

The **BARRED OWL**

Newsletter of the Baton Rouge Audubon Society

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Prothonotary Warbler Makes a Momentous Return

As some of our favorite birds come and go with the seasons, it can be humbling to think about the journeys each of these birds make. Some cross rivers, mountains, or continents; others cross seas and oceans. Each bird experiences its own pressures and struggles to make these epic journeys, and the successful ones often will do it again just a few months later.

Baton Rouge Audubon Society leaders wondered this very thing about the Prothonotary Warblers returning each year to Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center. In fact, one particular male had returned with each greening of spring, carrying a small aluminum band around his leg. So we set out to figure out where he went in winter.

Jared Wolfe, Eric Liffmann, Dan Mooney, and a bunch of other volunteers worked with bird-tracker extraordinaire, Luke Powell at Louisiana State University, to capture this 13-gram warbler in June 2013 and harness to him an even smaller backpack called a geolocator that would collect light data over the next 9 months, ultimately storing a daily record of his journey. After endlessly waiting through the fall and winter, John Hartgerink, Carol and Jeff Newell, and Jerry Seagle who scour the trails at Bluebonnet almost daily,



heard the first spring Prothonotary Warbler singing on March 24. Jared and I immediately dropped everything and went to the swamp. We found John eagerly snapping photos of the banded bird. We thought we could make out a small backpack partially hidden by its feathers, so set up a mist-net, a "feaux Protho", and a playback to lure the bird in to catch him...but we failed. So the next morning at dawn, determined to see if this was our special bird, we tried again – success!

The father of three warbler broods and a burgeoning research project, this legendary bird was quickly known as GeoDad. GeoDad was the first Prothonotary Warbler ever to have its annual migration tracked, so Jared Wolfe who led the project, and I as co-author, published a paper in the *Journal of Field Ornithology* describing the project and GeoDad's migratory route.

Amazingly, GeoDad traveled at least 5,000 miles, stopping in at least 7 countries during this journey. He wintered somewhere near the Colombia-Panama border, but took about 3.5 months to get there, spending prolonged periods of stopover in Central America and the Greater Antilles. His spring return in March took only 3 weeks and he made a b-line right up Central America and over the Gulf of Mexico to return to Bluebonnet Swamp.

With this success, Louisiana Bird Observatory, Audubon Louisiana, and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries worked together to deploy 21 more geolocators in 2014. We have recovered 9 of these in 2015 and are feverishly working to process the data. This work has also led to an incredible partnership of Prothonotary Warbler researchers who have collectively deployed a total of 95 geolocators across 5 states to understand what these birds need along their migratory routes and where they spend the winter. And with this knowledge, we will more effectively protect what's rightfully theirs.

Erik I. Johnson
Vice President,
Baton Rouge Audubon Society

2015 LOS FALL MEETING

Friday and Saturday, October 23-24 Cameron

Please pre-register by October 14th

Friday, October 23rd

Evening: First Baptist Church in Cameron, 110 School Street off of Marshall Street (the main street)

6 P.M.-7 P.M. Registration: Light snacks will be provided by the Cameron Parish Tourist Commission.

7 P.M.-8 P.M. Meeting and Evening Program

Friday Program:

SE Arizona in the Monsoons of July!

Ken Harris and Joelle Finley swapped the 95 degree heat of New Orleans for the 113 degree heat of Tucson and then quickly left Tucson for the "cool" of Mt. Lemmon, the Chiricahuas, the Huachucas and the Santa Ritas. Along the way they found a Tufted Flycatcher, a couple of Plain-capped Starthroats, and the expected Five-striped Sparrow in California Gulch. They also found Kevin Morgan at Santa Rita Lodge!

Saturday, October 24th

7:00 A.M. Field Trip Meet in the parking lot of the Cameron Motel. Ed Wallace, Marty Floyd, Donna Dittmann and Steve Cardiff will lead field trips to the Cameron Parish hot spots. Bring lunch, drinks, bug spray and walkie talkies if you have them.

Evening: First Baptist Church in Cameron, 110 School Street off of Marshall Street (the main street)

6:00 P.M.-6:30 P.M. Registration

6:30 P.M.-7:30 P.M. Dinner: chicken/sausage gumbo dinner, potato salad, bread, dessert

7:30 P.M. Meeting and Evening Program, Election of officers

Saturday Program:

Insights from the Louisiana Bird Atlas Project
By Matt Brady

After six years of hard field work by the Louisiana birding community, the Louisiana Bird Atlas is finally yielding results. Combining survey effort for bird communities in both summer and winter, the Louisiana Bird Atlas is a truly ground-breaking project. What insights can we gain from a better understanding of the fine-scale distributions of birds across our state?

Matt Brady, a California native, started grad school at the LSU Museum of Natural Science in 2012. Before that, he worked a series of bird-related field jobs in California and the Neotropics. His favorite location to bird in Louisiana is Grand Isle, while his favorite spot outside of Louisiana is Big Sur, California. Matt hopes to find a museum-related job after graduating. He also hopes to be able to bird in Australia someday.

Cameron Accommodations:

The phone number for the Cameron Motel is 337-775-5442. The Cameron Motel also has sites available for RV campers. Several lunch places are open in Cameron and Johnson Bayou and gas is available. Bring your own breakfast food. Other accommodations can be found in Sulphur or Lake Charles. East Jetty also has camper spaces with hook-ups.

Please pre-register by October 14th!

Do we have your email address?

Keep up to date with all of Baton Rouge Audubon Society's events and programs by joining our email list! We won't inundate you with spam, we promise! Simply send a request to president@braudubon.org and ask to be added to the e-list!

AND If you would prefer to receive the BRAS "*Barred Owl*" newsletter in electronic form **ONLY** (rather than the printed version thereby lessening your carbon footprint) please email our Membership chair and let her know! Drop her a line at membership@braudubon.org

Also please follow us on Facebook at
www.facebook.com/BRAudubon

Louisiana Master Naturalists of Greater Baton Rouge

by Colette Dean

It's been a few years in the making, but in the spring of 2016, Greater Baton Rouge will have a chapter of the Louisiana Master Naturalist Association.

The Louisiana Master Naturalist Association offers an opportunity for citizens to expand or sharpen their skills in natural history, with special focus on the diverse habitats of Louisiana, the Sportsman's Paradise. According to the Louisiana Master Naturalist website, in the early 1700s naturalists arrived on many ships and sent specimens of species then new to science back to museums of the Old World. Most of the early natural historians traveled Louisiana's byways, as demonstrated by John James Audubon's many contributions.

Katherine Gividen, vice president of the Louisiana Master Naturalist of Greater Baton Rouge, said there are currently three active chapters in the state (Greater New Orleans, Acadiana and Northwest Chapter (Shreveport/Bossier City) with three more being formed, including Greater Baton Rouge.

What Our Friends Are Up To!

Mark your calendars for the
Winter LOS Meeting
Details at www.losbird.org

January 29-31, 2016 Monroe

BRAS would like to extend a special thank you to our high-level contributors for their generous support in the 3rd quarter of 2015.

Louisiana Waterthrush Membership

Josephine Nixon

Rose-breasted Grosbeak Membership

Dr. Stephen Pagans
Dr. & Mrs. Herbert Dyer

Thank You!

In order to be a certified Louisiana Master Naturalist, you must complete all requirements set forth by the chosen chapter of LMNA. Current requirements are to complete all training requirements (about 46 to 58 hours), with some class time and the majority of time spent in the field, 20 hours of volunteer service and 8 hours of advanced training, a satisfactory score on an exit exam and payment of modest dues. If you want to maintain your certification, you must annually attend periodic educational sessions (8 hours minimum), and contribute volunteer hours using your LMN skills.

Programs for the Baton Rouge chapters are being developed this fall include, but are not limited to: Arthropods, Natural History Collections, Birds, Stream Ecology, Plants and Soils, Herpetology and Mammals.

"We've been in the works on this for a few years and hope to announce the LMNGBR program to the general public by early spring," Gividen said.

Participants are encouraged to enter the LMN program and contribute to the well being and expanding the knowledge base in natural history in Louisiana. The Master Naturalist training, through its various chapters, studies the nature of the state's varied physiographic regions, and helping to understand the connections among our valued environment, culture and economy.

Master naturalist volunteers will provide environmental stewardship within their community through conducting educational activities projects and demonstration.

"Our primary focus is to educate Louisiana citizens about our precious flora and fauna as well as other aspects of their environment and ecosystems. Our goal is to promote and protect Louisiana's natural heritage," she said.

Baton Rouge Audubon Officers

President

Jane Patterson
president@braudubon.org

Vice-President

Erik Johnson
vice-president@braudubon.org

Past President

Eric Liffmann
eliffmann@gmail.com

Treasurer

Kimberly Lanka
treasurer@braudubon.org

Secretary

Donna LaFleur
secretary@braudubon.org

Committee Chairs

Conservation

Richard Condrey
conservation@braudubon.org

Education

Jane Patterson
education@braudubon.org

Fieldtrips

Daniel Mooney
fieldtrips@braudubon.org

Membership

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

Newsletter

Steve Mumford
newsletter@braudubon.org

Programs

Crystal Johnson
programs@braudubon.org

Sanctuaries

Dave Patton
sanctuary@braudubon.org

Webmaster

Daniel Patterson
webmaster@braudubon.org

At Large Members...

Melanie Driscoll
mdriscoll@audubon.org

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

7TH ANNUAL

YELLOW RAILS AND RICE FESTIVAL

The seventh annual Yellow Rails and Rice Festival is scheduled for 28 October - 1 November 2015. 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 organizations 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 2015 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 2015 announcements, or to ask for information or inquire about private tours, send email to yellowrailsandrice@gmail.com.

Audubon's Louisiana

Save a spot on your wall for *Audubon's Louisiana*, an upcoming calendar being prepared by the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program as part of its educational program highlighting the estuary's and Louisiana's unique ecology and history.

Though still in preparation, the calendar follows Audubon as he explores Louisiana, his "favorite portion of the Union" (Audubon 1843, 6:122) through samples of his original watercolors from the New York Historical Society and the Houghton Library at Harvard. In it we listen as Audubon's tells us of his findings through his own words, taken from his 1820-1821 journal (Corning 1929); his smaller, more complete and widely distributed second edition of **Birds of America** (Audubon 1840-1844), and his 1837 letters and advertisement.

In the first half of the calendar we follow a recently bankrupt Audubon descending the lower Mississippi in 1820 on a flatboat headed for New Orleans. His mission is to complete and publish his life-size, drawn-from-nature images of the birds of the United States (Audubon in Corning 1929, 226-227). His field guides are a birder's memory and Turton's (1802) barely illustrated, Linnaean-based birds of the world. His equipment is not much more than a sharp-eye, a shotgun, drawing tools, and two portfolios. His laboratory is the American frontier. He wishes to study and record its avian treasures, which he has glimpsed on a previous 1819 voyage to New Orleans. Before the end of 1821 he will have made important additions to Wilson's monumental **American Ornithology**, including the Wild Turkey, Double-crested Cormorant, and White and Brown Pelicans; identified incidentals like the Scarlet Ibis and Smew Merganser; and discovered new species including Bewick's Wren. By the end of 1821, Audubon's Louisiana stay will have allowed him to study more than 120 birds and complete at least 26 drawings which (by his notes on the originals) would appear in his **Birds of America**. Included in his Louisiana-drawings are his iconic images of the Carolina Parrot and the Ivory-billed Woodpecker.

In the second half of the calendar we follow Audubon when he has returned to Louisiana in 1837. He is now an internationally celebrated author, naturalist, and artist. He sails along the Louisiana coast, gathering birds and data to complete first, life-size edition of **Birds of America** (Audubon 1827-1838) and formulating plans for its second edition (Audubon 1840-1844). By now Audubon understands the importance of his work as a touchstone for measuring environmental change:

...this Work... forms a complete history of the Birds of America, and will in after times be a point from which to institute a comparison for the purpose of ascertaining what changes civilization produces in the Fauna of that great continent.

(Audubon. 1837. *The Athenæum*: 523:823).



Purple Gallinule male. Drawn from Nature by John J. Audubon, New Orleans April 23^d 1821. Courtesy Houghton Library at Harvard.

As an example of the calendar's monthly presentations of selected images and quotes consider the current draft of June's Purple Gallinule. Here Audubon's April 23, 1821, New Orleans illustration of this elegant and abundant water bird with a "Blue baby top" and yellow legs and feet predates its correct identification in the published literature.

I have experienced a thousand times more pleasure while looking at the Purple Gallinule flirting its tail while gaily moving over the broad leaves of the water-lily, than I have ever done while ... gazing on the flutterings of gaudy fans and the wavings of flowing plumes. Would that I were once more extended on some green grassy couch, in my native Louisiana, or that I lay concealed under some beautiful tree, overhanging the dark bayou, on whose waters the bird of beauty is wont to display its graceful movements, and the rich hues of its glossy plumage! Methinks I now see the charming creature gliding sylph-like over the leaves that cover the lake, with the aid of her lengthened toes, so admirably adapted for the purpose, and seeking the mate, who, devotedly attached as he is, has absented himself, perhaps in search of some, secluded spot in which to place their nest. Now he comes, gracefully dividing the waters of the tranquil pool, his frontal crest glowing with the brightest azure. Look at his wings, how elegantly they are spread and obliquely raised; see how his expanded tail strikes the water; and mark the movements of his head, which is alternately thrown backward and forward, as if he were congratulating his mate on their happy meeting. Now both birds walk along clinging to the stems and blades, their voices clearly disclosing their mutual feelings of delight, and they retire to some concealed place on the nearest shore, where we lose sight of them for a time

(Audubon 1842 5:128).

If this interests you, check the Baton Rouge Audubon Society's (BRAS) home page <http://www.braudubon.org/> as the new year approaches. We'll post the notice of a BRAS talk I'll be giving on *Audubon's Louisiana*, where a limited number of calendars should be on hand for distribution. We'll also post a link to the BTNEP site where you can download an electronic copy of the calendar or find instructions for sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope to cover the postage for a free 'hard' copy once the calendar is available.

Richard Condrey
Conservation Chair,
Baton Rouge Audubon Society

Baton Rouge Chapter of the National Audubon Society

Baton Rouge Audubon Society

P.O. Box 67016

Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70896

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Keeping your membership current is important!

BRAS and National Audubon Membership

You may join NAS by going to their website (audubon.org) and you automatically become a member of both NAS and BRAS. You will receive the quarterly award-winning *Audubon* magazine as well as the quarterly BRAS newsletter, *The Barred Owl*.

BRAS Only Membership

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

Patches!

Extra sanctuary patches or patches for NAS members are \$10 each and can be ordered by using the form to the right. If you are joining BRAS and want a **free** patch, you must put "1" in the blank.

Baton Rouge Audubon Society (BRAS)

Please enroll me as a member of BRAS! Enclosed is my check for:

- \$25 Individual Membership
- \$30 Family Membership
- \$50 Wood Thrush Membership
- \$100 Rose-breasted Grosbeak Membership
- \$250 Louisiana Waterthrush Membership
- \$500 Painted Bunting Membership
- \$1000 Cerulean Warbler Membership
- \$ _____ Additional Contribution
- \$ _____ Total remitted with form

#____ of patches (indicate 1 which is **free** with BRAS membership. Additional patches are \$10 each; NAS member patches @ \$10 each; no patch will be sent if there is no indication.)

- Electronic version of newsletter **only** (do not mail)
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