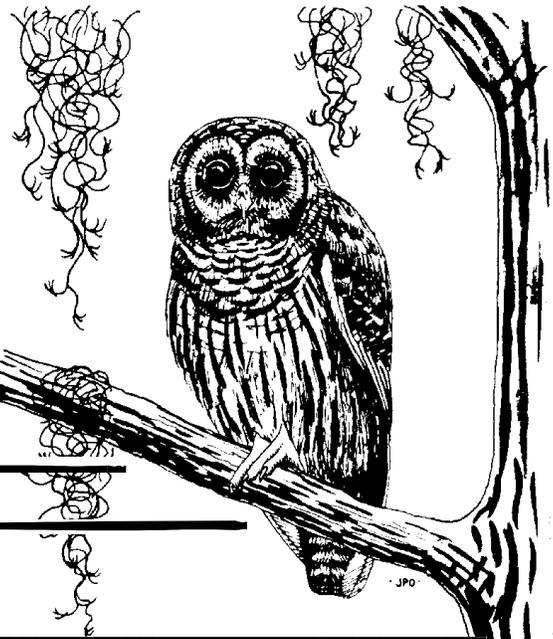


# The **BARRED OWL**

Newsletter of the Baton Rouge Audubon Society

Volume XLVI, Number 1

2nd Quarter, 2019



## **IMPORTANT MESSAGE REGARDING DELIVERY OF THE BARRED OWL**

As a cost-saving measure, Baton Rouge Audubon has decided to change the policy regarding mailing and delivery of our printed newsletter. See below.

### **Baton Rouge Audubon Members (Direct & Dual)**

You will continue to receive the printed version of the newsletter by mail, but may choose the environmentally friendlier paperless option by contacting our membership chair, Heather Wilson, at either (985) 768-9285 or [membership@braudubon.org](mailto:membership@braudubon.org). PDFs of our newsletters, past and present, can be found on our website - <http://www.braudubon.org/newsletter>.

### **National Audubon Only Members**

*Congratulations! You are now paperless!*

This is the last print version of *The Barred Owl* you will be receiving, **UNLESS you opt in** by contacting our membership chair, Heather Wilson, at either (985) 768-9285 or [membership@braudubon.org](mailto:membership@braudubon.org). PDFs of our newsletters, past and present, are available on our website: <http://www.braudubon.org/newsletter>.

**Your memberships status can be found by looking at the back of your newsletter at the mailing...** 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).

**If you have any questions or concerns about your membership status, please contact Heather Wilson directly.**

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# When will "our" birds return?

by Jane Patterson

**I**t's starting again! Reports of "first of season" birds are ramping up for Spring 2019. It's a fun time of year, as spring bursts forth and our neotropical migrants return from their wintering grounds. How do you know when birds will return? Here are few ways:

Use George H. Lowery's "*Louisiana Birds*". There is a chart in the back of the book that lists all of the expected species in Louisiana, along with a graph indicating their seasonal occurrence for each month. For migratory species, specific dates of return (and departure) are noted for all of Louisiana, and for the Baton Rouge area in particular. However, since the last printing of this volume was in the early 70's the information may be a bit dated.

A more up-to-date chart may be found in the back of "*A Birder's Guide to Louisiana*" (2013, Gibbons, Breedlove, Lyon). The "*Abundance and Status of Louisiana Birds*" chart is modeled after Lowery's, with the exception that it

shows occurrence in North Louisiana vs South Louisiana (divided along the I-10 corridor). It also offers finer definition to the status, offering 6 different levels.

A more technical approach to the question would be to use the **eBird** database to see what birders around Louisiana noted in the past few years. To do this, simply go to [www.ebird.org](http://www.ebird.org), click on **Explore, Bar Charts, Select Louisiana (Entire Region) and Continue**. This produces a list of any bird that has ever been seen in Louisiana over all reporting years. Refine this list, by selecting the years and months. For recent spring migration information, you might choose February through May, 2015 through 2019. The resulting chart will show you all the birds that have been recorded during those time periods. To see when Prothonotary Warblers are expected back, you will note there is no green color the first week of March, but there is in the second, indicating the rate of reporting of more than 1 Prothonotary starts the second week of March. If you compare with the "*Birder's Guide*"

or "*Louisiana Birds*" the information is much the same.

Here are a few birds and their recently reported return dates:

**Indigo Bunting:** trickling in March 1, things ramp up March 15

**Scarlet Tanager:** one or two the last week of March, but things get hot in April

**Blue-winged Warbler:** don't look for this bird until April 1!

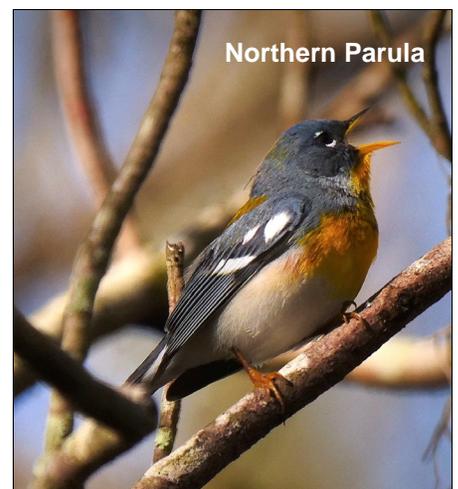
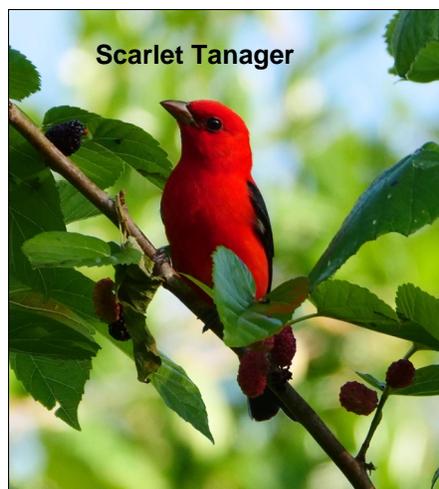
**Northern Parula:** present in winter in small numbers, the tide turns for this early migrant on March 1!

**Rose-breasted Grosbeak:** A few will see these beauties in the first week of April, but by the second week, they will be plentiful!

The graphs all clearly show the peak of our spring migration activity is in April. It's also one of our better weather months, generally. All the more reason to get out there and find all the birds!

*Good birding!*

All photos by Jane Patterson

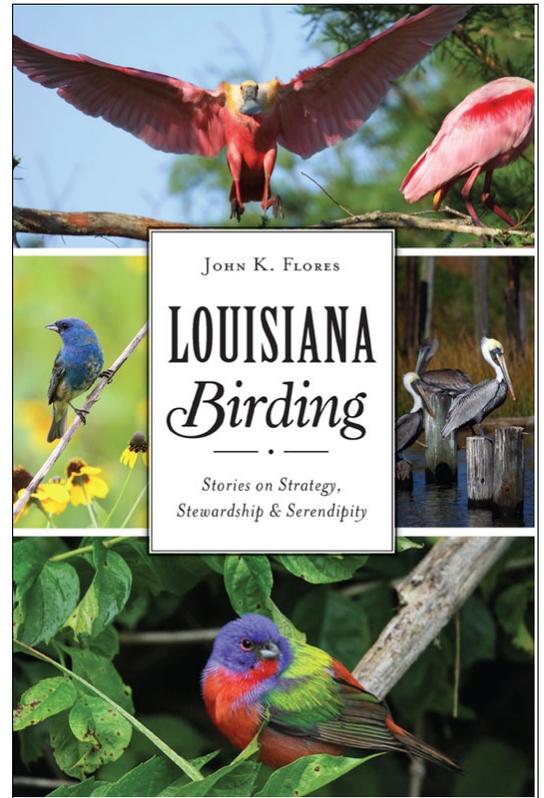


# Louisiana Birding: Stories on Strategy

In his new book, *Louisiana Birding: Stories on Strategy, Stewardship & Serendipity*, John K. Flores does an admirable job of describing the avian bounty available to us here in Louisiana. He takes you to the gulf coast in the spring, where thousands of colorful neotropical migrants have just arrived from their trans-gulf journey on their way to the northern breeding grounds. He describes the cacophony of sound from the waterfowl that fly over the wetlands in the winter, working over the spent grain fields. He expounds about the wonder and magic of a wading bird rookery full of silly, beautiful pink birds. In this way, he introduces a new birder to avian life across the state and through the seasons.

But much of this book is focused on the various conservation efforts related to different birds that have taken place in the state. He recounts the history of the reintroduction of our state bird, the Brown Pelican, as well as the newer efforts related to the Whooping Crane. He also talks at length about the impacts of coastal erosion on birds and the research, conservation and stewardship efforts directed there. Those of us who have been birding in Louisiana for a while will recognize the names of the folks he worked with in gathering material for this book.

For new birders, this is a great way to get a feel for what the state has to offer in the way of birding locations and events. It's also a reference that describes the historical conservation efforts of people and organizations that are important to Louisiana birds, as well as current challenges and opportunities. It's one that should be in all Louisiana birders libraries!



## CBC: The Results Are In!

**T**he Baton Rouge Christmas Bird Count (CBC) was held on Saturday, January 5, 2019. Weather conditions were rather favorable this year – after the early morning fog lifted, we had clear skies and little wind all day. Over 60 people participated by either submitting a checklist from their yard or helping to cover larger areas within the Baton Rouge circle.

A total of 150 species were documented during the Baton Rouge count this year, which is tied for the second highest count ever recorded for this circle. A total of 150 species were also documented in 2003 and 2013. The highest species count ever recorded during a Baton Rouge CBC was in 1998, with a total of 151.

For the first time this year a Royal Tern was documented during the Baton Rouge CBC! Additional rare

birds included: King Rail, Common Gallinule, Eastern Whip-poor-will, Vaux's Swift, Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Vermilion Flycatcher, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Bell's Vireo, Northern Waterthrush, Black-and-white Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Grasshopper Sparrow, Indigo Bunting, Painted Bunting, and Baltimore Oriole.

Neotropic Cormorant numbers increased drastically from all previous years with just over 1,000 individuals recorded. The majority of these individuals were counted at a roost site located on City Park Lake. Relative to historical averages, high counts were also recorded for Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (224), White Ibis (2,682), Cattle Egret (378), Red-breasted Nuthatch (14), White-eyed Vireo (26), Palm Warbler (38), Purple Finch (85), and Pine Siskin (46).

Conversely, American Coot numbers have been decreasing since a peak of over 27,000 in 1995 to just 8 individuals recorded this year. There has also been a decrease in the number of Rufous Hummingbirds reported in recent years, which peaked at 113 individuals in 2012 and was down to just 8 individuals reported this year. Other low counts, relative to historical averages, included American Crow (56), Fish Crow (2), White-throated Sparrow (164), Red-winged Blackbird (3,054), Rusty Blackbird (14), and Brown-headed Cowbird (598). Altogether misses (i.e., no individuals documented) included Field Sparrow and Brewer's Blackbird.

These numbers are not final, and may change slightly if additional checklists are submitted. If you would like to know more, CBC records can be accessed at [netapp.audubon.org/cbcobservation/](http://netapp.audubon.org/cbcobservation/)

# Goldfinches Prefer Nature's Fare

**Many people wonder why all their goldfinches suddenly abandon the feeders around the end of February. The answer is easy -- Mother Nature is providing TONS of nutritious food!**

From the nature dude (Bill Fontenot)  
reprint from his Facebook page from  
February 2018

If I was capable of being embarrassed I guess I'd be embarrassed to post such a picture. Hard to tell that anything might be happening here. . . ah, but we lose again, Grasshoppers, for much has been going on . . . in plain view . . . but which we've missed yet again, due to our 'busy eyes' affliction. (sigh)

But HEY Fortune did ultimately smile, allowing me to witness this neat thing in this wild aster patch (that's what you're looking at): On the morning of 01 Feb 2018 as I rose from the back porch to go inside I spied a bird-flurry going on in a strange part of the yard. See, we've been having lots of goldfinches, siskins, and sparrows all in heavy numbers (since the recent heavy freezes) crowded (as in hundreds) around both our back and side-yard seed feeding stations.

But this commotion was coming from a spot well-away from a seed feeder. Study the picture as best you can. The sparse bare/pale woody shrub in the middle is a young buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*). It is flanked by two wispy-fine brown shrublets. These are clumps of wild asters. Here in late winter they've successfully dropped 99.9% of their seed load. Like all parts of a wild aster, their seeds are ultra-fine -- even smaller than the niger thistle seed commonly given to goldfinches and siskins at seed feeders . . . hmmm..... well I'll be dam.....

What I'm seeing then, is a foraging-flurry consisting of American Goldfinch, Chipping Sparrow, and White-throated Sparrow all gang-eating the aster seed, which is apparently densely deposited right around the pictured aster clumps. Another thing the picture does not show is the size of these two clumps. The one on the left is 30" x 36" and on the right 48" x 42" and comprised of many stems arising from the root

crowns -- quite dense and stiff to the touch . . . sturdy.

The portion of the feeding frenzy that I was able to see involved a total of maybe 15 birds, but as I watched-on I could see a steady stream of birds rotating in and out of the aster site and towards the feeder station about 25' away.

Over the past two years, the (ahem) generous rainfall pattern here along the Gulf Rim has really increased the presence of wild asters around our place. Asters really get around via wind, water, and probably stuck to birds flying in and out of their midst.

Every nature dude, and especially those of us living in suburban and rural areas, should be on the lookout for wild asters. Note from the penny/foilage pic how very small/fine most aster leaves are. It is that smallness/fineness which should inform your search image for this plant as it sneaks into ditch edges, bed edges, woodland edges . . . really just about every edge you could think of, and possibly more . . .



Another spring favorite of our goldfinches...  
Winged Elm is chock full of seeds!



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# Kudos to the LABO Bluebonnet Volunteers

**V**olunteers at the Louisiana Bird Observatory's Bluebonnet Swamp banding station have invested thousands of hours to gather data on 6005 birds captured there in the first nine years of the Bluebonnet Bird Monitoring Project which grew into the Louisiana Bird Observatory, a project of Baton Rouge Audubon. We have banded 701 Northern Cardinals, an amazing number for a 103-acre tract of habitat completely surrounded by Baton Rouge! A total of 88 different species found the nets. Carolina Wren, Prothonotary Warbler, White-throated Sparrow, Brown Thrasher, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, House Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, and Indigo Bunting round out the top ten in terms of numbers captured. In total, 3537 new bands were applied and 2351 birds were captured that were already banded. Seventy-seven were captured and released without bands. We occasionally capture hummingbirds and raptors which we are not permitted to band, and some birds are just too slippery for us and escape before we can put a ring on them!

This project would not be possible without a dedicated group of volunteers! One hundred and forty volunteers have processed at least one bird at the Swamp. Most of those were students who are preparing for careers in wildlife management. Seventeen volunteers have processed more than a 100 birds!



**Have you renewed your membership for 2019?** Do it now and receive our 2019 collectible patch featuring one of the coolest birds ever: the Crested Caracara

Visit [www.braudubon.org/join](http://www.braudubon.org/join) to renew your membership



**Pictured:** Front row - Jerry, Erik J. Peter, Jared, Donata, Emma, Lainie, Falyn, Kristin, Lindsay. Back row - Dan, Stefan, Randy, Marty, Eric L., Linda, Don, Blaine, Ariel, Maggie, Justin, Sabrina, Sherri.

Photo by John Hartgerink

## Baton Rouge Audubon Is Seeking Sanctuary!

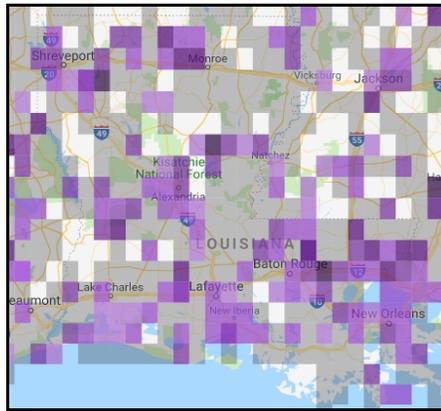
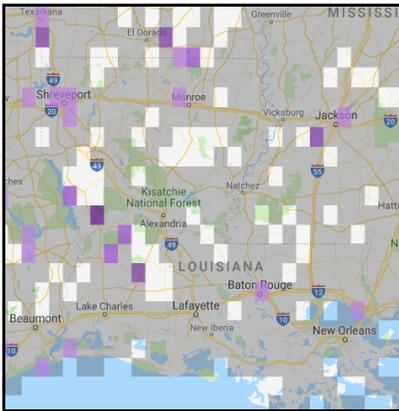
BRAS is looking for land to purchase within an hour of Baton Rouge for a new sanctuary. If you know of any property (preferably 10 acres or more) that is available, please contact

[President@braudubon.org](mailto:President@braudubon.org)



## A Year of Irruption

**H**ave you noticed some different birds in your yard this winter? Red-breasted Nuthatches, Pine Siskins, and Purple Finches have appeared in yards and other locations all across the south this winter. While we might have a few of these birds from time to time, the numbers indicate we are having an irruption year for these species. Webster defines "irruption" as "to undergo a sudden upsurge in numbers especially when natural ecological balances and checks are disturbed". The speculation is that their favored food, in this case spruce seed, is scarce farther north where these particular species normally over-winter, so they've been forced to move south. Generally this is a cyclical occurrence and not a cause for undue concern. For those of us who have been lucky enough to see them, it's been a treat!



The left image is an ebird graphic showing occurrences of Red-breasted Nuthatch in winter of 2017-18. The right image is from 2018-19. The darker purple indicates more reported sightings.

## You Are... Invited!

Join us on **May 9, 2019** for our annual potluck and elections and a special lagniappe program. We will hear all about the birds of Cuba from Joelle Finley and Ken Harris of Orleans Audubon Society. Cuba is home 30+ endemic species and all were spotted on their recent trip...along with other specialties of the Caribbean and West Indies.



**Cuban Trogon**  
photo by  
Jane Patterson

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## The Barred Owl

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



## Keep Your Membership Current!

If your membership expires, you will no longer receive *The Barred Owl*. We'll eventually 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](http://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](http://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)  
 Add me to the BRAS email list (to be informed of field trips, etc.)

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MAIL COMPLETE FORM TO:  
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PO Box 67016  
Baton Rouge, LA 70896

## 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](mailto: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](mailto:membership@braudubon.org)

**Also please follow us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/BRAudubon](http://www.facebook.com/BRAudubon)**

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Baton Rouge Chapter of the National Audubon Society

**Baton Rouge Audubon Society**

P.O. Box 67016

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