

# The **BARRED OWL**

Newsletter of the Baton Rouge Audubon Society

Volume LII - Number 2

2nd Quarter, 2025



## Prothonotary Geolocators

**On May 28, 2024**, biologist and researcher Katie Percy installed USGS and color bands on Prothonotary warblers that were nesting at the Amite River Wildlife Sanctuary. In addition, Katie was able to install two geolocators on adult male Prothonotary warblers. A geocator is a passive solar data collector that is attached to the back of the bird. It keeps track of sunlight data, which determines where the bird is physically located on the earth. These particular geolocators also collected barometric data, which helps researchers determine their altitude as they move on their migratory journeys. Because these devices are passive, they must be retrieved from the bird in the following year to analyze the collected data. Since Prothonotary warblers are very site loyal to their breeding grounds and also use cavities, like the nesting boxes we have provided for them, they are particularly suited to this type of research.

On March 30, 2025, Michele Giroir, who monitors our nesting boxes at the ARWS sanctuary, photographed the male with black color band and a geocator! He was in a serious territorial duel with another unbanded male near box 5 in the southern part of the property. They were even fighting in the water! That same day, Jane Patterson photographed the green-banded male sporting a

geocator near box 3, singing on territory. So exciting that *\*both\** birds with geolocators had returned!

Erik Johnson with Audubon Delta and LA Bird Observatory, attempted to capture the birds on April 3, 2025. He was able to retrieve the device from the green-banded bird. However, it seems the black-banded bird lost his territory dispute with the usurper and he was not relocated after he was first seen and photographed. He's still out there somewhere wearing the rig and we have to hope that maybe we'll be able to retrieve it in the future!



**Geocator installed on an adult Prothonotary warbler**

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# BRAS OFFICERS 2025-26

**Our slate of officers** for 2025-26 has changed! We welcome our new board members and we send our appreciation to our retiring board members, Carson Lambert and Dave Patton.

## Officers

**President:** Jane Patterson  
**Vice-president:** Katie Percy  
**Secretary:** Donna Lafleur  
**Treasurer:** Mark Pethke

## Got tech skills?

We need someone to be the on-site person for Programs at the Main Library in Baton Rouge (generally the last Wed of the month). Ideally, this person would have a laptop and assist our speaker with setup of their PowerPoint, host the meeting via Zoom, and upload the recording to our YouTube channel (training available!)

## Committee Board Members

**Conservation:** Richard Condrey  
**Education & Publications:**  
Jane Patterson  
**Membership:** Heather Wilson  
**Sanctuary:** Charlotte Chehotsky

## Board Members at Large

Maddi Cowen (*Field Trips*)  
Colette Dean (*Programs*)  
Debbie Taylor (*Hospitality*)  
Casey Wright (*general*)  
Katherine Gividen (*general*)  
Erik Johnson (*LA Bird Observatory*)



## **Do you have your 2025 Baton Rouge Audubon Sanctuary patch?**

This beautiful work of art features a Summer Tanager. The artwork is courtesy of the very talented artist, Donna Dittmann. If you are an active Baton Rouge Audubon member, please contact Mark Pethke, at [treasurer@braudubon.org](mailto:treasurer@braudubon.org) to request your 2025 patch.

# Governor Jeff Landry Vetoes Measure to Ban Mass Balloon Releases

by Mark Pethke

**Environmental groups statewide** were stunned when Governor Jeff Landry vetoed HB 581 on June 20, 2025. The bill, which had passed the house 98-0 and the senate 33-1, banned the intentional outdoor release of lighter-than-air balloons by persons over the age of sixteen unless the release was for a valid scientific or educational purpose, was a weather balloon, or was a hot air balloon that is recovered after launch, and provided civil penalties for violators. It was sponsored by Rep. John Ilg, (R) Harahan, a board member for Keep Louisiana Beautiful, an agency housed in the office of Lt. Gov. Billy Nungesser that focuses on litter prevention and beautification. Designed to address a particularly noxious form of pollution not covered by ex-

isting anti-litter laws, the bill was backed by the Lt. Governor's office, the Louisiana Wildlife Federation, the Louisiana Cattlemen's Association, and the Louisiana Retailer's Association.

The Baton Rouge Audubon Society has been advocating for such a law for years. See Loose Balloons Kill, R. Condrey, BRAS Barred Owl 2019 Q3 newsletter, and Balloons Blow: Don't Let Them Go, J. Patterson, BRAS Barred Owl 2013 Q1 newsletter. Balloons negatively impact the environment by littering fields, lakes, streams, and beaches. When balloons make their way into the water, their floating pieces and tattered ends can resemble jellyfish or other sea life that is con-

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## Meet Our New Sanctuary Chair, Charlotte Chehotsky

**With the announcement** of Dave Patton's retirement, it's my honor to assume Sanctuary duties. I look forward to working with every one of our dedicated volunteers. Together we have made advances in preserving our cheniers, a very special place for migratory birds to fuel up and rest. We all know that stewarding our little place on the planet has worldwide effect.

Cameron Parish has received ample rainfall this summer so of course the vegetation is growing exponentially! We are grateful to Mark Young for his efforts in keeping the big trails and parking lots in good shape.

- We are already weed whacking/trimming the smaller trails.
- We've also built a new blind and painted the donation box.
- Please watch for an announcement on our September Fall workday.
- I look forward to seeing friends, old and new, in the woods, this upcoming Fall migration.



Would love to hear comments, suggestions, and any questions. At your service,  
Charlotte Chehotsky  
337-912-1703  
pookah@live.com



# New ARWS Bog Bridges



**More thanks go out** to our hardworking scout volunteers!

New bog bridge projects were completed in May and June by Benjamin Dickson of Troop 136 and Rex May of Troop 50. Note the genius of Troop 50 to construct a shade cloth to work under in late June heat!



**Troop 136**



**Troop 50**





# New ARWS Trailhead Kiosk!



**Samuel Leblanc & Troop 65** built a trailhead kiosk for us. The kiosk will display the trail map and rules for the sanctuary, as well as other relevant information.



## New ARWS Junction Signs

**We've made an improvement** to the trails at our Amite River Wildlife Sanctuary. All of the trail junctions are now marked with special "T" signs indicating there is a junction at this spot. Each of these junctions is numbered. On the trail post, there is a QR code. When a visitor points their smart-phone camera at the QR code, it brings up a link to an online map that they can use to figure out where they are on the trails, so they can find their way around or back to the exit.



In addition to the online map, there are laminated maps at the trailhead kiosk that folks can use and return when they're done.

Let us know if this helps you find your way around!



# 2025 Louisiana Legislative Session Update

by Mark Pethke

**You may have noticed** more emails and Facebook news items about activities at the Louisiana Legislature. This is not accidental. In the wake of the proposed Constitutional Amendment 2 on the March statewide ballot, which would have removed the property tax exemption nonprofit corporations such as BRAS currently enjoy (which permits them to own Peveto Woods and the Amite River Wildlife Sanctuary) and which, thankfully, failed, your board has made it a priority to keep an eye on legislation that concerns our well-being or which may be of interest to our members. Apart from the ill-fated balloon release ban, covered separately in this newsletter, the recently concluded legislative session contained three bills which we watched closely.



While the legislature did not attempt to repeat the economic changes sought in Amendment 2, it did entertain a bill, HB 678, that contained many of the same tax measures without addressing the non-profit property tax exemption. This bill ultimately did not clear the Senate Finance Committee, but we watched to make sure it was not amended in a man-

ner that threatened BRAS's ownership of its sanctuaries.

The property tax exemption non-profits enjoy remains a potential target for reform. Business and governmental reform organizations have criticized the exemption since its inception, arguing that it is too broad, in that the 1974 Constitution removed a requirement from the prior constitution that the nonprofit exemption be tied to a legitimate nonprofit purpose, such as educational, charitable or cultural uses. Critics argue that too much property in the hands of nonprofits, particularly in urban areas, is held and then either leased for profit or devoted to nonpublic purposes, defeating the spirit if not the letter of the property tax exemption. A second bill, HB 448, sought to address this issue by denying the property tax exemption to nonprofits for property used for commercial purposes. The term commercial was not defined, and BRAS was concerned that since the sanctuaries are not residential property, or public lands, that they would be considered commercial by default. We were assured by the bill's sponsor that this was not the intended purpose of the proposal, and that subsequent amendments defining the term commercial would make this clear, but ultimately the bill was never brought before a committee and died without hearing.

A third measure of interest to environmentalists all over Southeast Louisiana, SB 124, would have removed a number

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# New Chimney Swift Tower

Last year, BR Audubon was awarded a collaborative grant from the National Audubon Society to help construct a Chimney Swift Tower. These towers are basically elaborate bird houses designed specifically for Chimney Swifts, who only nest on vertical surfaces. Historically, hollow trees would

have served this function. In more modern times, the birds sought out actual chimneys, which served the purpose since, in general, fireplaces are not used in the warmer months. In addition to nesting, groups of swifts look for these vertical structures for community roosts during migration in the spring and fall. Where only a single pair will use a tower for nesting, dozens of swifts may use a tower for roosting during migration. Chimney Swifts are a declining species and are a species of greatest conservation need in 22 states, including Louisiana. So we are doing our part to help this fragile species!

Fortunately for us, three wonderful volunteers were available for the construction of our tower. Dave Patton and John Nelson had both built towers before, so were familiar with the process and the materials needed. Sue Broussard, volunteer extraordinaire, provided assistance with all phases of the build.

In order to involve the community in this effort, BRAS engaged the students and faculty at St. Amant High School. Chantal Correll and students in her nature club and the art class painted the panels that were installed on the exterior of the tower. The illustrations depict the swifts flying in the sky, something they spend most of their time doing! In the fall, paintings of our native Louisiana Iris will be added to the bottom of the tower.

For more information about Chimney Swifts, please visit [chimneyswifts.org](http://chimneyswifts.org). Maybe someday in the future, we can host our own Swift Night Out!





## Have you seen a large pink bird in Louisiana?

**No, not the "Cajun flamingo"... but the one with *\*really\** long legs and a long neck and a big honking bill?**

**The American Flamingo** is an iconic bird that is native to the countries around the Caribbean ocean. However, after storms, it's not uncommon to find that some birds have been pushed northward and there are rare records all over the eastern part of the US. After Hurricane Francine in 2024, there were reports of a flamingo off the coast of LA and another was spotted in a similar location this year. Then in June 2025, thirteen American Flamingos were spotted south of Cocodrie!

The location of the birds is Raccoon Island, which is a barrier island managed by LDWF as an important nesting area for our seabirds. It is NOT open to human traffic. Evidently the flamingos like the company as they seem inclined to hang out. Several birders have chartered boats to view the birds. It's important to note that the birders are keeping a respectful distance from the island to ensure the safety of the nesting birds. A zoom lens and binoculars work just fine! There are a couple of charter companies that have taken birders out there; we used Ellender charters out of Houma. I just saw a report that a group of 125 Flamingos have gathered in the Everglades in Florida! Perhaps some will eventually become permanent residents in the U.S.

**Pictured: Flock of Am. Flamingos off the coast of LA - July 2025**

## 2025 Louisiana Legislative Session Update

*(Continued from page 6)*

of Saint Tammany Parish waterways from the protection of the Louisiana Scenic Rivers Act. Due in large part to the public uproar over the proposed legislation, which included a well-coordinated campaign by Northshore Riverwatch to inform constituents of the broad-reaching nature of the suggested changes, this bill also died in committee.

As the state and municipalities seek new sources of revenue, these issues are likely to recur in future legislative sessions. We ask for your help in keeping us informed about any future measures that address these or similar concerns.





# Prothonotary Geolocators

(Continued from page 1)

Erik has started the process of analyzing the data from the retrieved geolocator. Although the locations are not precise, we are able to glean where he spent his time over the year and how long he stayed at each location. Erik is still analyzing the barometric data, so that's not factored in yet.

## The timeline:

**May 28, 2024** - Katie installed the geolocator. He stayed at ARWS for about 90 more days.

**Aug 31, 2024** (approx) - the bird started south, flew across the Gulf and landed on the Yucatan peninsula. He stayed ~ 8 days

**Sept 8, 2024** (approx) - flew down to coastal Belize for one day and then Honduras for .5 days

**Sept 10, 2024** (approx) - flew to eastern Nicaragua on the Caribbean side and stayed for 21 days

**Oct 1, 2024** (approx) - flew to the northwest coast of Colombia S.A. and stayed for the winter season, 135 days

**Feb 13, 2025** (approx) - flew south (!) to just below Medellin in Colombia and stayed another 17 days

**March 1, 2025** (approx) - flew north to the coast of Honduras where it stayed less than a day

**March 2, 2025** (approx) - flew north to the vicinity of western Cuba where he stayed for just over 2 weeks

**Mid-March 2025** (approx) - flew from Cuba across the Gulf and inland to the Amite River Wildlife Sanctuary

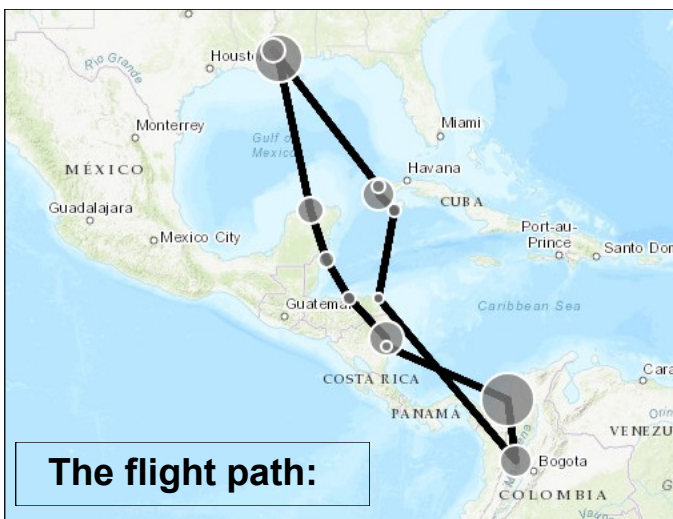
**March 30, 2025** - photographed on site

**April 3, 2025** - geolocator retrieved.

Here is a link with the data from the geolocator that you can use to view the map and stopover durations.

[https://rpubs.com/Erik\\_I\\_Johnson/1301030](https://rpubs.com/Erik_I_Johnson/1301030)

This bird had a new mate this year (the female he mated with last year was banded but she did not return this year) and they successfully fledged 2 broods (7 chicks total). Katie had 4 geolocators to install this year, and he was given a new one. If he returns, it will be *\*very\** interesting to see how his path varies from this past fall and spring! Katie was also able to install geolocators on two other adult males and one adult female. Fingers crossed that they will be successful on their migratory journeys and return next spring!



Green-banded male Prothonotary warbler that returned with geolocator that was retrieved

# Governor Landry Vetoes Balloon Ban Measure

*(Continued from page 3)*

sumed by marine animals like fish, sea turtles, and dolphins. Birds and other wildlife are also attracted to the colorful refuse, but when the pieces of latex or Mylar are mistaken for food and ingested, they can get lodged in the digestive tract, inhibiting the animal's ability to eat, and can cause a slow and painful death by starvation. The concerns are also economic, as Entergy Louisiana has raised alarms about Mylar balloons, which are metallic and can cause dangerous electrical surges or outages when they contact power lines or transformers. A high-profile outage occurred in New Orleans in August 2024, when a Mylar balloon caused a power flicker at a water treatment plant, leading to a boil water advisory for nearly 370,000 residents.

Current litter laws do not cover balloon releases, as they are viewed as celebratory, not litter. Governor Landry's veto message noted that localities could ban releases on their own, but that he felt the

statute would be impractical and unenforceable, placing additional burdens on law enforcement officers. Proponents were disappointed that Landry did not raise these objections before final passage, when they could have been easily addressed.

BRAS notes that the proposal was no more unenforceable or impractical than any other litter law, or, for that matter, any other statute prohibiting an activity that requires investigation. Proponents throughout the legislative session noted that the value in the statute was the prohibition itself, which would have expressed a clear public policy against the practice and stopped balloon releases from the most frequent practitioners--schools, businesses, and funeral homes, who would have developed other means of celebratory expression. It is not clear if Lt. Gov. Nungesser or Rep. Ilg will seek to reintroduce the legislation, which enjoyed broad support, in the next legislative session.

## Meet our new Field Trip Coordinator, Maddi Cowen

Maddi (she/her) is an ecologist, writer, and freelance editor. She grew up in Florida but spent the last 10+ years in Southern California, where she led a student Audubon chapter for several years. She's loved birds since middle school and studied them for her MS and PhD, and is passionate about environmental education, bird conservation, and native plants.

She recently moved to Baton Rouge and is excited to explore the area with BRAS!





# Help Support Our Amite River Wildlife Sanctuary



**Help out our Amite River Wildlife Sanctuary  
by buying one of these beautiful t-shirts!**

**The shirts feature the beautiful artwork used for  
our sanctuary sign. The shirts come in  
two styles in various sizes and colors.**

**You order directly from the manufacturer and  
they are shipped directly to you!**

**Order yours today at:**

**[www.bonfire.com/bras-amite-river-sanctuary/](http://www.bonfire.com/bras-amite-river-sanctuary/)**

## Baton Rouge Audubon YouTube Channel

***Do you subscribe to the Baton Rouge  
Audubon YouTube channel?***

<https://tinyurl.com/28h2cjxt>

Subscribe now and get a notification when a new video is uploaded  
our channel. All of our monthly programs will be stored there, as well  
as other special 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 spam, we promise! To be added to  
the email list, simply send an email with only your name in the body of the email  
to [braudubon+subscribe@groups.io](mailto:braudubon+subscribe@groups.io)

**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)**

## Baton Rouge Audubon Officers

### **President**

Jane Patterson  
[president@braudubon.org](mailto:president@braudubon.org)

### **Vice-President**

Katie Percy  
[vice-president@braudubon.org](mailto:vice-president@braudubon.org)

### **Secretary**

Donna LaFleur  
[secretary@braudubon.org](mailto:secretary@braudubon.org)

### **Treasurer**

Mark Pethke  
[treasurer@braudubon.org](mailto:treasurer@braudubon.org)

## Committee Chairs

### **Conservation**

Richard Condrey  
[conservation@braudubon.org](mailto:conservation@braudubon.org)

### **Education**

Jane Patterson  
[education@braudubon.org](mailto:education@braudubon.org)

### **Membership**

Heather Wilson 985/768-9285  
[membership@braudubon.org](mailto:membership@braudubon.org)

### **Sanctuaries**

Charlotte Chehotsky  
[sanctuary@braudubon.org](mailto:sanctuary@braudubon.org)

## At Large Members...

Maddi Cowen (Field Trips)  
Colette Dean (Programs)  
Debbie Taylor (Hospitality)  
Casey Wright (general)  
Katherine Gividen (general)  
Erik Johnson (La Bird Observatory)

### **Webmaster**

Daniel Patterson  
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### **Newsletter**

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## The Barred Owl

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Baton Rouge  
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Baton Rouge, LA 70896



Baton Rouge Chapter of the National Audubon Society

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## 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 online 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:

- |                                   |                                   |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$25     | Individual Membership             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$30     | Family Membership                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$50     | Wood Thrush Membership            |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ | 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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