

The **BARRED OWL**

Newsletter of the Baton Rouge Audubon Society

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4th Quarter, 2016

Bluebonnet Swamp - Avian Anomaly

by Dan Mooney

This spring at Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center Jeff and Carol Newell along with John Hartgerink documented an unusual interaction between Carolina Chickadees and a Carolina Wren. On April 19th Jeff and Carol noticed a Carolina Wren feed chicks in a Carolina Chickadee nest just off the boardwalk. The wren also had a nest about 30 feet away.



Carolina Wren waiting in line to feed Carolina Chickadee chicks. At least on this trip, they each brought the same type of food.

The chickadees watched the wren bring food and remove fecal sacs without any apparent objection. At times there was a waiting line with the wren feeding and a chickadee waiting with food in its beak. The wren continued to feed the chickadees until three fledged on April 25th.

The wren was also feeding his own nestlings. The wrens fledged 4 chicks on April 22nd.

Some videos of the feeding and fledging can be seen on John Hartgerink's Flickr page:
www.flickr.com/photos/johnhartgerink/sets/72157667433235315

Hometown Habitat

by Colette Dean

Want more birds in your life? Plant native plants in your yard!

After years of research at the University of Delaware, Entomologist Professor Dr. Doug Tallamy has been spreading this message through writings, lectures and books and now through his latest project, a documentary film, *"Hometown Habitat"* which will be shown in Baton Rouge at the Manship Theatre in November.

The Capital Area Native Plant Society is sponsoring the event.

"Our song birds have been in decline since the 1960s, having lost 40 percent of their numbers so far," Tallamy says.

"So many animals depend on insects for food (spiders, reptiles and amphibians, rodents and 96 percent of all terrestrial birds) that removing insects from an ecosystem spells its doom."

Insects, and other wildlife depend on native plants for survival.

Tallamy's landmark book *"Bringing Nature Home"* examined a way homeowners should garden by linking the valuable role native plants play in developing healthy ecosystems. *"The Living Landscape"* his most recent book, is a collaboration with horticulturalist Rick Darke. Through beautiful color pictures and prose, it explores how gardeners can have a home landscape that offers pleasing places for families and sustenance for wildlife. Tallamy's opening essay in *"The Living Landscape"* describing how a male blue grosbeak built a nest in his ironwood tree with a discarded snakeskin is worth the read.

The film *"Hometown Habitat"* sounds the alarm about habitat and species loss, but it also features uplifting stories from homeowners, city agencies, businesses, schools and churches - all "habitat heroes" who have been healing the Earth, one yard at a time. Documentary Director, Catherine Zimmerman, says she hopes this project will help fire up the movement toward making natural landscapes the new landscaping norm.

"No other species on Earth is as influential as our is, yet we are part of it all, connected to it all. Our actions have far-reaching consequences, and if we're thoughtful, most of them can be good ones," Tallamy says.

"Hometown Habitat"

Manship Theatre at the Shaw Center for the Arts
Tuesday, Nov. 1, 7:45 p.m. / Sunday, Nov. 6, 2 p.m.

Cost: \$7.50

Film Length: 1 hour 30 minutes

This Film is Rated: NR

Directed by: Catherine Zimmerman

Presented by Capital Area Native Plant Society

canps.weebly.com

Baton Rouge Audubon Society Speaker Series

The BRAS Speaker Series continues the 2016-2017 year with diverse and interesting topics. We have an exciting lineup of speakers this year, and we hope that you will join us for camaraderie, stimulation, and refreshments. This year's schedule thus far is as follows:

November 10, 2016:

Lisa Elizondo (American Woodcocks)

January 19, 2017:

Scott Duke-Sylvester (avian malaria)

February 9, 2017:

Will Selman (TBD)

March 16, 2017:

Delaina LeBlanc and Jed Pitre
(Red Knots and more)

April 6, 2017:

Leslie Lattimore (TBD)

Join us as we hear about Whooping Cranes, American Woodcocks, Red Knots, avian malaria, and other exciting topics! Many thanks to David Muth, who started the year on a highly invigorating note with very exciting lessons on the history and future of the Mississippi River Delta. All talks are held at 7:00 PM at the Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center's Education Center, with refreshments beginning at 6:45 PM. Please note that the location is NOT the same as the Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center. It is the Education Center, which is located on a different street. The address is 10533 N. Glenstone Place, which is a U-shaped street. The Education Center is the building in the back corner with the swamp mural painted on the front. Attendance is free for all BRAS Members, \$3 at the door for non-BRAS Members and \$2.50 for non-BRAS seniors (price of admission at the Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center). For more information please contact Crystal N. Johnson at crystal.johnson.lsu@gmail.com.

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

Attracting Winter Hummers?



Buff-bellied Hummingbird

(see story, page five)

Let's Celebrate Audubon's 1837 Voyage along the Louisiana/Texas Coast

Next year marks the 180th anniversary of Audubon's ornithological expedition along the Louisiana-Texas coast. This was his last trip to Louisiana, his "favorite portion of the Union", and his only visit to Texas. During it he witnessed an avian panorama of monumental proportions which "gave us the very best opportunities ... to observe... the birds that visit us from the south and west when the imperative laws of nature force them from their winter retreats" (Audubon 1837 in Brewer 1880 Harper's 61:271).

Driven by these insights, Audubon derived the birdscapes of nearly half of America's then-recognized avian species (Audubon 1840 – 1844 *Birds of America* 1-7; electronically available at <http://www.audubon.org/birds-of-america>), thus fusing the foundation for his Environmental Touchstone Hypothesis -- that his written and illustrated record of America would prove to: "be a point from which to institute a comparison for the purpose of ascertaining what changes civilization produces" (Audubon 1837 *The Athenæum* 523:823).

I provide an overview of this voyage in *Audubon's Louisiana*, the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuarine Program's 2016 Birding Calendar (electronically available at http://www.btneep.org/Libraries/Calendars/2016_BirdsCalendar.sflb.ashx). Beginning on the calendar's September page, we find Audubon among the Sandhill/Whooping Cranes and alligators two miles below New Orleans. From here he explores the Birds-foot Delta before crossing the bar into Barataria Bay, birding at Grade Terre, and sailing onto Cayo Island – once at the end of a vast peninsula which divided Terrebonne and Timbalier Bays and brought Bayou Terrebonne to the Gulf of Mexico. Cayo was noted among coastal sailors for its fresh water supplies and among coastal birders as a great breeding ground. It is now gone, an early victim to coastal erosion. From Cayo, Audubon birds around Last Island, finds no rabbits on Rabbit Island, and tediously crosses

"large bays cumbered with shallow bars and banks" of dead oyster reefs as he enters the Atchafalaya Bay. Once inside, an ecstatic and unshaven Audubon lands in Cote Blanche Bay where he is surrounded by snipes, blackbirds, gallinules, curlews, nighthawks, and herons on his approach to a coastal mansion. Sailing onto Texas, Audubon finds the Little Blue Heron "...on the islands in the Bay of Galveston, in Texas, in nests placed amidst and upon the most tangled cactuses, so abundant on those curious isles, on the latter of which the climbing rattlesnake often gorges itself with the eggs of this and other species of Heron, as well as with their unfledged young" (Audubon 1843 *Birds of America* 6:15).

In December of this year I will present a talk, *Audubon's 1837 Environmental Change Hypothesis: Postcards from Eden*, at the 8th National Summit on Coast and Estuarine Restoration in New Orleans. In this short talk, I will have two main points. One is the link between Audubon's coastal voyage of 1837 and his Hypothesis. The second is that Audubon's observations provide a gateway which allows us to understand how and when Louisiana began to lose the vibrant, seaward advancing coast Spain, France, and the United States found from 1500-1810.

On a much broader scale, we can do our part in 2017 to stimulate a greater appreciation of Audubon's coastal voyage of 1837 and its role in the formation of Audubon's Hypothesis. Louisiana's coastal parishes have set the framework with an amazing array of migratory bird festivals including those in Mandeville, Grand Isle, Jennings, St. Bernard, and Sherburne. In the coming months I'll be exploring what I can do as your Conservation Chair to help and will greatly appreciate your thoughts emailed to me at coecnd@lsu.edu.

Richard Condrey
Conservation Chair
Baton Rouge Audubon Society



Attracting Winter Hummingbirds

How to Identify Them, and How to Report Them

One of the most interesting birding phenomena to have emerged over the last 40 years in Louisiana is that hummingbirds often spend the winter among us. Our warm Gulf Coast climate in combination with the right mix of landscape characteristics seems to offer a haven for several different hummingbird species. The Ruby-throated Hummingbird is our only breeding hummingbird in the eastern U.S., and they are common in Louisiana from late March through October. As they are getting ready to mostly clear out in the fall, right about now, that is when hummingbirding can get interesting!



The Rufous Hummingbird, a bird that breeds in the Pacific Northwest, is our most common hummingbird species between late October and March. They begin arriving sometimes as early as late July, and I have received word of about 30 birds so far this fall in Louisiana as of September 23. Other species also are regular in winter, although in lower numbers, including our familiar Ruby-throat, but also Black-chinned, Buff-bellied, Calliope, and Broad-tailed. There are several even more unusual species, and Louisiana has a total of 13 hummingbird species on its official state list!

Here are some tips for attracting hummingbirds to your yard at any season:

1) Keep your feeders stocked and clean. A water to sugar ratio of 4 to 1 or even 3 to 1 is optimal. Yes, you can make it yourself! And you do not need to add red dye – feeders have enough red on them already to attract hummingbirds. Change out the liquid every few days (especially when the liquid starts to get cloudy), and regularly wash your feeders with a solution of hot water and vinegar or bleach (about ¼ c per gallon of water). Rise thoroughly and let dry longer than it takes for the water to evaporate so that there are no residues left. Be

patient if at first you don't see a wintering hummingbird. Sometimes it takes a while for them to find you, or you may have one without knowing it – a single hummingbird can be pretty sneaky!

2) Provide evergreen cover. Shrubs and trees like live oak, citrus, sweet olive, azalea, holly, and camellia are all good for providing cover year-round. Hummingbirds use these for shelter and hiding when not out foraging, and these plants are a critical component of any productive winter hummingbird yard. Native shrubs will be more likely to also host insects that attract hummingbirds and other bird species year-round.

3) Plant as many hummingbird flowers and plants as feasible. Hummingbirds particularly like reds, violets, and pinks, but you also need plants that produce enough nectar to keep the birds coming. Perennials will be easier to maintain in the long-term, and avoid annuals of hummingbird plant look-a-likes that are commonly found at home and garden store chains. Even potted hummingbird plants on your patio can spruce up a rental or small yard. There are many types of hummingbird plants that one can get from local nurseries, or raid your neighbors' and local hummingbird enthusiasts' yards for cuttings. There are too many types to mention here, but try to pick several that bloom at different times of year, particularly in fall and winter. I also encourage you to visit Baton Rouge Audubon's hummingbird page for a starting list of plants (and other excellent information):

<http://www.braudubon.org/feedhummer.php>

Once you have attracted a winter hummingbird to your yard, the next challenge is identifying it! Males of each species are relatively straight-forward, but the females and immatures, which are the most numerous, can be a headache to identify. In fact, Rufous and Allen's Hummingbirds are so similar that it often requires a licensed bander to capture the bird and examine it to be certain, or clear photographs of a tail spread open. Arm yourself with a good hummingbird identification book and a camera, and know that "white tail spots" are not a useful identification feature. Other features of the tail, however, are actually incredibly central to hummingbird identification. Consider details of the tail feathers themselves – do they have orange, and if so, where and how much? What is the shape of those individual tail feathers? Are they broad, narrow, do they have a notch? Here are some starting pointers (and feel free to ask your favorite hummingbird expert for additional guidance):

(Continued on page 6)



Attracting Winter Hummingbirds

(Continued from page 5)

🐦 Rufous, Allen's, Broad-tailed, and Calliope (the *Selasphorus*) versus Ruby-throated and Black-chinned (the *Archilochus*). The former four species have at least some rufous in the tail. Least of which in immature female Broad-tailed and most of which in male Rufous/Allen's. All six of these species can have at least a little orange wash on the flanks, so it ultimately comes down to the tail.

🐦 Ruby-throated versus Black-chinned. The most useful character to distinguish between these species for any age/sex is the shape of the outer primary (flight feather). It is more rounded in Black-chinned and more pointed in Ruby-throated. Thus, it requires viewing when the bird is perched. There are also average differences in back color (duller in Black-chinned), tail-pumping activity when hovering (more rapid, especially when the bill is inserted in a flower or feeder, in Black-chinned), and bill length (Black-chinned has a slightly longer bill on average). Note that males of both species have dark throats when the light isn't reflecting the colors, and really a combination of supporting characters are usually needed to be certain of an identification.

🐦 The *Selasphorus*. They vary in size from largest (Broad-tailed) to smallest (Calliope), but this is essentially useless without direct comparisons among species. There are subtle differences in voice, but that takes practice. Males, again are somewhat obvious (although Broad-tailed can look suspiciously Ruby-throated-like without a view of the tail). There are average differences in the amount of orange in the tail, but also beware of age and sex differences within species. Something that is hard to glean from field guides is the differences in shape among species. Calliope appears dumpy and short-tailed, whereas Broad-tailed appears long and big-tailed, with Rufous/Allen's falling somewhere in between, roughly *Archilochus*-like in shape.

🐦 Buff-bellied versus Broad-billed. The most obvious difference is the color of the tail – dark bluish-black in Broad-billed and distinctly rufous in Buff-bellied. There are other more subtle plumage differences in the throat and elsewhere, too.

Once you have attracted winter hummingbirds to your yard, and have a starting point to identify them (or a photo for people to help you out), please consider reporting your bird to a long-running state-wide database that I currently keep updated. This database was started by Tom Sylvest in 1999, and it has accumulated many thousands of records that contains information about arrival and departure dates, species (and age/sex) distributions and abundance, and annual changes in these patterns.

To report your winter hummingbird (including any Ruby-throated that stays later than 15 November), please email me at ejohnson@audubon.org with the following information: species, age/sex (if known, nearest city, parish, first observed date, last observed date, banded (if known), and banding date. Please also include photos if you have any, for confirmation. Best of luck attracting hummingbirds this winter!

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

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Winter LOS Meeting

in Baton Rouge!

January 27-29, 2017

LOS is coming to your hometown in January! The meeting will be hosted by the LSU Museum of Natural Science and Friday's reception will be held at the museum with a behind the scenes tour of the research collections. Saturday's program will be held at The Faculty Club on the LSU campus and Dr. J. V. Remsen, Curator of the Section of Ornithology will be the keynote speaker. Add on an array of fantastic field trips and the Baton Rouge meeting is sure to please. Please join us and watch for more information at www.losbird.org in early winter.

See you there!

Baton Rouge Audubon Society THANKS YOU!!

BRAS would like to extend a special thank you to our high-level contributors for their generous support in the second and third quarters of 2016.

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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

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