

The **BARRED OWL**

Newsletter of the Baton Rouge Audubon Society

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4th Quarter, 2013

BRAND NEW!! HOT OFF THE PRESS!! "Birder's Guide to Louisiana"

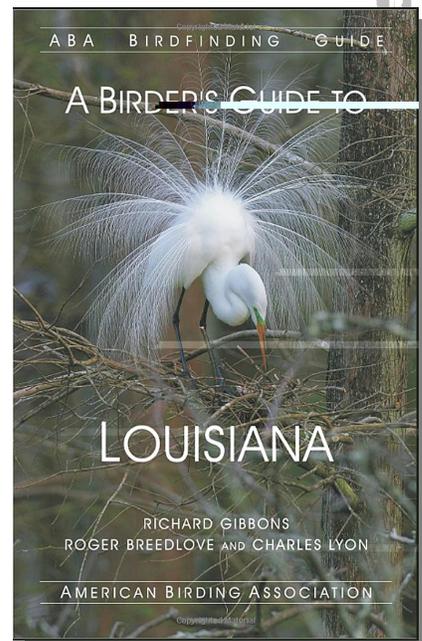
"If you like seeing large numbers of birds, you'll love Louisiana. Although Louisiana may not have the life-listers appeal of some of the border states, probably no state in the USA can compete with Louisiana in terms of bird spectacles. Bird density in general is higher here than almost anywhere in the country, and some of the concentrations are stunning. This birdfinding guide will help more people appreciate our state for the special birding area that it is."

- J.V. Remsen, Jr.

This excerpt from the foreword from the brand new "Birder's Guide to Louisiana" sets the tone. This long-awaited guide was begun years ago by Roger Breedlove, Charles Lyon and others, but was updated, polished and brought to the birding public by Richard Gibbons. Richard acknowledges the input and assistance of many Louisiana birders, as well as others that contributed in many ways — from contributing material, to editing, to supplying outstanding photographs. Of special note are the folks at the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area program of the Louisiana Office of Culture, Recreation, and Travel, who provided the final financial push to make this new Louisiana birdfinding guide a reality. And, of course, the book was published under the auspices of the American Birding Association; the latest addition to the national library of similar guides for North America.

Richard's lively introduction to the book gives birders who are not familiar with Louisiana a taste of the culture here, describing the opportunities for food and fun, as well as offering a geography lesson (you mean it's not all swamp??) and goes on to highlight some very special birding opportunities here in the state. Michael Seymour's heartfelt description of the "Tree Swallow tornadoes" provide the perfect example of the kind of bird spectacle one can encounter here in Louisiana, which Van so aptly alludes to in his foreword. This book is truly a "must have" for Louisiana birders, but it's also one we should all be recommending to our birding friends in other parts of the world. It's time to share our wonderful secret!

The meat of the book, of course, is the painstaking descriptions of the places to bird throughout the state of Louisiana, along with descriptions of the birds you will find there at various times of the year, and maps that show in some details how to get there. The book is organized by geographic area of the state and offers suggestions that birding residents as well as visitors can use to "make a day of it." One of the most valuable aspects of the book is a variation of the "Lowery Graph" which shows the abundance and status of birds in Louisiana, enabling



birders to know which birds "belong" where and when. A complete checklist to the official state Louisiana Ornithological Society bird list is provided, along with lists of other fauna which can be encountered within our borders.

The book is available from outlets such as Amazon.com and Buteo Books online. Our friends at the Wild Birds Unlimited stores in Baton Rouge and Lafayette also have it in stock. A wonderful option also is provided by the Atchafalaya Na-

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The Plight of the Prothonotary

“Szeep.” I look up at a starry sky, the winds have gone to sleep, a chorus of crickets have calmed and quieted. *“Szeep.”* On the northern banks of the Gulf of Mexico, I stand, silent, with anticipation of winter as a slight chill crosses my brow. *“Szeep.”* I look up once more. Invisible birds are overhead and they are migrating south. *“Szeep.”* Another one, a Prothonotary Warbler, is leaving its cypress haunts for more tropical climates.

Anyone who has ever visited Whiskey Bay Road in the Atchafalaya Basin or boated through Maurepas Swamp knows this bird well. Its return in March and April announces spring with its “sweet sweet sweet” song. Nesting in cavities in snarled cypress, red maple, tupelo, or even outdoor grills and other patio accessories, this trusting and brilliantly yellow bird is at once captivating and familiar, a symbol of Louisiana’s wet forests. Prothonotary Warbler populations in Louisiana are critical to its survival, with the West Pontchartrain-Maurepas Swamp and Atchafalaya Basin Important Bird Areas each hosting well more than 1% of the continental population each breeding season.

The Prothonotary Warbler breeds across wet cypress-tupelo and bottomland hardwood forests from eastern Texas up through Delaware, and across the bottomland forest system of the Mississippi Alluvial Valley. Only 10% of this original habitat remains in the lower 48 states. On top of that, Prothonotary Warblers are sensi-

tive to forest edges, where microclimates are altered and Brown-headed Cowbirds parasitize nests. It is perhaps no surprise that populations have declined range-wide by about 1% per year (which translates to a loss of 1/3 of the population since 1966) and about 1.6% per year in Louisiana, according to Breeding Bird Survey data.

A freshly bathed Prothonotary Warbler perches on a cypress knee.



But these Prothonotary Warblers are only seasonal visitors for us. They actually spend more than half their lives away from the breeding grounds. Some of this time is spent migrating, where they have to dodge cell and radio towers, lighted buildings, and wind farms, only to find progressively smaller and more isolated patches of forest habitat as they go to and from southern Central America and northern South America.

Where they winter in places like Nicaragua, Panama, and Columbia, they depend on coastal mangrove forests. These mangroves are not like our shrubby black mangroves of Grand Isle, but instead are tall forests with several to a dozen or more species of mangrove trees. Like our northern bottomland forests, these mangroves not only provide critical habitat for birds and other wildlife, but also act as flood protection buffers when waters rise. They sequester carbon, nutrients, and toxins that would otherwise flow into sensitive coastal marine environments, thus are critical to the health of estuaries and fisheries. These forests have historically been difficult for humans to penetrate and develop, thus have largely remained intact relative to other coastal habitats. Even so, about 1/3 of mangroves world-wide have been lost, primarily since 1980, and those trends are increasing as ever more sophisticated technological advances brought around the world.

A male Prothonotary Warbler, fitted with a geolocator on its back, visits its nest box put out by Baton Rouge Audubon Society volunteers.



Photo by John Hartgerink

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BRAS Soars at Audubon Convention

Six members of Baton Rouge Audubon Society's board attended the Audubon Convention in Stevenson, Washington in July, 2013. Jane Patterson, Erik Johnson, Eric Liffman, Dan Mooney, Jared Wolfe, and Melanie Driscoll joined nearly 500 other people, including chapter members, staff, board members, donors, vendors and partners, for Audubon's first convention in 13 years. Much of our board members' travel was offset by Audubon scholarships and chapter grants, and awards from Audubon Louisiana.

The theme of the convention was *Taking Flight Together*, and the emphasis during the four day convention was on how Audubon can succeed in the face of unprecedented environmental challenges if we work together as 'One Audubon'. Speakers came from across the Audubon network, and topics ranged from fundraising and development to climate change, from IBAs to bird-friendly communities, from national policy to chapter successes leading bird-a-thons, and from nature writing to GIS technology. Information came through presentations, workshops, and most importantly, through the networking that can only happen when like-minded people gather for several days away from their day-to-day demands.

Energy was high throughout the convention and the field trips before, during and after. Audubon President David Yarnold gave an inspiring plenary talk, sharing Audubon's vision developed through an intensive strategic planning process that emphasizes including and valuing the leadership of Audubon's many chapters. The setting, the Skamania Lodge, was idyllic, with Spotted Towhees singing near our windows, giant pines murmuring in the breeze, and trails to wander in search of coveted western birds.



Jane Patterson, our own esteemed president, was also the star of the Mississippi Flyway! Along with a chapter leader from Mississippi, Jane was honored with the **2013 Mississippi Flyway Dutcher Award** for service to Audubon. According to Doug Meffert, Audubon Louisiana Executive Director, "Our own BRAS president was one of two in the flyway that were awarded this year's Dutcher Award for her incredible volunteer contributions to Louisiana and Audubon. Rising from a continuing education student on birds to a statewide leader in less than a decade is an incredible achievement that only someone with Jane's enthusiasm, kindness, and tenacity can accomplish. Louisiana is proud of you, Jane!"



Jane Patterson, BRAS President, receives the 2013 Mississippi Flyway Dutcher Award for service to Audubon from Chris Canfield, Vice President, Gulf Coast & Mississippi Flyway.

Chris Canfield, the Gulf Coast & Mississippi Flyway Vice President, gave the award to Jane at the Mississippi Flyway meeting, citing her work in education, including the founding of *Kids Who Bird*, her improvement of BRAS's outreach through our improved website, her work to identify and initiate the process of acquiring a new sanctuary, and her boundless enthusiasm for introducing new people to birding (in several flyways!). All of the members of the BRAS board were in attendance and immensely proud of Jane and all of her accomplishments.

Taking Flight Together was accomplished through the efforts of many whose names may be familiar. Lynn Tenefoss, Vice President of Chapter Relations, was the overall project manager. Doug Meffert led the program committee, and Chris Canfield led the Mississippi Flyway meeting. Erik Johnson presented our Gulf conservation science work, including Audubon Coastal Bird Survey, while I presented one Gulf conservation and partnerships at Important Bird Areas across the Mississippi Flyway.

Given the success, there will certainly be another convention soon, and we hope more of you can join!

Melanie Driscoll
Director of Bird Conservation
Gulf Coast Conservation/Mississippi Flyway
National Audubon Society



Seabirdin'

With Jane Patterson

Venice Marina is a surprisingly busy place at 6 o'clock in the morning. The parking lot is virtually full of trucks and trailers,, and the purr of motors starts even before the sun comes up. Most of the folks are fisherman...either leisure or professional...heading out to sea. We were the "odd men out" so to speak. For one thing, there were a bunch of women in our group. For another, we didn't have a fishing pole between us. We boarded Captain John's boat, the Cougar, with much excitement. We were birders and we were headed out to sea to see "pelagic" birds. Pelagic birds are birds the primarily live their lives out a sea, rarely visiting land except to raise young. Some never come near the shore, preferring the richer "blue water" that occurs further out at deeper depths. This is an all day affair...we'd be going 50 or 60 miles out from shore to get to where the green water meets the blue...and then beyond. It was important to start early and with a full tank of fuel!



Sunrise in Venice is usually a treat, and this morning was no different. Linda Stewart-Knight taught us about "sun dogs and mare's tails" -- interesting cloud patterns the developed as we motored out through South Pass. We checked out each bird eagerly...but there was very little diversity. And then suddenly...what's that odd looking bird in the middle? Odd shape, not a gull, was it a Frigatebird? I jumped up to get a better look and someone shouted "Brown Booby"! All eyes and bins spun that way as we watched this large seabird wing it's way north up the channel. It was quite a distance away, so no one got great photos, but at least we got something to prove we saw it! And wing its way it did...it easily out-paced our fishing charter vessel and disappeared to the north. What a great bird to start the day!



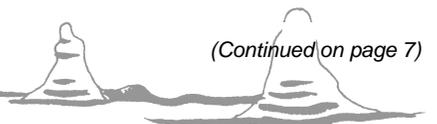
Little did we know that the best pelagic bird of the day would occur before we were even out to sea! We tried really hard to find the specialties...looked for wrack lines, looked for blue water. But the blue water was further out than the 50 miles we traveled that day and the wrack lines were not productive. Birds do tend to congregate around fishing vessels, so when we saw piles of Frigatebirds around the shrimp trawlers we went in closer for a look. One shrimp had

over 20 Frigates loafing on its lines, waiting for easy pickings! The Magnificent Frigatebirds were definitely the stars of the day...diving and skimming and dueling in mid-air! One of the best moments of the day was finding a shrimper that had just dumped its by-catch. Small fish, crabs, and other critters littered the water..and the birds were there for an easy meal. And so were the sharks! It was my first time seeing sharks out at sea; folks were pretty sure they were Bull Sharks.

But try as we might, we couldn't turn up a Shearwater or a Petrel or any of the other deep water specialties. Were we too early? Other successful pelagic trips had taken place in late September rather than in late August; was that the key? Or was it just that the Gulf is a vast, vast place and we were just not where the birds were? We had to settle for the other wildlife, Blooming fields of jellyfish....skittering schools of flying fish...quick and rare glimpses of sea turtles coming up briefly for a breath of air...all provided their own delight. And the dolphins kept us company...running with apparent ease under the bow of the boat as we chugged along on our quest.

Our day ended in another glorious sunset as we moved inland up Tiger Pass. As Bob Thomas said, Tiger Pass is a wonderful consolation for tired pelagic birders as they come in from a long day at sea. Spoonbills, and ibis and egrets and herons and stilts and skimmers, and...the list goes on. The cloud of several hundred Black Terns was a special treat.

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The Plight of the Prothonotary

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In and around Panama City, for example, mangroves are being filled and converted to industry and residential communities. To reduce flood risk in these expensive ventures, developers build these lands up quite high and opportunistically divert canals through waterways, which inevitably is bad news for lower lying older communities. A RAMSAR designated site established in 2002 currently protects much of these mangroves, but there are almost annual attempts to shrink boundaries and open these mangroves to development as Panama City encroaches closer and closer with each construction project. Oh, and not to mention that mudflats adjacent to Panama Bay estuary and mangroves supports 1.1 million Western Sandpipers each year, as well as a variety of other shorebirds. What will their fate be as mangroves are replaced with high-rises and industry?



Dave Fox stands next to a Prothonotary Warbler visiting its nest cavity. Dave measured densities of Prothonotary Warblers in Maurepas Swamp, and his data contributed to the establishment of the West Pontchartrain-Maurepas Swamp Important Bird Area.

So where does this leave our beloved Prothonotary Warbler? Declining on the breeding grounds, and with an increased threat of habitat loss on wintering grounds, they remain one of the highest priority conservation species in the eastern United States according to Partners in Flight. Local conservation organizations, such as Richmond Audubon Society in Virginia and more recently Baton Rouge Audubon Society at Bluebonnet Swamp, have been placing nest boxes with predator guards to increase breeding productivity. Groups like Virginia Commonwealth University are starting research on the wintering grounds in mangroves. Those findings will help conservation planners understand and strategically address the effects of habitat loss on wintering Prothonotary Warblers, like research on the breeding grounds has revealed.

The missing piece is to understand their migration. How long does it take? Where do different breeding populations winter and where are important stop-over sites for these populations? What is the degree of mixing among breeding populations on the wintering grounds? Baton Rouge Audubon Society has purchased the first geolocators small enough to place on Prothonotary Warblers. These geolocators are data-logging devices that record the timing of sunrise and sunset with each passing day. As has been used for a number of larger birds, this information can be used to determine one's position on the planet allowing researchers to literally track migration routes of birds. Of course, the limitation is that these devices need to be retrieved to collect the data. After three years of banding birds at Bluebonnet Swamp, we have seen banded Prothonotary Warblers return year after year. A team of volunteers led by Jared Wolfe, Eric Liffmann, and John Hartgerink deployed geolocators on four of these birds during the summer of 2013 with the hopes that these swamp canaries will once again return next spring. It will be exciting to learn about the Prothonotary's time away from Louisiana, potentially connecting conservation efforts at Bluebonnet Swamp with initiatives on the wintering grounds, and describing their migratory routes for the first time. "Szeep."

Erik I. Johnson
BRAS Vice President
ejohnson@audubon.org

A "Birder's Guide to Louisiana"

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tional Heritage Area. If you visit their website, Atchafalaya.org you can download the entire manuscript for free! This pdf version is a wonderful addition to your electronic library and is especially effective on a tablet such as an iPad, because the outstanding photography can be enjoyed in beautiful living color. It also provides the capability to zoom in on the maps to see details which may be difficult to see in the printed version. I highly recommend acquiring both the print and pdf versions.

Bravo, Richard, for making this important project a reality!

Jane Patterson
BRAS President

A FESTIVAL LIKE NO OTHER!

The fifth annual **Yellow Rails and Rice Festival** is scheduled for 23-27 October 2013. Designed with fun in mind, its primary goal is to provide participants a unique venue to view Yellow Rails while at the same time bringing birders and farmers together to realize the value to birds of the area's "working wetlands." The festival schedule is casual and participants can attend all field days (weather permitting) or come and go at their leisure. Leaders/facilitators are positioned at field sites and help participants spot birds as well as provide information or answer questions. In addition to visiting rice fields, participants can explore nearby birding areas, join trips to local points of interest, or venture farther afield to search for specialty birds in other Louisiana habitats, such as the pineywoods or Cameron Parish coast. Many of the agencies and or-



ganizations that study, manage, and protect Louisiana's birds and habitats assist at the festival, as well as have information booths during the opening reception (icons displayed below) so that participants can learn more about their activities. A banding workshop is again offered this year. Based in Jennings, participants are positioned in the heart of Cajun Country in Louisiana's SW prairie region, an area known for great birding, local cuisine, and a rich history and culture.

Visit the YRARF 2013 Events Schedule page at http://www.snowyegretenterprises.com/Snowy_Egret_Enterprises/Event_schedule.html to see this year's activities and find links for additional information. Online and mail registration opens 1 July. To be added to our emailing list for up-to-date YRARF 2013 announcements, or to ask for information or inquire about private tours, send email to yellowrailsandrice@gmail.com.

Upcoming BRAS Presentations

Each year BRAS brings renowned bird experts, scientists and conservationists to our community for monthly presentations. This season's line-up is proving to be very exciting. Starting things off this September 26th, 6:15pm at Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center, LDWF Biologist Sara Zimorski will present on the history of Whooping Cranes - both in Louisiana and nationwide, their decline,

and now their recovery through habitat management and reintroduction projects. Sara will cover all facets of the introduction, positive and negative, and where we're headed.

On October 24th, 6:15pm at Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center, Dr. Donata Henry from Tulane University will present on the nesting ecology of Louisiana birds giving us an opportunity to discover answers to some questions you may never even have thought to ask! Where do baby turkey vultures hang out? How clean is a Kentucky warbler's nest? Who would you bet on in a competitive food eating contest, the cardinal or the cuckoo? You will also have the opportunity to test your bird, and

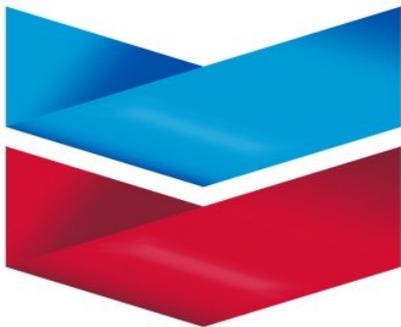
nest, ID skills in this engaging program that includes forty species you know and love in Louisiana.

In addition to Cranes and nesting Birds, we will also host presentations focused on Bald Eagle migration, the evolution of tropical birds, National Audubon's newest state office (Louisiana!), the life and times of Juncos, and a presentation and bird ID workshop in December with author and birding superstar, Kenn Kaufman. Be sure to check the BRAS website for regular updates regarding our monthly speaker series.

Jared Wolfe, MSc
BRAS Programs Chair

Baton Rouge Audubon thanks

Chevron



for their sponsorship of our education programs!

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 email, we promise! Send a request to "President@braudubon.org" and ask to be added to the list! Also follow us on Facebook at [facebook.com/BRAudubon](https://www.facebook.com/BRAudubon).



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With Jane Patterson

Seabirdin'



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I highly recommend the pelagic birding trip..whether on the warm, calm waters of the gulf or the more lively waters of the Atlantic or Pacific Oceans. You will almost certainly see new and wonderful birds and other sea life that you just can't see from land. Many, many thanks to Erik Johnson for arranging this trip and to Captain John and the crew of the Cougar for their patience with us crazy birders!

What Our Friends Are Doing

ORLEANS AUDUBON SOCIETY Birding Trips and Programs

Birding the Louisiana Nature Center — Sat., Oct. 12, 7:30 a.m. Meet at the entrance on Dwyer Rd. Exit I-10 at Read, turn right on Read then turn left on Dwyer. Go about 2/3 miles down Dwyer, the gate is on the left. Leaders: Glenn Ousset-(504) 495-4284 and Amy LeGeaux-915-8296

Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge — Sat. Oct. 26, 8:00 a.m. Meet at the Bayou Sauvage Ridge Trail entrance located on US 90 (Chef Menteur Highway) across from Recovery Road in New Orleans East. Exit I-510; go left on Hwy 90, about 4 miles to parking area on the left. Leader: Phillip Wallace-628-0146

Birding the Lower Coast Algiers — Sat., Nov. 2, 8 a.m. Cross the Crescent City Connection, exit east (away from the river) on Gen. Degaulle. Drive several miles, cross the big Intracoastal Bridge, turn right onto Hwy 406. Meet where Hwy. 406 meets the river levee. Leader: Ed Wallace-(504) 343-1433

Birding St. Bernard — Sat., Nov. 16, 7:30 a.m. Meet at Hoefer's gas station on the corner of Paris Rd. and Judge Perez. Leader: Glenn Ousset-(504) 495-4284

The Effect of Mercury on Birds — Speaker: Ariel White, Tues., Nov. 19, Social at 6:30 p.m., program at 7:00 p.m., Community Church Unitarian Universalist, New Orleans

Bonnet Carré Spillway — Sat. Dec. 7, 8:00 a.m. Meet at the Norco Boat Launch. Take Airline Hwy (US 61) west, turn right onto the east Spillway levee, and turn left down to the boat launch. Leader: Chris Brantley -234-4560

Birding Fontainebleau State Park — Sat., Dec. 14, 8:00 a.m. Meet at the large parking lot closest to the lake. \$1.00 entrance fee required. Leader: Tom Trenchard-884-2009

Birding Audubon Park — Sat., Jan. 4, 8:00 a.m. Meet in the parking lot off Magazine St. (St. Charles side of Magazine) near the golf club house. Leader: Mary Joe Krieger-(504) 866-3396 (home)

New Orleans East Canals and Lakes — Sat., Jan. 18, 8:00 a.m. Meet just inside Joe Brown Park. Exit I-10 at Read Blvd. and turn right on Read. Joe Brown Park will be on the left about 1/2 mile down Read. Leader: Joelle Finley (504) 715-2647



www.braudubon.org

Baton Rouge Chapter of the National Audubon Society

Baton Rouge Audubon Society

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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 educa-

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.