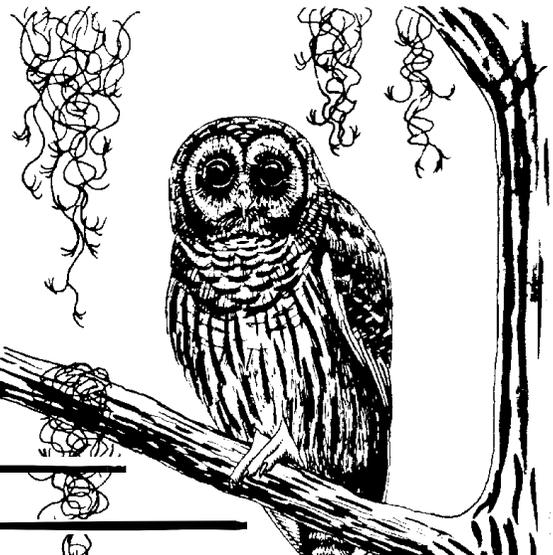


The **BARRED OWL**

Newsletter of the Baton Rouge Audubon Society

Volume XXXX, Number 2

2nd Quarter, 2013



See Birds. Share Birds. Save Birds.

This is the mantra of the of the **Pledge to Fledge** campaign inspired by bird educators everywhere. This campaign challenges birders to nurture an interest in birds in others. The goal is to provide your budding new birder(s) with ongoing and frequent support as they develop their own appreciation for birds.

The **Pledge to Fledge** Campaign is designed to:

- Encourage birders to actively share their appreciation and enthusiasm for birds with others.
- Expose “fledglings” to birds and nature in order to fuel their curiosity and awareness of the world around them.
- Provide basic guidance for birders to effectively transform their friends from non-birder to casual birder with a regard for wildlife and the environment, and then, ideally, to a citizen concerned about conservation.

In other words, it's birders inspiring new birders. What better time to do that in Louisiana than the month of April? The “official” P2F weekend is the last weekend in April, but we're not going to limit you to that! YOU can participate in this worthwhile campaign by including your non-

birding friends on your birding outings this month! Talking a walk in the woods of your local park? Invite a friend along and share your extra binoculars! Going to Grand Isle for the Migratory Bird Festival – take along that neighbor who is always saying she'd love to go! Know a backyard birder that would be wowed by migrating birds? Invite them along to the LOS meeting in Cameron at the end of the month! Planning your annual pilgrimage to one of our outstanding wading bird rookeries? Invite everyone including the kids –everyone loves baby birds!

Once you decide to participate, make your pledge online by going to <http://www.globalbirdinginitiative.org/pledge-2-fledge/the-pledge/> to make your pledge! And as you go, record the experiences and share your photos and stories. There is a facebook page where you can post: www.facebook.com/P2FLA and if you use Twitter or Instagram, you can use the hashtag #P2FLA and we'll collect photos and tidbits that way, too!

Baton Rouge Audubon will hold a **Pledge to Fledge** event at Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center on April 20, 2013 for the public. Please watch the BRAS website (www.braudubon.org) for particulars regarding schedule for that day, but it will definitely include:

- On site banding by the Bluebonnet Swamp Bird Monitoring group – see wild birds in the hand!
- Bird walks on the nature trails led by KidsWhoBird and local guides
- Becoming a birder - Intro to Binoculars, Field Guides, and Electronic Birding Apps
- Bald Eagles in Louisiana by Nickolas Smith
- Gardening for Hummingbirds

It should be a great day for birds and birders alike at the Swamp. We hope to see you and your friends there.

Please consider making your own personal **PLEDGE TO FLEDGE** this year in Louisiana – share your enthusiasm for birds!

--Jane Patterson



Get thee to a Rookery!

by Jane Patterson
photos by Jane Patterson

My ten-year old nephew from California visited Louisiana a couple of years ago. It was not an ideal time for a visit....right after Fourth of July weekend. But we made the best of it -- played tourist in New Orleans-- visited the newly opened *Insectarium* and went to the Imax theater. I decided that he needed to experience "real" Louisiana, so even though it was a bit warm for it, we went on a swamp tour to Lake Martin and we took an airboat tour out of Henderson. The slow-moving swamp tour was a bit over-warm, but the airboat tour was an exhilarating experience! However, we were certainly not sneaking up on any birds with a noisy airboat. I really wanted him to see some of our great birds up close, so we headed over to Jefferson Island.

We arrived after noon -- nearly the peak hottest time of the day. I fully expected him to take a look, say "yeah, pink birds, big deal, let's get back in the a/c". Instead, we spent over an hour out in the full sun looking with binoculars and scope, taking pictures and talking about the birds. He was thrilled with the ugly pink Spoonbill babies. He was so excited when *he* noticed the "different" heron -- the last Tri-colored Heron to be nesting at this particular location. He laughed at the comical Cattle Egret squabbles, and cringed with me as the juvie herons attacked the adults for food. He directed me to take this picture, get that picture. That night when he was telling his dad about his day, he recounted the airboat experience with excitement. But my favorite part was when he said, "...and then, Dad, we went to this magical place."

Rookeries are indeed, magical places. Wading bird rookeries in particular. Wading birds are colonial nesters, so they all pile up in a concentrated area to nest. Multiple birds of various species may even nest in the same tree. The larger birds start nesting earliest; the Great Blue Herons and the Great Egrets. Snowies, Tri-colors and Spoonbills seem to follow suit. Little Blue Herons return from parts south in early March and immediately set up shop -- seeming to prefer buttonbush to trees. White Ibis seem to be among the last to start their housekeeping. The process starts with courtship displays; wonderful seemingly choreographed dances that are peculiar to each species. Presenting sticks and nesting materials is part of this ritual as well, and watching spoonbills clack at each other --



kissing? arguing? as they build their nest is a comical experience. And the noise! The wonderful, joyful, grunting, groaning, squawking and complaining as the birds go about their business is one of the most wonderful aspects of the experience. The whole reproductive process takes at least 3 months from start to finish, so there is plenty of opportunity to observe the birds raising their young if you are lucky enough to find a good location. We are blessed here in south Louisiana with plenty of opportunity for that!

Lake Martin, near Breauz Bridge, is a world class wading bird rookery. The south end of the lake is roped off and protected from boat-goers, but the birds are fairly visible (especially with optics) from the public road. Certainly you can see them overhead. Tell me, is there anything much finer than the sight of a pink bird overhead against a bright blue spring sky? Bird Island at Avery Island is equally famous -- the site of the McIlhenny families successful efforts to restore the egret population to Louisiana. But the most wonderful site I've come across is a tiny rookery near Delcambre, Louisiana. This rookery is in the borrow pit just outside Jefferson Island plantation and Rip Van Winkle gardens. It certainly isn't a site you'd expect the birds to choose, but choose they did, not ten years ago. Tiny islands that hold a few cypress trees but many more tallow trees are the home to literally hundreds of pairs of nesting birds each year. And when you're standing on the levee around the ponds, you're not more than 100 yards away from the birds. Far enough for them not to fear; close enough that you can observe them easily, especially with binoculars and scopes. Photographers especially love this location with eye level views of the nests.



Truly, If there is one thing, as a Louisiana birder, that you *must* do each year in Louisiana, it's visit a wading bird rookery. I highly recommend it!

BATON ROUGE EAGLES

by Jane Patterson

Last year we were so excited to report that a pair of Bald Eagles had nested in south Baton Rouge at Farr Park. Unfortunately the eagles were not successful in raising any young, and there's really no way to understand why. The good news is that there's a new nest in Baton Rouge this year, and it's in a wonderful spot to be enjoyed by eagle-watchers! We can speculate that it's the same pair that built in Farr Park last year since this nest is so close in proximity to the old one. Maybe they just decided they didn't like the location after all, and that's why they moved. The new spot is in the center of a strong sycamore tree and the tree is in the levee batture so it's not accessible by humans. The nest, however, is easily visible with scopes and binoculars from River Road or the top of the levee. There was concern early on that folks trying to see or photograph the eagles might put them off, and I think that they were made nervous by folks that strayed off the levee down toward the nest. But overall they seem perfectly fine, though



watchful, if folks stay on the levee and view the nest from there. In early January, we first spied two fuzzy heads! By the end February the chicks were nearly as large as the adults, exercising routinely in the nest with lots of flapping and carrying on. It's now the second week of March, and I think the chicks will be fledging from the nest just any day. They will likely stay close to the nest tree, probably coming back to the nest to roost at night for a while, and then the family will move on. New research indicates that "our" eagles that nest here in Louisiana travel far and wide the rest of the year. But if luck holds, this pair will return to Baton Rouge next September and set up housekeeping again. And we can only hope they continue to use this wonderful nest site. It has allowed many Baton Rougeans to see their first "real life" Bald Eagles!

(P.S. For those that might be wondering, the Ramah eagles fledged two chicks this year as well! The chicks left the nest just this week!)

BIRDING BREC'S GREENWOOD PARK IN BAKER

If you live in Baton Rouge, you know some of our best birding opportunities are at our local parks. The Baton Rouge Recreation Commission or BREC is one of the best things about the Baton Rouge community...indeed the whole parish. They've just undertaken a major revamp of many of the parks in the area, with input from the community and the results are wonderful. And the parks are being used! It's great to go out on any given Saturday and see families and teams all playing out there!

North of Baton Rouge, up highway 19 just shy of Baker, is a park that recently had a facelift. Greenwood Community park now sports a golf

course, tennis courts, a wonderful playground area, a disk golf course, fishing and many other amenities. Of particular note to birders is the fact that the park includes a nature trail around the lake...and as we all know...water = birds. In fact, this lake is only a couple of miles from the Mississippi River and is near the Devil's Swamp area. Bald Eagles are reported to be nesting in Devil's Swamp, which likely accounts for their occasional presence at the park. In recent visits to the park, we not only found woodland birds in the forested areas that surround the park, but also birds that prefer open spaces, like American Pipits and E. Bluebirds. Kingfishers and Anhinga hangs around the lake consistently,

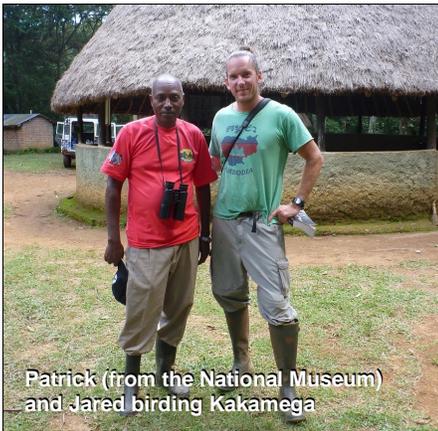
and I was very surprised to come across a Horned Grebe in the little lake as well! It's a nice spot for a morning of birding. You even might think you've been transported to Central America as you traverse the trails and the call of Howler Monkeys fills the air...the park is right next to the Baton Rouge Zoo!



KENYA BIRDING/BANDING BONANZA!

by Jared Wolfe
BRAS Programs Chair

This past fall I decided to take a two week holiday from banding birds in the Amazon to visit the beaches of Bahia where my friends and I could focus on watching birds, drink caipirinhas and swim in the Atlantic sea. One evening while sitting on our rented Bahian apartment's patio, I received an incoming skype

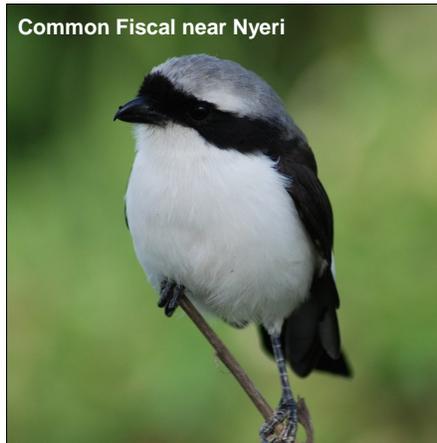


Patrick (from the National Museum) and Jared birding Kakamega

call from my former advisor, Dr. Matthew Johnson. The news was exhilarating: Matt told me that he had successfully received a National Science Foundation grant to partner with the Kenyan National Museum in Nairobi to capture and mark birds near Mt. Kenya. He also needed to immediately know if I could travel to Kenya, upon my return to Louisiana, and supervise the assembled crew for one month. I accepted the invitation knowing full well that neither my PhD advisor nor (most importantly) my girlfriend would be pleased, and rightfully so, with my departure to Africa immediately after a five month field season in Brazil. The African continent, however, as depicted in Karen Blixen's



Speke's Weaver in the Rift Valley



Common Fiscal near Nyeri

famous memoir 'Out of Africa,' has a strange habit of capturing one's imagination.

In fact, Africa has captured the imagination of ornithologists and naturalists for centuries. Landscapes on the eastern half of the continent famously gave rise to our species, but these same regions are also renowned for their impressive diversity of habitats filled with a dizzying array



Field Crew in Nyeri

of birds. Within hours of arriving I found myself with the banding crew at Kimathi University near the town of Nyeri where we began capturing birds on the university's property. Kimathi is a beautiful and bird-rich university where rolling grasslands are interspersed with forest fragments and ponds. The diversity of seed-eating and nectar-feeding birds was staggering; our nets dripped with Purple Grenadier, Red-billed Firefinch, Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu, Variable and Amethyst Sunbirds. Each morning we

were greeted with the crackling calls of Black-and-white-casqued Hornbills and Syke's Monkeys. In addition to banding birds at Kimathi, we also traveled around central Kenya and through the Rift Valley meeting local landowners to acquire access to work on their property. Without exception we were warmly invited to band birds throughout the region leading to more amazing captures: Northern Anteater Chat, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Upcher's



Bare-faced Go-away-bird in Maasai Mara

Warbler and Wahlberg's Honeybird to name a few. We also happened to be working during the over-wintering period for many migratory birds which were quite common on the surrounding ponds: Marsh Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper, Common Greenshank and Ruff. During the month-long field season we traveled throughout the country including a trip to the last Kenyan vestiges of Congolese forest in a preserve called Kakamega. The forests in Kakamega were tall, green, and very-wet with a thick understory. Endemics were common and the birding spectacular. I picked-up many new species

(Continued on page 5)

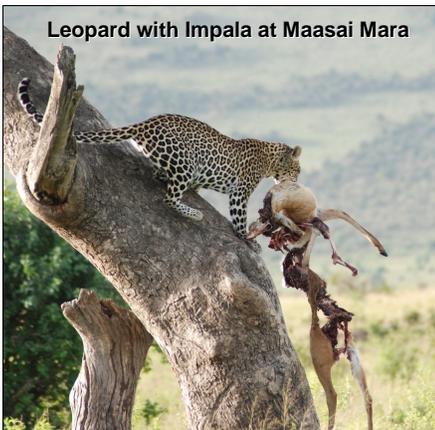


Common Ostrich at Maasai Mara

KENYA BONANZA!

(Continued from page 4)

including Boucaque's Bushshrike, Gray-back Cameroptera and Double-toothed Barbet. From Kakamega I traveled to Maasai Mara where large cats slumbered under acacia trees and Secretary Birds, Ground Hornbills and Ostrich foraged in the savannah. During my last morning at Maasai Mara I took a drive to the Maasai river where a number of Nile Crocodiles and Hippopotamus had gathered. Strangely, on the river's edge was a Common Sandpiper that

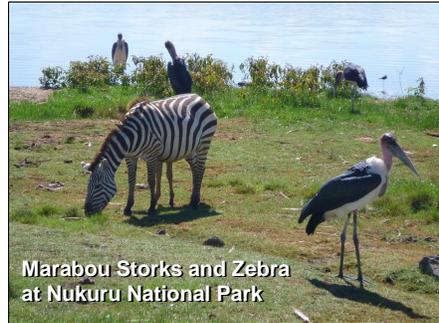


Leopard with Impala at Maasai Mara

was foraging on the backs of several Hippopotamus. I quickly trained my binoculars on the sandpiper and was dismayed to see the bird gorging itself on blood it was extracting from wounds on the hippos – the natural history note will be submitted to an African Ornithological Journal soon! After my encounter with the vampiristic sandpiper, it was time to return to upper-reaches of Mt. Kenya where I checked off more life birds: Alpine Chat, Mountain Buzzard, Hartlaub's Turaco and Malachite Sunbird to name a few.



Kenyan farmer releasing a Blackcap



Marabou Storks and Zebra at Nukuru National Park

After one month of field work, bird banding and quality bird watching my trip was coming to an end. My final stop was in Nairobi where I toured the ornithological collection at the museum and said farewell to our wonderful collaborators. In total, I saw over 350 species of birds and an amazing diversity of mammals. Since my return to Baton Rouge I have kept in contact with several friends at the National Museum in Nairobi and we continue to concoct future plans to study migratory birds in mountain valleys, endemics in Kakamega and broaden our reach to Uganda. Hopefully, these tentative projects will come to fruition and return visits to east Africa will become bird-rich trips happening on a regular basis.



White-bellied Bustard at Maasai Mara



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is published quarterly by the
Baton Rouge chapter of the NAS.
Submissions should be emailed to
newsletter@braudubon.org

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

Baton Rouge
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Baton Rouge, LA 70896

5th Annual
Bayou Birding Bon Temps
April 1 - 30

Are you going birding in Louisiana in April? Well, of COURSE you are! It's the best time of year to be outside! The weather's fine, the migrants are streaming through... So why not win fabulous prizes as you bird? OK, "fabulous" might be a bit of an overstatement, but we WILL have prizes for participants and for winners in each of the categories for the annual Bayou Birding Bon Temps birding competition. This fifth annual event runs the month of April. Basically, all you have to do in order to participate is bird in any of the Louisiana Birding Trail sites, or National Wildlife Refuges, or LA Wildlife Management areas and report your sightings to ebird. We'll cull those lists and determine winners in each of the categories outlined below. The BBT is designed to do two things: build up bird lists for these locations AND to encourage birders to explore areas that they've perhaps not explored before! You're out there anyway -- why not submit your checklist for a chance to win?

For more information, check the Louisiana Bird Resource Office website: www.birdoffice.lsu.edu

Who? Everyone is encouraged to participate.

When? April 1 - April 30, 2013

Where? Louisiana Birding trail sites, National Wildlife Refuges, and Louisiana Wildlife Management Areas

EVENT CATEGORIES

STATEWIDE

- **Big Day** (statewide species count)

This is a classic big day restricted to Louisiana. We recommend you review and follow the American Birding Association's Big Day rules.

REGIONAL

- **Big Location** (species count)
Single day and total period divisions

This will be the most beneficial for developing location checklists. Choose a location and bird it for a day or the whole month. The location within each region with the most species takes the bragging rights.

- **Most Locations** (total period location count)
This category is for the explorers. The participant that enters checklists for the most locations wins.
- **Lagniappe Award** (Random birding trail location, all entries from location eligible for drawing) A little something extra.

Upcoming **BRAS** Programs

The 2012-2013 monthly speaker series is winding down and what a season it has been! Participants learned about the endemic birds of Costa Rica from Cesar Sanchez, Birds of New Zealand from Dr. Sabrina Taylor, the secret lives of Marsh Birds from Dr. Sammy King, Big Year highlights from Dr. Jay Huner and Louisiana Hummingbirds from Nancy Newfield.

The last two presentations of the year promise to be equally engaging.

First, **Karl Mokross** will present on the fascinating behavior of tropical mixed-species bird flocks. Karl spent about two years in the Amazon forest following, documenting and studying the complex interactions of these birds which resulted in some remarkable insights he will be share with us on the 21st of March at Bluebonnet Swamp (6:15pm); please email jwolfe5@lsu.edu for your free ticket.

Next, **David Sibley**, world-renowned artist, naturalist and bird watcher will present on *'The Psychology of Bird Identification'* where David will detail the subconscious shortcuts birders use to identify birds, and how occasional mistakes are the unavoidable byproduct when we try to identify birds under normal field conditions. Mr. Sibley will be available for book signings after the presentation. David Sibley's talk will be held on May 2nd (6:15pm) at LSU'S Coastal Environment Building.

Finally, David Sibley will conduct a 1-day advanced bird watching workshop at Bluebonnet Swamp. Mr. Sibley will lead the group through lectures and guided bird-watching focused on the finer details of bird identification. The cost of the one day workshop is \$100 (lunch provided) and applicants will be chosen using a lottery system. BRAS will begin accepting applications for the workshop on March 20th through online applications via the BRAS website (www.braudubon.org).

See you at the next BRAS event!

-- **Jared Wolfe, BRAS Programs Chair**

My Adventures in Blinded Breakfast Birding

by Crystal Johnson

I'm so fortunate. My small yard is ~300 yards from the back of the Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center. I've enjoyed breakfast with birds most mornings because of this, and I never have to leave the house to get close to them. In addition to breakfast, I read, exercise, play music, talk on the phone, and even tap on the window to warn the birds I am about to open the window. Let me tell you about my "blind".

Tired of trying to find the perfect slant in my window blinds to allow me to see both birds on the ground and those in the air, I tried sheer cloths, vertical blinds, and even that one-way printable film they use on bus windows. Each time, the birds would spook if I moved. On the way out of the last film store, I noticed a truck that had reflective tint, and that eureka moment led me to a local car tint shop, where I spent ~\$40 on enough reflective tint to cover a 33" x 72" window.

I used a spray bottle of water and a dollar store squeegee to apply the non-glue-based reflective tint to the inside of my workout room windows, and I removed the outside metal screen. Best of all, the modification won't affect my property value. I can simply peel the tint off and replace the screen if I move.



Since birds may mistake the images in the window (reflected trees, plants, etc.) for open flying space, it is very important to physically mark the outside of the window with an indicator to prevent window strikes. I like yellow highlighter as it is less obstructive than the spider web material sold by some sellers, and some say its color is amplified by UV light. I never have bird strikes.

It is also very important to have an indicator (such as bird feeders hanging on a shepherd's pole) within 2-4 feet of the window so that birds are less likely to fly into the window from a long distance at a high speed. I also don't have a problem with cardinals mistaking their reflection for a competitor, though they do sometimes look in the "mirror." I do not know the reason for this, but I suspect it is because my windows are not particularly spotless due to dried rain droplets; the cardinals are smart enough to know it is simply a dull reflection.

There are two disadvantages, however. One, the reflection only works if there is light outdoors; at night, there is no light to be reflected outwardly, so blinds must be lowered for privacy. Two, the yellow highlighter has to be re-applied about once a month, more if rain is frequent.

I have had breakfast with mourning doves, chickadees, titmice, Carolina wrens, mockingbirds, brown thrashers, dark-eyed juncos, cardinals,

house finches, house sparrows, goldfinches, an occasional red-winged blackbird and brown-headed cowbird, and one Cooper's hawk. And squirrels, of course. I was even adopted by likely rufous and broad-tailed hummingbirds in January (1 of each). All visiting within 6 feet of me while I eat breakfast or do cardio. I use safflower and black oil sunflower seeds with hopper-type feeders, with occasional peanuts. I use saucer feeders for the hummers. Sometimes I sprinkle sunflower seeds on the window sill, and goldfinches and wrens are only as far away as the width of the window pane (see image). All for less than \$50.

In the interest of full disclosure, I do have a water feature next to the window. I purchased a 50-gallon rain barrel for ~\$100 online, but the idea can easily be reproduced from materials available at a hardware store. I placed it ~30" off the ground atop 3 pairs of soon-to-be-decorated cinder blocks above a water dish, and I fill it with tap water every 3 weeks or so. I use a drip rate of ~20-30 drips per minute. The ploop-ploop sound drives the birds crazy! Now if I could just figure out how to keep the neighbors' cat out! Stay tuned...

[Note from Jane Patterson, BRAS President: Thanks for the newsletter contribution by new member and birding enthusiast, Crystal Johnson. If YOU have a story or pictures to contribute to the newsletter, they'd be most welcome! Send to president@braudubon.org

Baton Rouge Audubon thanks



for their sponsorship of our education programs!

Baton Rouge Chapter of the National Audubon Society

Baton Rouge Audubon Society

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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.

If you would prefer to receive the newsletter in electronic form only rather than a printed version, please email our Membership chair and let her know! Membership@braudubon.org

Patches Extra sanctuary patches or patches for NAS members are \$10 each and can be ordered by mailing the form below. 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
- # _____ of patches (indicate 1 which is free with BRAS membership; additional patches \$10 each; NAS member patches @ \$10 each; no patch will be sent if there is no indication.)
- Electronic version **only** of newsletter (do not mail)

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