

The **BARRED OWL**

Newsletter of the Baton Rouge Audubon Society

Volume XLVIII, Number 3

4th Quarter, 2021

Storm Destruction and Recovery at our Amite River Wildlife Sanctuary

by Jane Patterson

Our hearts go out to everyone affected by Hurricane Ida. She cut a mean path through our state from stem to stern.

Our new sanctuary property in Ascension parish was hit particularly hard by the storm. I was hopeful as I approached the area after the storm. Port Vincent looked ok. But when I turned on Manny Guitreau road where the sanctuary is located, oh boy! I guess the fact that the road was open to the east and the wind whipped in from that side was the reason so many trees were down along the road. We lost two very large white oak trees at the front of the property, and a number of others throughout the forest.

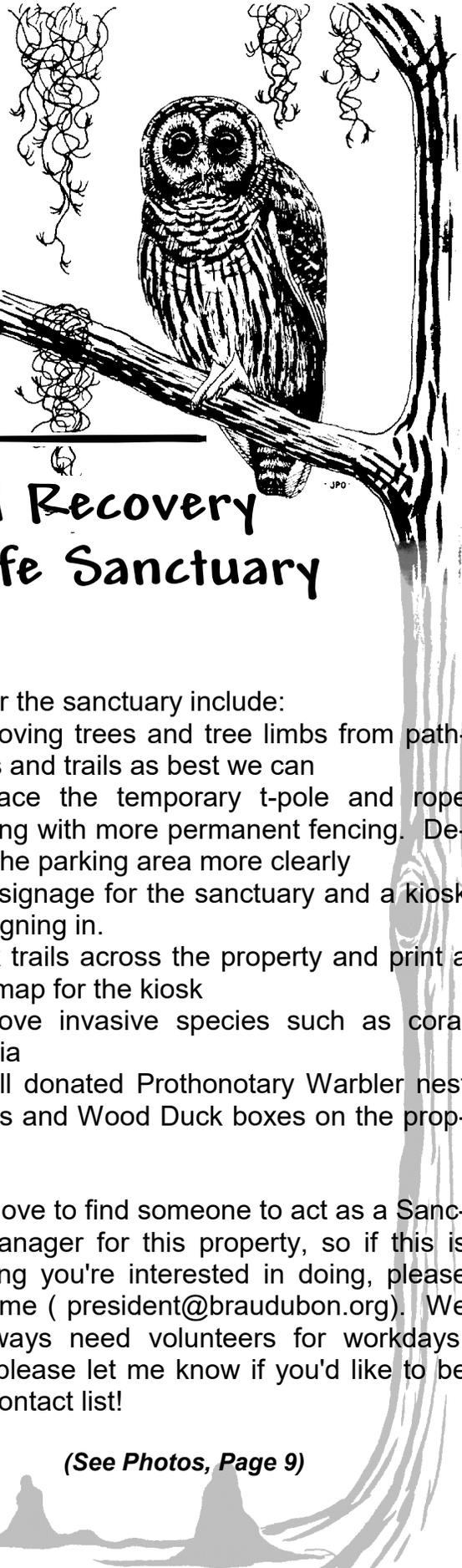
Unfortunately one of the problems this has created is that the trees fell across the ditch where we were trying to have a culvert installed. This is effectively blocking the entrance to the property. We are going to have a route around the trees as they are much too large to remove. Challenges ahead!

Plans for the sanctuary include:

- Removing trees and tree limbs from pathways and trails as best we can
- Replace the temporary t-pole and rope fencing with more permanent fencing. Define the parking area more clearly
- Add signage for the sanctuary and a kiosk for signing in.
- Mark trails across the property and print a trail map for the kiosk
- Remove invasive species such as coral ardisia
- Install donated Prothonotary Warbler nest boxes and Wood Duck boxes on the property

I would love to find someone to act as a Sanctuary Manager for this property, so if this is something you're interested in doing, please contact me (president@braudubon.org). We also always need volunteers for workdays, etc, so please let me know if you'd like to be on the contact list!

(See Photos, Page 9)



Baton Rouge Audubon Upcoming Programs

TIME: 7:00 - 8:00 PM; Refreshments and fellowship offered 6:30 - 7:00 PM

LOCATION: BREC's Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center's *Education Building* - 10503 N. Oak Hills Parkway, Baton Rouge, LA 70810

***Please note that the Education Building, which has a swamp mural painted on the front, is now accessed through the main gate located at the end of N. Oak Hills Parkway.*

Attendance is free for all BRAS Members, \$3 at the door for non-BRAS Members and \$2.50 for non-BRAS seniors (price of admission at the Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center).

Please RSVP if you plan on attending (programs AT braudubon.org) so that we can add your name to the guest list.

All of our programs will also be available via Zoom for real-time viewing.

To receive registration information, please join our mailing list at braudubon+subscribe@groups.io

We will also upload our program recordings to our YouTube channel for later viewing.

SCHEDULE

- **December 9** - Social / Potluck
- **January 13** - Dr. Nick Mason - "LSU Natural History Museum - A New Era"
- **February 10** - Dr. Dawn O'Neal, Audubon Delta - "Audubon Delta: Looking Forward"
- **March 10** - Rob Dobbs, LDWF "Leaping Limpkins"
- **April 14** - Andre Moncrief - LSU graduation student. Subject TBD
- **May 12** - BRAS Potluck and end of year appreciation

Girl Scout Troup 10340 From Gonzales, Louisiana led by Elaine Baker built and donated three wood duck boxes for our new Amite River Wildlife Sanctuary. Many thanks, girls!



2021-22 season

Christmas Bird Count

The Christmas Bird Count is an annual citizen science event that started in the year 1900 and has proved to be one of the longest running sources of data regarding bird populations in the world. Birders all over North America brave frigid temperatures to count *all* the birds they can find within designated count circles. The idea is to count all the birds within the 15 mile diameter circle on a single day within the count period of Dec 15 to January 5 each year. The Baton Rouge Count Circle has been in place since 1974. The BTR circle is divided up into various areas, and each area is assigned to a person or a team. It's important for the integrity of the data that folks don't stray outside their area for the count. Each team compiles their area list, preferably but not necessarily with ebird. Then each team reports their area data to our count compiler, Katie Percy (bless her heart!). Katie collects and tallies all the data and then those data are submitted to the state compiler along with all of the other CBC data for the state. All previous years' data can be found online via the National Audubon website: <https://netapp.audubon.org/cbcobservation/>

Each team will have an experienced birder and although species identification is important for this count, even new birders can help with the count by being spotters or by recording birds that have been identified by the expert in the group. The Baton Rouge count is normally held on the last available Saturday of the count period, but this year it will be held on Sunday, January 2, 2022. If you're interested in participating in this year's Christmas Bird Count, please contact Katie Percy at katiepercy@gmail.com and she will make sure you're added to a team.

It's always exciting to see the results and compare with previous years!

Email List Change

Update from Jane Patterson

Baton Rouge Audubon Society is converting from Mailchimp as our email management platform to groups.io. If you are a member of our email list, you should have received an email about this conversion. We have found Mailchimp a bit unwieldy and I personally have found that gmail which I use for personal email tends to stick Mailchimp messages into a Promotions folder no matter what I do so I don't see the messages. Hopefully using groups.io will change that and people will miss fewer messages from us!

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

If you have any questions, please email me at president@braudubon.org

BRAS Now Has A YouTube Channel!

It is our plan to record and publish all of our future programs on this channel so that you can enjoy them whenever you wish. All of our recent programs are already out there! To find it, simply search for "Baton Rouge Audubon Society" in the youtube search bar. Once you're there you can Subscribe to our channel to find it more easily! We hope you enjoy it!



Yellow Rails and Rice Festival 2021

by Colette Dean

A late October morning marked the opening day of the 12th annual Yellow Rails and Rice Festival in the small town of Thornwell, Louisiana.

Despite 35 -mile per hour wind gusts, undaunted participants buttoned-up and diligently headed for the rice fields with cameras and binoculars in tow.

bringing birders and farmers together to realize the value to birds of the areas working wetlands.



Birders ride on the rice combine while netters stand by to chase birds kicked up by the machine



Netters corraling a bird

Designed with fun in mind, the YRARF's primary goal is to provide participants a chance to view yellow rails – a “lifer” bird for most visitors - while at the same time

This year, COVID-19 meant the festival had to be scaled down from previous years, limiting the number of participants and extra field trips, but participants from 27 states and England enjoyed the seeing the rails, ibis, and soras in the fields as well as the black-bellied and fulvous whistling ducks, Ross's Geese, purple gallinules, American avocets, semi-palmated plovers, stilt sandpipers, gull-billed terns, bald eagles, sandpipers, crested caracara, vermilion flycatcher, and impressive numbers of other species of waterfowl in surrounding areas further afield from the Lacassine NWR Pool Unit, Kistachie piney woods, and several other locations in Southwest Louisiana. Several participants were able to spy the whooping cranes in fields.



Netters running after bird

Visitors delighted in holding and learning about the Louisiana alligator from docents at the Gator Chateau at the JD Oil and Gas Park and enjoyed lunching on fresh seafood and fixings from area restaurants.

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Yellow Rails and Rice Festival 2021

(Continued from page 4)

The Audubon Delta rail banding team worked the field sites, giving participants an opportunity to see the banding process in action and offering great photo opportunities.



Paparazzi gather around the star of the show

A coastal black rail survey trip to assist with salt marsh banding project in Cameron Parish using rope pulls and spotlights was offered to ambitious participants who, on a first-come, first serve basis, were eager to trek in the salt marsh through thick, knee-deep wet vegetation to search for the elusive bird.

The count of yellow rails was a little lower than past years, which festival co-coordinator Donna Dittman explained may have been due to the low stature of the Jazzman rice crop in the field.

“It’s always interesting to evaluate the rice type, its height and density, and soil saturation (from dry to flooded) on a number of rails,” Dittmann said.

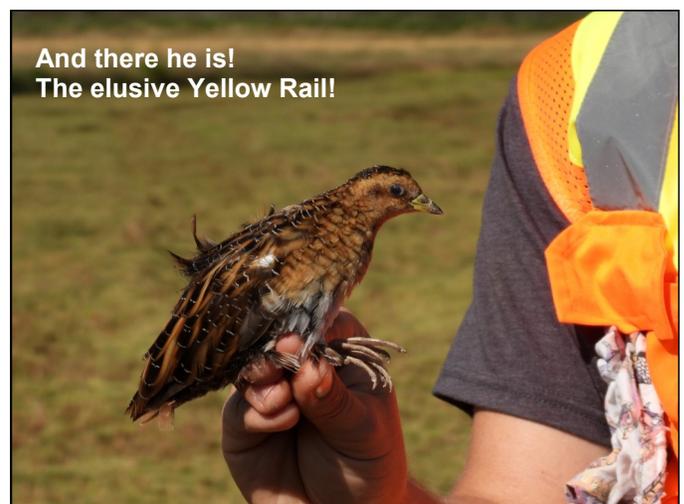
Twelve years ago, when two rice farmers, Kevin and Shirley Berken, and two birders, Steve Cardiff and Donna Dittman, created one of Louisiana’s most unique ecotourism events; neither were sure how well it would be received.

“We never realized we would have so much participation with people from around the world,” Berken said.

At the first morning orientation, Kevin Berken explained to participants that rice provides habitat for more species of animals than any other crop. Louisiana provides three percent of the world’s production of rice and is the top four exporter of rice. Louisiana is one of the nation’s top three producing states, growing mostly long-grain rice.

The Louisiana rice industry contributes over \$400 million in economic value to the state annually while providing valuable wetland habitat to some of North America’s most unique migrating birds.

For more information about the 2022 event: yellowrailsandrice.com



And there he is!
The elusive Yellow Rail!

Plants for Winter Hummingbirds

by Jane Patterson

Attracting winter hummingbirds to your yard takes more than luck (although that's definitely a factor!), you have to put out the welcome mat! Using plants in your garden that will continue to bloom in our fall and even early winter weather is a great way to do this. Some of the best plants to use:

Firespike (*Odontonema strictum*) (the red variety) will start blooming in September in zone 8b. It will produce attractive spikes of flowers right up until we get our first hard frost, which hits this plant particularly hard. It will die back to the ground, but it has proven to be root hardy and will come back the following spring. As an added bonus, it roots very easily in water and you can propagate additional plants for yourself or to share. Sugar concentration is ~19%.

Firebush (*Hamelia patens*) - if this one gets happy in your yard, watch out! You'll have an 8 foot tall and 8 foot wide clump on non-stop flowers! It's never grown quite that profusely for me, but I've seen it done! Although the sugar content hovers around 20%, the non-stop proliferation of blooms makes up for any shortcomings. Plus it's just a handsome plant and a great addition in your garden!

Mexican Cigar or **Cuphea**. These excellent plants come a few varieties, but the smaller flowered *Cuphea ignea* 'David Verity' and the larger flowered *Cuphea micropetala* are both winners. Each plants produces hundreds of blooms at a time. It will begin blooming in the spring and bloom all summer until a hard frost in winter. Can't ask for more than that! To top it off, the sugar concentration in these blooms is about 28%!

Orange Abutilon is a beautiful plant that really springs to life in the fall and spring. Sometimes the flowers are so full of nectar you can see them dripping with it! Sugar content has been measured to be an average of ~22%.

Turk's Cap - we can have 3 varieties of Turk's Cap in our gardens. The smaller flowered *Malvaviscus drummondii* blooms nicely in the spring, likes the hot weather better and seems to retreat in the fall. But the Giant Turk's Cap *Malvaviscus penduliflorus* really comes into its own in the Fall and will be covered with flowers until it gets too cold. Then, like Firespike, it will die back but the roots are hardy and it will return in the spring. We also have the cultivar 'Big Momma' which is a cross of *Drummondii* and the Giant Turk's Cap that has a blooming habit more similar to the Giant and blooms profusely in Fall and early Winter, but will have blooms nearly all year.

"Ugly" Shrimp plant - There are a few varieties of *Justicia brandegeana*, but if you can find the brick-red variety (some folks have dubbed it ugly; I think it's quite lovely) that blooms profusely in the fall, this is another one that will bloom into winter as long as we don't get sustained cold. The brick-red color of the flower is actually the bract and the nearly white flower is the part that contains the nectar. If it's happy in your yard it will form a clump that is easy to divide and spread out or give away.

Porterweed comes in two colors: purple and coral. The purple seems to be hardier and longer blooming in the Baton Rouge area but I've heard people rave on the coral as well. This is another non-stop bloomer and doesn't quit til the cold hits it hard. It's not as root hardy, so it would do with protection over the winter before the first hard freeze. But it also propagates quite well from cuttings and you can ensure a population in your garden if you cut some and root it over the winter. With ~25% sugar content, it's worth it!

Salvia coccinea aka **Scarlet Sage** or **Texas Sage**. I love this plant so much. It is native to Louisiana and tends to be an annual or a tender perennial for us. Most salvias are great for hummingbirds as they contain a lot of sugar, but

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Plants for Winter Hummingbirds

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this one racks up at about 33%. It's so easy to grow; just spread seeds where you want it and step back! It will bloom very nicely in partial shade as well as sun. After the flower spike has finished just peel off the seeds and spread them around to get more plants! It will bloom spottily during the summer but then spruce back up again in fall and keep going until frost.

So what, you might ask, will the hummingbirds do when we do get a killing cold snap that knocks all these plants back? Well, our winter hummingbirds are hardy little beasts. They spend much of their time gathering insects in the winter time. We can also supplement their nectar needs with our feeders. You can use a 3 parts water to 1 part sugar ratio in winter. Keep them clean and fresh and try to maintain at least one feeder for every bird you've noticed in your yard (have you recognized they don't share well!?!). They also need warm places to stay during the day in the form of broadleaf evergreen plants like live oak trees, camellia and sasanquas, azaleas, and evergreen vines. Since these are staples in many of our southern gardens, they feel very welcome.

One of the early winter hummingbird experts in Louisiana, Laurie Binford, also told me that he strongly believed that the more bird activity you have in your yard, period, the more likely you are to have winter hummingbirds. So keep the other feeders and water features in your yard fresh and clean as well.

With any luck, you'll see some hummingbird activity in your yard this winter! If you do, please report the sighting to Dr. Erik Johnson with Audubon Delta (Erik.Johnson@audubon.org). He compiles a list each year by location and species and will include your birds. If you're **very** lucky, you may even be able to have the bird banded so that you'll be able to identify it in the future if it returns to your yard!



Salvia coccinea aka Texas Sage, Fire Sage



Cuphea 'David Verity'



"Ugly" winter shrimp plant



Firebush - Hamelia patens



'Big Momma' Turk's Cap



Orange Abutilon



Giant Cuphea - Mexican Cigar

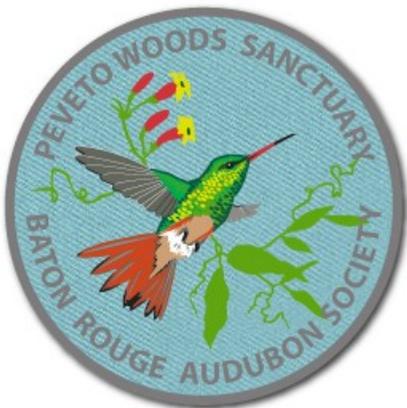
The Waiting Game

By Linda Barber Auld, NOLA BugLady

“The Big Easy Native Plant Guide”, Susan Norris-Davis’ book that she recently self-published, has catapulted curiosity and conversation surrounding the native plants in the New Orleans area. As the demand to obtain these plants grows, thankfully, the supply chain is following suit. As more native plants are made available for the retail market, an amazing selection of plants has found a new home in BugLady’s garden. Growing them for the very first time, I am filled with high levels of excitement and a-n-t-i-c-i-p-a-t-i-o-n while taking a peek in the garden to enjoy what is blooming each and every day.

I’ve been doing the waiting game to see these plants give birth to their captivating flowers and each one is presenting a feast for my eyes. Oh, my goodness—the fantastic beauty of native plants!

Hyssop “Blue Fortune”	Hyssop “Apricot Sunrise”	Hyssop “Tutti Frutti”	Hyssop “Piquito Orange”
			
Penstemon “Husker Red”	<i>Monarda didyma</i>	Standing Cypress	Bottlebrush Buckeye
			
Phlox “Daughter of Pearl”	Phlox “Jeana”	Phlox “John Fanick”	Louisiana Phlox



**Do you have your
2021 sanctuary patch yet?**

Please send an email to our membership chair Heather at membership@braudubon.org if you would like to claim your patch!

Storm destruction and Recovery at our Amite River Wildlife Sanctuary



Two large white oak trees came down on the front of our property.

At this point, one has to pass under this tree to get to our main trail!



Manny Guitreau Road had been cleared by the time I visited on Sept 12. Lots of trees down!



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

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

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The Barred Owl

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Changes of address and other official correspondence should be sent to:

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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) 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)
- Add me to the BRAS email list (to be informed of field trips, etc.)

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