

The **BARRED OWL**

Newsletter of the Baton Rouge Audubon Society

Volume XLVII, Number 1

2nd Quarter, 2020



Peveto Woods Volunteer Work Day

Saturday February 29th was such a wonderful spring day, it was more of a celebration than a work day for the 17 volunteers that arrived early and teamed up for projects around the sanctuary. Two years ago we planted about 75 young trees and many have survived. The vines that grow rapidly during the summer had engulfed most of them, but these die back in the winter revealing the small live oaks, tooth ache, and honey locus trees. Large areas were mowed around them and vines and grass were pulled away from the bases and out of their branches. Teams also set off to clear trails, pick up trash, clean interpretive panels, and clean out water



Hard At Work: Ann Ingram, David Booth, Charlotte Chehotsky



Lunch Break! From left rear: Gordon Griggs, Paul Zimmerman, Natalie Seaman. From right rear: Linda and Bill Kalb, Ann Ingram, Barbara Morris.

dishes. Bill Gover and Gene Barnett came the day before to clean and weather seal the wooden benches for another season. Mark Young gave us his Saturday to bring his mower and help cutting around the planting areas and trails. The sanctuary is looking healthy, green, and ready for birds and birders. Thanks to the following volunteers for their help: David Booth, Gene and Carmen Barnett, Bill Gover, Dale Hamilton, Mac Myers, Natalie Seaman, Paul Zimmerman, Chet St. Romain, Linda and Bill Kalb, Tom and Barbara Morris, Gordon Griggs, Charlotte Chehotsky, John Parker, Ann Ingram, and Mark Young.

Dave Patton
Sanctuary Manager

Birding in the Time of Covid-19

One of my favorite all-time movies is "Serendipity" with John Cusack and Kate Beckinsale. The book "Love in the Time of Cholera" is featured heavily in this film. I haven't read the book; perhaps now I will with my extra free time. But as I was trying to think of a title for this article, the name kept coming back to me...hence, "Birding in the Time of Covid-19".

These are strange and frightening times. Unprecedented in most of our lifetimes, to be sure. We each are being asked to make sacrifices to get through it. But it's also important to keep perspective. We are not being asked to go off to war, or to send our children to do the same. We are being asked to take steps to help slow the spread of a dangerous disease by staying home or avoiding contact with other people. There are many among us who don't have that option: health-care workers, vital services such as police and fire, pharmacy, grocery store and restaurant owners who are helping to fulfill the demand for food and necessities...indeed all of those who have essential jobs. And we owe them a huge debt of gratitude for continuing to do those essential jobs.

As a birder, it's especially hard to be "stuck at home" during spring migration. The next few weeks are generally the most productive of the year in terms of bird species that can be detected in our state. Our resident birds are here, many of our winter visitors haven't left yet, but some of the species that breed here in summer have started arriving. In a normal year, we would flock to places like Grand Isle or Cameron parish to enjoy the incoming migrants. This year, though,

that's a risky proposition and one that is not advised. So what can we do close to home? Here are some suggestions:

Bird your yard and your neighborhood

Getting to know the birds that reside in your yard and in your immediate neighborhood will provide so

overhead. There's no telling! Find a few places in your yard to do stationary counts where you get wide views of the sky.

Learn bird sounds

This is an EXCELLENT time to learn bird sounds. Your cardinals and wrens and chickadees and titmice are all chiming in starting about an hour before dawn and sometimes sing the whole day. Listen for the bird and then zero in on it and actually watch its little lips moving :) I swear it helps tremendously to actually observe the bird singing. Practice, practice, practice....and then once

you get to know all your "regular" birds, when a new one shows up, your ear will pick it up. What's the "fweep" sound coming from the neighbor's oak tree? It's the first Great Crested Flycatcher of the season, just returned from its wintering grounds in central or South America! Again, try to find the bird making the sound. If you can't find it, record a video of the sound with your phone and post it for someone to help you. There are a couple of apps like Bird Genie or Song Sleuth that are supposed to be able to ID birds using recordings of their songs. Frankly, I haven't been able to get them to work. But maybe that's something I need to work on.

The best thing about learning bird sounds in your yard is that when a new sound happens, your ear is attuned to it. What's that sounding like a sneaker on a gym floor? A ROSE-BREADED GROSBEAK! What's the little "check" sound coming from the hedge... a Common Yellow-throat patiently looking for insects! What's the chorus of

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All meetings, bird walks, and programs for Baton Rouge Audubon Society are suspended until further notice. We will post on our website and send out email when activities resume.

Please stay safe and healthy out there!

many benefits. You'll observe interesting behaviors, like the way a male cardinal will delicately feed seeds to his bride as a token of courtship. "See what a caring father I will be?" he seems to be saying. You may have nests around your yard to observe. Carolina Wrens are famous for making nests in the oddest places: old boots, socks on a clothesline, a flowerpot on the shelf in the utility room, my bicycle basket.

But the fun thing about birding in your yard (or I should say "from your yard") is that you not only get to count the birds in the yard, you get to count all the birds you can see from your yard as well. Bald Eagle flying over? Check! Mississippi Kite daily soaring down the street? Check! You'll be surprised what you'll see if you keep an eye on the sky! Best time of day for this is early morning and late in the evening. You may observe wading birds in the morning leaving a roost somewhere in the vicinity, or returning to it in the evening. You may observe migrating birds passing



The Catahoula Hummingbird & Butterfly Garden

by Linda Barber Auld, BugLady

Lepidopterists all know that we need specially selected plants to attract the specific butterflies and moths that we desire to observe living in their wild habitats. I enjoy visiting different gardens in all corners of our state to witness these plants in action while studying which ones they prefer and select to use in varying situations. The Catahoula Garden, full of activity and surprises, is one for your "must see" list.



Bentley, Louisiana, is an unincorporated community in Grant Parish with a population of only 722 people. Just twelve miles north of Pineville, Bentley is located off State Highway 167. Positioned inside the Kisatchie National Forest on U.S. Forest Service land, the Catahoula District station can be found on the corner of Louisiana Highway 8 and Forest Service Road 147. It overlooks the oasis garden residence of an array of birds, butterflies and important life-giving native plants that support this interesting ecosystem. A Forest Service team of employees in cooperation with a local group of volunteers, driven by the selfless mission of creating this super special place, worked together to begin building the garden in 1994. It's divided into smaller sections which in the last few years have also been tended by some local Louisiana Master Gardener volunteers. They continue to enhance the nature smorgasbord by introducing more native plants. On October 20, I did a plant inventory and the totals were 45 nectar, 38 caterpillar host and 9 non-native. Of course, each season would produce more additions for my list. Multiple Eagle Scout projects have improved the garden

by helping to lay out the beds with posts and also constructing the Bat House.

The first quadrant contains a beautiful stand of Longleaf pine trees where rare Red-cockaded woodpeckers (RCW) call it home. The woodpecker cluster site was there before the garden was established. RCWs now occupy a much smaller portion of their original range and are federally listed as endangered. They have a preference for longleaf pine forest habitats that have diminished across the South due to fire suppression and intensive logging. Many of these cut areas were replaced with other pine species that grow faster. The other limiting factor is they prefer "park-like" stands of pine trees so they need old trees in open areas. The birds are rarely seen except perhaps during breeding season. The male has a small red streak on each side of its black cap called a cockade, hence the name. The common name came into use during the early 1800's when 'cockade' was regularly used to refer to a ribbon or other ornament on a hat. The RCW plays a vital role in the intricate web of life of the Southern pine forest because they are 'primary' cavity nesters, meaning they are responsible for the construction of cavities. In the Southern pine ecosystem, there are many 'secondary' cavity users that benefit from the RCW's work. RCWs are considered a 'keystone'



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The Catahoula Hummingbird & Butterfly Garden

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species because use of their cavities by these animals contributes to the species richness of the pine forest. At least 27 species of vertebrates have been documented using RCW cavities, either for roosting or nesting.



Drizzling rain and fog this morning had me wondering what butterflies we might see. The meandering paths invite curiosity and adventure with flowering surprises at every turn. Fluttering around the red Turk's cap flowers, a Cloudless Sulphur was using its long tongue to probe and slurp up pollen. The sprawling lantana growing in the middle of the garden was beaconing Clouded and Ocola skippers. A beautiful freshly-hatched Red Admiral was flitting around the flower clusters and repeatedly evading my camera lens. It landed on my shorts ever-so-briefly but long enough for me to admire its beauty. Shimmering green Long-tailed Skippers were zooming about visiting and tasting a variety of blossoms.

Lisa Norman and I spent some time attempting to determine whether the six Monarchs we were excitedly watching glide about were males or females. All were females except for one. Supposedly, this weekend is the middle of Monarch migration and this is definitely an excellent fueling station. Master Gardener Jacalyn Duncan had reported to me that they have been trying to establish native milkweeds in this space. The plants were there but we couldn't find them because they had probably been chewed down by Monarch caterpillars.

The next sighting was a gorgeous Red Spotted Purple, its iridescent blue wings were glistening as it was pumping them. Its tongue was thrusting into the lantana blossoms gathering pollen. A Pipevine Swallowtail swooped in to challenge territorial rights. It is easy to confuse these two butterflies because the adults look very similar. The Pipevine caterpillar eats the pipevine plant (*Aristolochia*) which is toxic and therefore makes the butterfly taste bad to predators. The flashy colors are the message, "Don't eat me!" The Red Spotted Purple caterpillar eats willow and cherry which tastes good, so the adult Red Spotted Purple mimics the adult Pipevine as its self-preservation technique.

The two Hackberry (Sugarberry) trees not only provide tasty berry food for the birds but also caterpillar food for four butterflies even though none of them were seen today. I feel sure the Hackberry and Tawny Emperor, Question Mark and the American Snout all reside here in other times of the year. They could have been there and just were not spotted.



The rarely seen *Zanthoxylum clava-herculis*, also known as Hercules club or Toothache tree, is one of the native alternatives to citrus for feeding Giant Swallowtail caterpillars. However, unlike evergreen citrus, the toothache tree will lose its leaves in Autumn which could pose a problem to the third generation Giant caterpillar who might run out of food if it takes too long completing its life cycle. Swallowtails usually overwinter in the pupa or chrysalis stage.

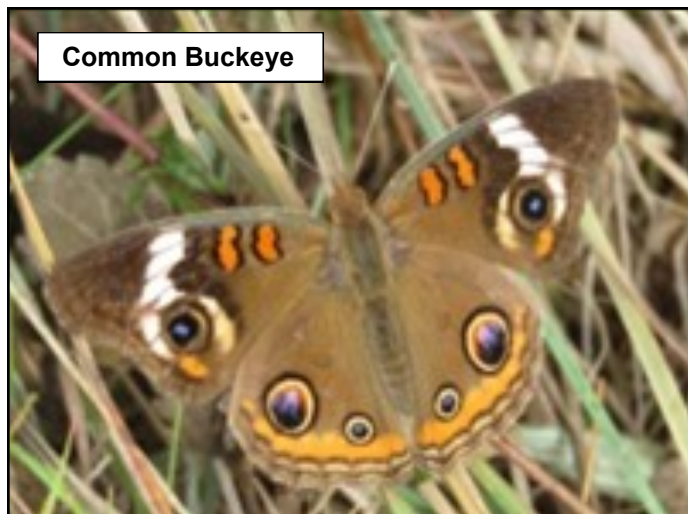
The Catahoula Hummingbird & Butterfly Garden

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Almost at the garden's center stands a stately Catalpa tree with its long seed pods. It offers a bounty for hungry *Ceratomia catalpae*, the Catalpa Sphinx hawkmoth caterpillar, which is just one of the 58 Louisiana sphinx moths that have been studied and documented by Vernon Antoine Brou, Jr.

As we walked around the little pond, we were surprised by a green heron when it burst out of the bushes, flew to the island in the pond's center, then landed at the water's edge. A line of *Callicarpa* (Beauty Berry) loaded with pretty purple berries down its stalks provides a feast for a variety of birds.

Lisa and I quietly stood gazing at the endless acres of bright, golden *Helianthus angustifolia*. All you could hear was the wind in the swaying pine trees and the trickling sound of the little waterfall on the pond's island. Suddenly motion caught my eye. It is a beautiful Buckeye coaxing us to enter the wildflower patch. A two-foot wide path invited us to explore and follow the Buckeye. There before us we see liatris, blue lobelia, aster, and agalinis, the Buckeye caterpillar host plant. The Buckeye landed on my shoe (which has trod many a trail) and quickly began sucking fluids. Lisa and I laughed out loud as its wings began to tremble! We guessed that the mineral concoction it was siphoning must have tasted really good. Lisa observed that the plants looked beaten down and we deduced that deer must be bedding down in this area. All of their needs are met here: food, water and a quiet place to live.



The next two quadrants are more pine trees to the left and to the right are two more wildflower fields that measure ten acres each. As we were discussing the wonderful sporadic wildflower assortment growing amidst this yellow gorgeousness, I spied something on one of the sunflower centers. My heart beating a bit faster, I exclaimed, "It's a caterpillar I've never raised and I don't know what it is!" The caterpillar was positioned on the dark brown center packed with seeds. It appeared to be eating the seeds and not the flower petals. This larva is a yellow-brown mix which perfectly matches the flower colors. A row of fleshy thorns down its back resembles the seed textures. I checked my best caterpillar guide without success. After downloading the pictures later on Facebook, I received the identification within a few minutes, "Yellow Sunflower Moth", *Stiria rugifrons*. Well, that certainly makes sense.

I was delighted to see my "Geaux Grow Natives!" project plants, both Spring and Fall selections, growing and thriving here. My showcase of nectar plants are Buttonbush, Garden Phlox, Cardinal flower, Slender Mountain mint, Purple coneflowers and Ironweed. The caterpillar host plants are Agalinis, Partridge Pea and Passion flower vine.

The butterfly population of the Catahoula Hummingbird & Butterfly Garden is surveyed each year for the North American Butterfly Association (NABA) by Marty Floyd, who also has the huge task of recording all of the Region 10 count data for the NABA annual report publication. Count data is also available on their website. Last year's count data totals are: Pipevine Swallowtail 8, Black Swallowtail 1,

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Birding in the Time of Covid-19

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"zeet" sounds from the neighbor's tree! Indigo Buntings!

The downside of trying to bird by ear, of course, is competing human sounds. Since everyone's at home it sure seems like the neighbors are all taking turns using every mower, blower and power tool they have. But, again...that's the world we live in, so learning to bird around these human sounds is part of the challenge.

Feed, and water, the birds

The number one way to bring the largest variety of birds to your yard is water. Clean, fresh water. Now even if you don't have a stream on premise, there are things you can do. If you have a bird bath, you want to make sure it's not too deep. Songbirds only want a half an inch or so of water to splash in; they're not going deep diving. Moving water is even better. One of the solutions I like is to suspend a water jug with a teeny-tiny hole over a terra cotta saucer. One gallon of water can last all day if you've got your hole sized right. A mister is a great solution and uses very little water. Also, it's good to place the water feature close to a shrub that birds can hop to to preen after they bathe; they need to redistribute the oil in the feathers. A bare dirt spot is often appreciated too for a dust bath...it helps to keep the mites down.

I could expound indefinitely on bird-feeders, but there's plenty of advice out there. Best all around seed to use is black oil sunflower seed. If you have trouble with squirrels (and who doesn't?) use a platform feeder on a post with a baffle that is far enough away from launching spots that the squirrels can't jump it. I have a variety of feeders

around. The squirrels get some, but in the end the birds do, too.

Feeding hummingbirds is a perpetually favorite activity and easy to do. Get an easy-to-clean feeder with lots of red on it and fill it with nectar made with 1 part sugar to 4 parts water (no red dye!). Replace the sugar water every 2-3 days; more often in the heat of summer. Hang it outside a window or some-



where it's easily viewed. There will be an influx of hummers in late March and April and then things will taper off in May and June as they are breeding, but numbers will build back up in July and August and peak in September as the birds move to Central America for the winter.

Let your weeds grow

I mean, plant native plants :) So this is challenging this year since we can't get out to acquire new plants. But you may already have some great plants-for-birds in your yard that you weren't even aware of. Consider letting a bit of your grass actually go to seed: the indigo and painted buntings will approve! Don't pick all the mulberries for cobbler; let the birds have some! Let the butterweed and fleabane and lyreleaf sage that have all been blooming like mad in the

ditches come in to your yard a little bit and let them set seed; it's very likely they will attract birdy visitors. Is there an overgrown or woody lot close by that you can easily visit by foot or by bike? Check it often as chances are that's where the birds are. I don't get White-Eyed Vireos in my yard, but I know I can find them in the shrubby lots around town.

And if going weedy doesn't appeal to you, take this time to plan for your fall garden installation. Study the work of Bill Fontenot and others use the National Audubon native plant finder to figure out what native plants you want to try in your yard. Get it down on paper and figure out how many you'll need of each. Then you'll be ready for the fall plant sales!

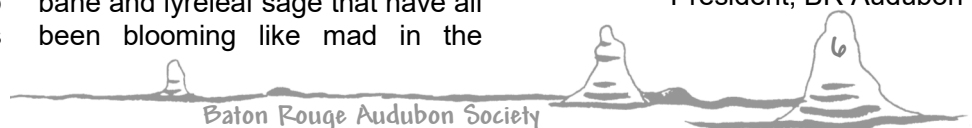
Not tuned in to why native plants are critically important for our birds? Google Doug Tallamy and listen to his programs on youtube. Then get his books. You'll be a convert!

But most of all, you need to just get outside. You're never going to see that Swallow-tailed Kite or kettle of Broad-winged Hawks flying over if you're inside watching Netflix! Find a good comfy seat, have your binoculars close by and explore the nature in your yard. It's endlessly fascinating!

Hopefully soon we will all be back to our regular routines. But I hope, too, that you get something out of this forced downtime that will stay with you. I also hope that you and your families stay well during these trying times.

Good backyard birding!

Jane Patterson
President, BR Audubon



The Catahoula ... Garden

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Cloudless Sulphur 110, Little Yellow 298, Sleepy Orange 1, Gray Hairstreak 20, Red-banded Hairstreak 6, Gulf Fritillary 132, Variegated Fritillary 5, Silvery Checkerspot 1, Phaon Crescent 10, Pearl Crescent 97, Common Buckeye 67, Carolina Satyr 19, Long-tailed Skipper 60, Funereal Duskywing 2, Common Checkered Skipper 12, Tropical Checkered Skipper 3, Swarthy Skipper 1, Clouded Skipper 8, Fiery Skipper 24, Whirlabout 3, Dun Skipper 2, Eufala Skipper 1, Ocola Skipper 2. Totals: 25 species, 893 individuals. Immatures: 20 Gulf Fritillary caterpillars on passion flower vine.

The Catahoula Hummingbird and Butterfly Garden offers a place for visitors to view hummingbirds and butterflies as well as other wildlife. It also provides an opportunity for volunteers to get involved in creating and maintaining a special place in their National Forest that attracts wildlife as well as tourists. The garden is an ever-growing project and the Forest Service team is always looking for new people to get involved. Interested folks can contact Emlyn B. Smith at emlyn.smith@usda.gov

All photos by Linda B. Auld



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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

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president@braudubon.org

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vice-president@braudubon.org

Treasurer

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treasurer@braudubon.org

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Donna LaFleur
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Richard Condrey
conservation@braudubon.org

Education

Jane Patterson
education@braudubon.org

Fieldtrips

Daniel Mooney
fieldtrips@braudubon.org

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Heather Wilson 985/768-9285
membership@braudubon.org

Newsletter

Steve Mumford
newsletter@braudubon.org

Programs

Katie Percy
programs@braudubon.org

Sanctuaries

Dave Patton
sanctuary@braudubon.org

Webmaster

Daniel Patterson
webmaster@braudubon.org

At Large Members...

Erik Johnson
Mark Pethke
Marie Varnes
Casey Wright

The Barred Owl

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Baton Rouge
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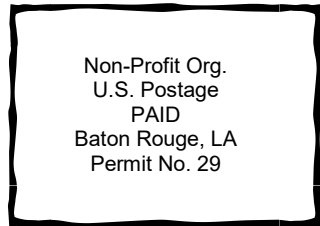
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BRAS and National Audubon Membership

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*.

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If you want all of your dues to support local conservation and education, join BRAS only. You will NOT receive the *Audubon* magazine. You WILL receive *The Barred Owl* and a free sanctuary patch. You may join on-line at any level by visiting our website www.braudubon.org, or send this form with your check to: BRAS, P.O. Box 67016, BR LA 70896.

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)

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