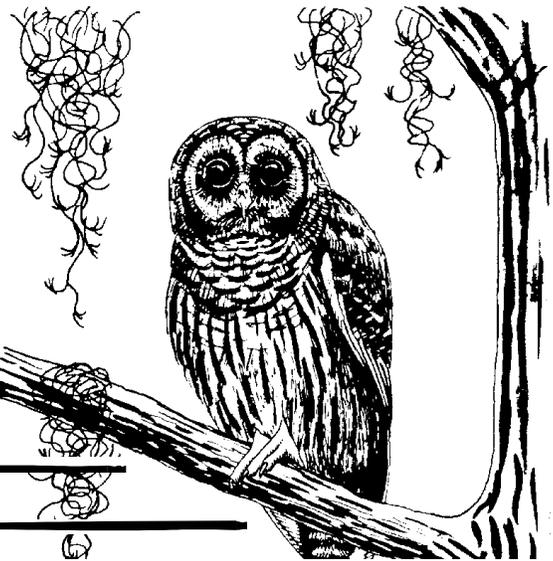


The **BARRED OWL**

Newsletter of the Baton Rouge Audubon Society

Volume XLl, Number 2

2nd Quarter, 2014



WELCOME TO THE LOUISIANA BIRD OBSERVATORY

By Jared Wolfe

In March 2010, a small group of volunteer biologists associated with Baton Rouge Audubon Society began a bird banding program at Bluebonnet Swamp to measure the health of birds living within a small habitat island and to provide environmental education to the local community. Four years later the Bluebonnet Bird Monitoring Project expanded beyond Bluebonnet Swamp to include additional banding stations at Palmetto Island State Park near Abbeville and at the Woodlands Conservancy in the Greater New Orleans area, and Baton Rouge. This recent expansion resulted in the renaming of the growing program to the Louisiana Bird Observatory.



More specifically, the Louisiana Bird Observatory (LABO) is a state-wide partnership of bird monitoring stations focused on promoting bird conservation through quality science and education. Our collection of scientific data through year-round censuses and bird banding is designed to support conservation and management decisions. In addition to developing quality science, LABO routinely provides training for students and outreach for visitors of all ages to help build a more bird friendly Louisiana.

Some of our more exciting collaborative studies include:

- Monitoring mercury levels in local bird communities (in partnership with the Biodiversity Research Institute)
- Assessing prevalence of avian malaria and avian pox in central Louisiana (in partnership with University of Louisiana at Lafayette)

- Effects of forest restoration on the health of bird populations at Woodlands Conservancy (in partnership with Woodlands Conservancy and Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program)
- Long-term changes in bird survival and population growth across the Louisianan landscape
- Prothonotary Warbler migration mapping using light-sensitive geolocators (in partnership with National Audubon Society)
- Weekly bird banding demonstrations during summer months at Bluebonnet Swamp (in partnership with Parks and Recreation Commission for the Parish of East Baton Rouge)

Louisiana Bird Observatory grew from a grass-roots commitment to create a more bird friendly community through promoting quality science, conservation and education. Louisiana Bird Observatory's continued success is similarly dependent on local support and involvement. We invite you to learn more about Louisiana Bird Observatory by reading the latest 'Audubon in Action' article in the February-March issue of Audubon Magazine, by visiting us online at <http://braudubon.org/lab0>, and at our facebook site www.facebook.com/labirdobservatory where you can sign up to receive regular information about upcoming banding events.



The subtle beauty of a captured Northern Parula

...more photos, Page Four

LIFER OWLS

by Crystal Johnson

I have never seen a Great Horned Owl. I have heard them call. I have breathed the same air with them. Been taunted by them, for sure. But I have never laid eyes on one.



I started birding in earnest in January of 2013. The first owl I ever saw in my life was a Burrowing Owl who lived amongst the cows in southern Louisiana. My friend and teacher, Jane Patterson, took me to what she called “*The Secret Place*”. As we pulled up to the area, I had no idea what we were looking for or why she had dragged me to this seemingly random and ostensibly private cattle farm. But there he was. Standing bold and knobby-kneed next to his culvert with large sleepy yellow eyes, like an uppity housecat who refuses to leave his comfy sill. When a nearby cow noticed this tiny bird defending his pipe, it was the cow who jumped and ran away. Burrowing Owl. Check.

Later that birding season, I participated in a birding walk led by Dan Mooney at Lake Martin. Toward the end when we headed toward the visitor’s center, various participants in the walk casually mentioned, “Oh, there’s a Barred Owl.” Dan set up his scope, and I saw a Barred Owl for the first time in my life. Still being a newbie, I did not want to “gush” over seeing this big guy high up in the tree, but I had to fight the urge to monopolize the scope. I just could not stop looking at him, and he spent a good bit of time checking us out. Barred Owl. Check.



I have a cousin who is like a sister to me. She lives in South Carolina and recently gave birth to her first child, who arrived 5 weeks prematurely, an ordeal that left her with an extended hospital stay. When I went to visit my new nephew in January 2014, I took a small, compulsive bird detour that delayed my arrival by 1 day. This was not appreciated by the new mother, but if I have any say, one day the kid will completely understand my sense of priority.

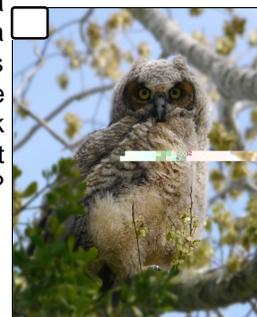
As I pulled up to the Little Talbot Island State Park, I walked through the sand and dune grasses. I walked along the beach bent over, leaning forward into the blistering, frigid winds as cold tears poured from my face and my fingers lost their ability to hold my binoculars steady. I finally arrived at the group of fellow eco-tourists. And saw my first Snowy Owl. In Jacksonville, FL.

As I stood there with a Grinch-wide grin on my face, I learned that tears and teeth can indeed freeze if given enough exposure time. The Snowy Owl was perched approximately 1/4 mile away on a sand dune. I suspect he was calling us names, like “lightweights” and other derisive insults. I stood there shivering for about 30 minutes admiring this seemingly misplaced apparition, at times with binoculars and at other times without. Most of the time I just stood there with my hands in my pockets, feeling honored and humbled that I was allowed to share the same space with this guy. As I walked back to my car, I felt like the National Science Foundation had just awarded a major research grant to me and only me. Snowy Owl. Check.

I was mostly raised by my grandmother in a small town called Moss Point, MS. The area is not the nicest part of town and is rife with gaudy, unkempt, unsightly dead trees. Each time I have visited my grandmother since early 2013, I have sworn her house is surrounded by approximately 17 Barred Owls, all asking the same question. Sure, I recognize I am likely hearing their echoes and there may only be 2 actual individuals. However, since I have yet to lay eyes on a single Barred Owl in that area, I have come to believe there is a crystal clear mocking tone when I hear the question being asked. “Who cooks for you?”

One day in March of 2014, I had had enough. After advice from fellow birders that I could try to replicate the Barred Owl call myself or use a bit of playback on my phone, I began my search. On a hunch, I checked out the back side of a tree that I had once begged the mayor’s son to cut down. Staring back at me was the heart-shaped face and spotted belly of a Barn Owl in all its 10X42 glory. Wide awake and not happy about the interloping Barred Owl walking by its tree cavity. As if to say, “Hey, lady, trying to get some sleep here.” You know that moment when you’re in free fall on a roller coaster and your stomach punishes you for it and your legs go weak? That was me versus the Barn Owl in our staring contest. The bird won. Barn Owl. Check.

At this rate, I suspect I will see a Spotted Owl before I lay eyes on a Great Horned Owl. In fact, I was once accused of being one of those newbies to whom rare birds flock then perch and coo. But Great Horned Owl, in the meantime?



Still checking...

Owl photos by Jane Patterson

BRAS Supports Second Annual Amazon Bird Banding Course

Each year, Dr. Erik Johnson and I, BRAS Board members and Louisiana Bird Observatory volunteers (read more about the Louisiana Bird Observatory on Page One of this issue of the Barred Owl), travel to the Brazilian Amazon to conduct a week long bird banding course designed to impart contemporary ornithological field skills to Latin American university students. The banding course is particularly important because highly skilled biologists are desperately needed to study and conserve vulnerable bird populations as deforestation threatens the Amazon while new bird species continue to be described. For example, in 2013, LSU researchers announced the discovery of 15 new Amazonian bird species while over 10,000 square kilometers of Amazonian forest, a region equivalent in size to the country of Jamaica, was cleared since 2011. Undoubtedly, many bird species in the Amazon are at risk of going extinct before being discovered.

Recognizing the need for trained and field-tested Latin American Biologists, the second Central Amazon Bird Banding Course was held in November 2013. The banding course, like the previous year, was held at the famed camp **Kilometer 41** in pristine primary Amazonian forest approximately 80 kilometers north of Manaus, Brazil.



Musician Wren

The banding course focused on teaching participants the field skills necessary to safely capture, monitor and ultimately conserve birds. For one week, 16 students

and five instructors representing seven different countries (Brazil, Costa Rica, Colombia, Peru, Portugal, Suriname, and USA) attended daily lectures and workshops detailing accurate data collection, ethics and project design methodologies. Each morning, students would practice their newly acquired skills by operating a bird banding station under the tutelage of a course instructor.

During the course students familiarized themselves with the rich Amazon bird community. Several highlight captures in-

cluded Musician Wren (*Cyphorhinus arada*), a species with a song so beautiful that according to indigenous legend other birds will stop singing just to listen to it, White Hawk (*Pseudastur albicollis*), a species that commonly hunts reptiles, arthropods and small mammals, and Wing-banded Antbird (*Myrmornis torquata*), a species reliant upon vast tracts of pristine lowland tropical forest.



White Hawk

In total, the course safely captured 313 individual birds representing 59 species. In general, participants found the course critically helpful in their development as skilled field ornithologists. This course would not have been possible without our partner's collaboration: Louisiana Bird Observatory, Costa Rica Bird Observatories, National Audubon Society, and Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul. Key institutional and funding support in Brazil came from the Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas da Amazônia (INPA), who hosted the initiative, and the Centro Nacional de Pesquisa e Conservação de Aves Silvestres (CEMAVE) who fully funded travel costs and registration fees for five participants. Funding was also obtained by a crowd sourcing effort where 44 anonymous donors helped fund the course (the associated crowd sourcing video showing highlights of from the 2012 course can be viewed here: <https://www.microrzya.com/projects/amazoncourse>).

Lastly, course instructor Pablo Elizondo, Executive Director of Costa Rica Bird Observatories, filmed and produced a brief video documentary of the 2013 Central Amazon Bird Banding Course for Channel 7 news in Costa Rica which can be viewed here: <http://www.teletica.com/Noticias/32842-QN-llo-leva-al-corazon-de-la-selva-en-el-Amazonas-.note.aspx>.

- Jared Wolfe



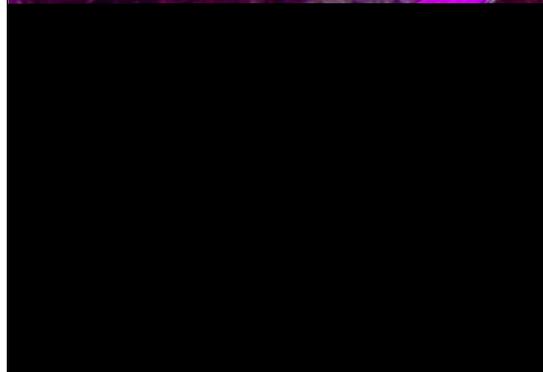
2013 Amazon Banding Course participants and instructors

WELCOME TO THE LOUISIANA BIRD OBSERVATORY



Dr. Erik Johnson teaching the finer points of aging birds to volunteers at Woodlands Conservancy

Prothonotary Warbler with geolocator at Bluebonnet Swamp



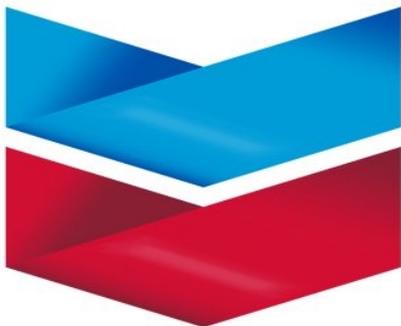
Eric Liffmann teaching local kids how to imitate an Eastern Screech Owl at Bluebonnet Swamp



Dr. Scott Duke-Sylvester showing off a Red-bellied Woodpecker to students at Palmetto Island State Park

Baton Rouge Audubon thanks

Chevron



for their sponsorship of our education programs!

What Our Friends Are Doing

LOS Spring Meeting,
Friday and Saturday,
April 25-26 Cameron

Friday Program: Seed Dispersal by Two Species of Toucans in Fragmented Habitats in Costa Rica by Landon Jones, PhD student ULL

Saturday Program: *A Place to Land? Stopover Biology of Intercontinental Songbird Migrants* by Dr. Frank Moore, Distinguished Professor in the Department of Biological Sciences at The University of Southern Mississippi.

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 www.facebook.com/BRAudubon.

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Baton Rouge
Audubon Society
P.O. Box 67016
Baton Rouge, LA 70896

Upcoming BRAS Monthly Presentations

What an exciting 2013-2014 schedule of monthly presentations we had so far! Participants learned about warbler migration from Kenn Kaufman, received a Whooping Crane update from Sara Zimorski, learned about Louisiana Audubon from Dr. Doug Meffert, reviewed Louisiana's nesting birds from Dr. Donata Henry, viewed the Baton Rouge premiere of the Ordinary Extraordinary Junco documentary, and most recently learned about the ecology of the Seaside Sparrow from Dr. Phil Stouffer.

The last few presentations will be equally engaging with Dr. Robb Brumfield presenting on the evolution of tropical birds and Nick Smith introducing us to the migratory pathways of Bald Eagles. Check out BRAS's website for scheduling updates (<http://braudubon.org/>) and we look forward to seeing you at the next BRAS presentation!

BRAS Treasurer and Program Chair Needed!

First we want to extend boundless thanks to both Jay Guillory and Jared Wolfe for acting as BRAS Treasurer and Program Chair respectively. Jay has been BRAS Treasurer for several years and has decided he'd just rather do other things. The Treasurer duties include: providing a current financial report to the board each month at the board meeting, preparing an annual report for the board and for National Audubon, picking up the mail and depositing checks to the BRAS account, arranging for the annual tax return to be done, and sending membership information to our membership chair. Ideally, we'd like someone with a basic working knowledge of Excel for maintaining our financial information. If you're interested in acting as Treasurer, please let Jane know so that your name can be included on the ballot at our May elections.

Jared became our Program chair just a couple of years ago and we were so lucky he volunteered! He has revived the BRAS monthly programs in a big way and we have had some outstanding speakers under his leadership, including both David Sibley and Kenn Kaufman. But Jared is wrapping up his education here at LSU and has secured a job with the National Forestry service in California, so he'll be moving in July. We will miss him immensely! If you are interested in acting as Program Chair for Baton Rouge Audubon, you have a few months to work with Jared before he leaves and get some good tips! Duties of Program Chair include arranging for monthly speakers, arranging for refreshments, and collecting names of attendees to give to Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center where our programs are held. This is an appointed position as opposed to elected, so if you're interested, please let Jane know ASAP.

We value our members highly and all of our members rely so much on our volunteer board. Please consider offering your services to Baton Rouge Audubon in one of these valuable ways!



Baton Rouge Chapter of the National Audubon Society

Baton Rouge Audubon Society

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If your membership expires, you will no longer receive *The Barred Owl*. Well, eventually we take your name off the list. It is expensive to produce and membership dues help to cover that cost. Please see the expiration code on the first line of the label above your name. The month and year in which your membership expires are indicated after your membership organization (e.g., BRAS DEC 09 for BRAS-only members and NAS DEC 10 for NAS members).

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)

Name: _____ Ph: _____

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City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

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