisiana updates can be found at www.jjaudubon.net/iba.htm



Louisiana Bird Resource Center Opens

By Fred Sheldon

More than 70 million people in America watch birds, and Louisiana--because of its vast marshes and swamps and remarkable concentrations of birds during migration--is a particularly desirable destination for bird-watchers and other ecotourists. However, Louisiana lags far behind

What our friends are doing

Hilltop (www.lsu.edu/hilltop) The ever popular annual Spring Garden Tour begins April 2 with 4 area homes designed by A. Hays Town. The event officially kicks off with a cocktail reception on April 1 honoring Gordon Brooks who produced the film 1000 HOMES: The Legacy of A. Hays Town, and Cyril Vetter who wrote the book *The Louisiana Houses of A. Hays Town*. A copy of the book signed by Hays Town will be auctioned. Gordon will make a presentation on Apr. 2 before the tour and Cyril will be available to sign copies of the book.

La. Native Plant Society - See www.lnps.org/ for information on activities and membership, or to join their email group.

Feliciana Nature Society (www.audubonbirdfest.com). The premier event sponsored by the FNS, the "Audubon Country BirdFest" will showcase the beautiful and abundant bird life, natural habitat, and history of Louisiana's Feliciana Parishes. This year's events will be held March 31 and April 1 & 2, 2006.

La. Hiking Society (www.hikelouisiana.org/)

The La. Hiking Club offers hiking trips throughout our state to members of the organization. Many of the hikes are nature outings with emphasis on birds, plants, and insects. Often the outings are led by professionals in their fields.

other states in the development of its infrastructure for bird-watchers. Our state bird book, *Louisiana Birds* by George Lowery, was last printed in 1974 and is woefully out of date, and we have no guide to bird-watching in Louisiana. Virtually every other state has a comprehensive birding tourist guide which undoubtedly promote ecotourism. On the other hand, Louisiana leads most other states in ornithology--the scientific study of birds. LSU, Tulane, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, and the State Department of Wildlife & Fisheries have excellent bird research programs. Indeed, LSU's bird program is second only to Cornell University's in productivity, and it is well ahead of Cornell's in graduate student training. Moreover, in Louisiana, many clubs, societies, and non-governmental organizations exist to promote bird-watching, conservation, and other natural history endeavors. In addition to BRAS, these include the Louisiana Ornithological Society, Orleans Audubon, The Nature Conservancy, and several birding clubs.

Despite this large number of knowledgeable and interested stakeholders, communication and coordination is minimal among the state's professional and volunteer bird organizations. As a result, cooperative interaction between academic ornithologists, amateur natural historians ("citizen scientists"), wildlife managers, conservationists, and the tourism industry does not approach its potential. Consequently, despite its natural gifts, Louisiana has failed to capitalize on hundreds of millions in tourist dollars and to assume its rightful position as the national leader in bird research and conservation.

To improve the infrastructure for bird research and tourism in Louisiana, the Louisiana Bird Resource Center has been established at LSU's Museum of Natural Science. This Center coordinates research on birds by providing a conduit for information for bird interest groups in the state. Its goal is to be an information clearinghouse for data on birds from all available sources and to

make those data available online and through publications to researchers, conservationists, developers, bird-watchers, and other interested parties. The Museum was the logical location for this Center because of its large and productive research program and its experience in collecting and storing data. It traditionally gathers information on birds, ranging from observations of nests and rare species by bird-watchers, to basic life-history data inherent in bird collections and obtained during bird surveys, to molecular genetic information produced from the Museum's world-renowned Collection of Genetic Resources.

The Bird Resource Center is up and running smoothly under the direction of its coordinator, Richard Gibbons, and with the help of Audubon's IBA coordinator, Melanie Driscoll (see related article, page 1).

In addition to establishing IBA's and working on the *Birds of Louisiana* and a *Guide to Birding in Louisiana*, the Center's first projects include the Nest Record Project, a winter bird atlas and a Second Breeding Bird Atlas Project.

The success of the Center will depend on the efforts of its two coordinators and the interest of state birders and ornithologists. Melanie has a sound background in the field. Richard is a Ph.D. student at LSU. He earned a Bachelor's degree from Centenary College of Louisiana and a Master's degree in Biology from Texas A&M-Corpus Christi. For his Master's project he investigated the wintering abundance and habitat preferences of seven species of surface-diving waterbirds in a Texas estuary. He has worked as a field biologist for the past ten years in various parts of the Americas on projects investigating avian productivity and survivorship, hawk migration, Andean hummingbirds, and Texas colonial waterbirds.

For more information, regarding the Louisiana Bird Resource Center, go to www.lsu.edu/birdcenter.

Grand Isle Conservation Success Story

By David Muth, Orleans Audubon

On Friday, January 6, 18 acres of the Sureway Woods (the Landry-Leblanc Tract) on Grand Isle were purchased by the Louisiana Nature Conservancy, marking an important conservation milestone for coastal cheniers, migratory birds, and birders. With all the destruction and bad news that has recently come out of our coastal areas, this was one refreshing piece of good news.

Birders have been working on preserving the remnant woods on Grand Isle formally since 1987 when an ad hoc committee of the La. Ornithological Society met under the chairmanship of the late Al Smalley to map out a strategy. Years of negotiation with the landowners of this largest tract, first by Orleans Audubon Society, then by TNC, are finally over.

OAS and TNC launched a fundraising campaign back in May. It was intended to culminate this fall, but then came Katrina and Rita. The storms filled the woods with debris, but the

forest remains intact. TNC decided that the opportunity to finalize this purchase was too important to let pass. TNC had to borrow to meet the purchase price and we are thankful to them.

Though the total area of forest, even before development, is small, the woods stand out like a beacon for migratory birds (and butterflies, moths, dragonflies, etc.). Birds crossing the gulf in spring, or crossing the vast expanse of coastal marsh and estuarine bay in fall, use these woods for rest and re-fueling, often in spectacular numbers. The woods are also a beacon to birders, one of the coastal gems like High Island in Texas (Houston Audubon), or Peveto Woods in Cameron Parish (Baton Rouge Audubon) or the Audubon Sanctuary on Dauphin Island in Alabama.

Equally importantly, the woods growing there --a type of cheniere-- are unique in the world. This is the only place where this particular type of

maritime oak forest grows.

When this project began, there were only about 40 acres of undeveloped, mature cheniere left on the island. To date, about 17 acres have been protected by OAS or TNC including 5 separate land areas, some well known to birders. This purchase will protect 18 additional acres, the largest tract, and the bulk of what remains. In addition to these purchases, we've worked (along with the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program) with several large landowners-- Exxon-Mobile, the local Port Commission, and the State Park, on re-forestation and habitat enhancement projects, that we hope will eventually mean a doubling of the available forest cover.

For more information and how you might help, go to the website for Orleans Audubon (jjaudubon.net) and The Nature Conservancy Louisiana (nature.org/louisiana/).

Baton Rouge Christmas Bird Count

By Victoria Bayless



The 106th Christmas Bird Count field season has finished, and the year's database of observations is developing now through online submissions. You can check out the Baton Rouge Christmas Count at www.audubon.org. Click on Citizen Science to get historical data for any count. Ours is named LABR and was held January 2nd. The numbers should be posted by February 15. You can also check out the counts that were held along the Gulf Coast. All efforts from this area will no doubt reflect the impact of the hurricanes and will provide crucial information for tracking the recovery of the region.

Nationwide more than 50,000 observers participate each year. In Baton Rouge, 37 people braved the warm sunny humid day this year. We counted birds in a 15 mile diameter circle that encompasses both sides of the river. Over the years, good habitat for birds has slowly dwindled in this count circle. There was another group of 8 people who traveled within the circle just counting wintering hummingbirds. They found 7 species and a total of 119 birds. The Anna's Hummingbird was their "bird of the day". There were also many feeder watchers who stayed home and turned in their numbers to Dennis Demcheck who is compiling all the data. Please see the Audubon website after February 15 for the complete picture.

Baton Rouge Chapter of the National Audubon Society

Baton Rouge Audubon Society

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Keeping your membership current is important!

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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*.

Patches Extra sanctuary patches or patches for NAS members are \$10 each and can be ordered by mailing the form below, or

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Baton Rouge Audubon Society (BRAS)

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

- \$20 Individual Membership
- \$30 Family Membership
- \$50 Wood Thrush Donation
- \$100 Rose-breasted Grosbeak Donation
- \$250 Louisiana Waterthrush Donation
- \$500 Painted Bunting Donation
- \$1000 Cerulean Warbler Donation
- \$ _____ Additional Contribution
- # _____ of patches (1 free with BRAS membership, - additional patches @ \$10 each, NAS member patches @ \$10 each)

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E-mail: _____