

The **BARRED OWL**

Newsletter of the Baton Rouge Audubon Society

Volume XLIX, Number 3

4th Quarter, 2022

A Louisiana First!

On Oct 13, 2022 a rare bird alert went out over several forums announcing that long-time veteran birder Melvin Weber had found a Red-legged Honeycreeper on Grand Isle. Other birders headed to the island and the photos started coming out. Son of a gun....TWO Red-legged Honeycreepers! First state record for this species! There was a male in non-breeding plumage (not bright blue), and at least one and possibly two female-type birds. We started hearing that a couple had showed up on the Florida Keys as well and then one showed up in Sabine Woods, Texas. When the first ones were seen on Grand Isle, there was speculation that maybe it was a captive/released bird, but when they showed up concurrently at other locations along the Gulf of Mexico, that lent support that it was a natural event. This is a tropical species of central and South America



and the birds do occur on Cuba, so it's possible they were blown that way, but the strongest prevailing theory is that they may be migratory birds from northern Mexico that were blown further north than normal by a weather event. There's no way to



know for sure of the provenance of these birds, of course. For at least a week, the birds were seen in the Landry-Leblanc woods behind the Sureway grocery store, or in various stands of giant Turks cap as these are nectivorous birds. They were also seen actively flycatching in the wood, taking advantage of a termite outbreak. Birders came from as far away as Ohio to see the birds. Unfortunately, once the termites petered out, the birds became scarce. Personally I think they're still on the island, as there is plenty of Turk's Cap and other insects, but they've definitely become harder to find.



Progress at Amite River Wildlife Sanctuary

by Jane Patterson

So much going on at Amite River Wildlife Sanctuary. It's a long list so I hope you don't get tired of reading before the end. Just to make sure, I'm going to start with Ways You Can Help.

Ways You Can Help

- Donate to BRAS and earmark funds for Amite River Wildlife Sanctuary. We can now take donations via Venmo as well as PayPal. Contact our treasurer Mark Pethke for particulars (treasurer@braudubon.org)
- Donate plants, native only, please. Please do contact me (Jane: seejanebird@gmail.com) before planting anything onsite, either plants or seeds. Some plants we are particularly interested in are: Louisiana Iris (check for central rib. A rib = non-native!), Yau-pon (ilex vomitoria), Black Cherry, Swamp Bay Magnolia, Southern Magnolia, American Holly, Red Buckeye. Most species of oaks that are native to this area are welcome, although we already have enough Live Oak (they take up a lot of space). We also need seeds for pollinator plants like ironweed, native sunflowers, etc.
- Know any woodworkers? I have a couple of small building projects
- Remove invasive plants. Again, please contact me (Jane: seejanebird@gmail.com) before undertaking this effort. We have knocked back quite a bit of the Coral Ardisia, but there's plenty more to kill. We are using an herbicide that seems effective but it has to be applied a certain way. Alternatively, using a hatchet to cut the roots and pull out the whole plant works too! In the Spring, we will have a Tallow and Chinese Privet abatement workday.
- Pick up trash and haul out
- Clear trails. Let me know if you're interested in this and we can talk about what's needed. Moving branches, etc off paths is always welcome.
- Build bog bridges. The sanctuary, as with most of Louisiana, is extremely dry right now, but that can change at any time. Generally we have ridges and swales throughout the property. I'd like to get some bog bridges built over the lowest, muddiest areas. Let me know if you're interested in tackling this!

Activity over the past few months

- Eagle Scout Robert Sayes from Prairieville Troop 769 completed construction of our kiosk in March. The wonderful sign designed by Nora Patterson and funded by the Andry family was installed shortly thereafter and the kiosk was painted in October.

- Eagle Scout William Monroe and Baton Rouge Troop 50 worked on the construction of a fence around our parking area a couple of weeks ago. They also painted the donated parking headers. The angle-in parking will provide the most efficient use of the limited parking space.
- Trail markers have been installed by our wonderful volunteers on the Main trail, the Tree Loop, and the Live Oak Spur. All together, these trails comprise about a half mile of trails. They've been cleared, though there are occasional tripping hazards like cypress knees. The Outer Loop trail is still a work in progress. It is marked only with orange tape and is not cleared. Please take care if you take this trail. Long pants, close-toed shoes, and a walking stick are *highly* recommended. It's only 7/10 of a mile but may take an hour to complete due to obstacles and uneven footing.
- Picnic table was donated by the McLindon family and makes a great spot to eat lunch or go over a birding list!
- We were awarded a small 100% matching grant to create and install interpretive signage for the sanctuary. We are starting with plants. Volunteers have been assisting by using iNaturalist to identify all the unique species on the property. From there we will decide what plants will be featured and create the signs.
- Met with Chris Doffitt of LDWF who is responsible for the State Natural Area program. He believes that this property as well as Peveto Woods will qualify for the program and we are working toward that end. Chris was also very helpful in identifying plants on the property.
- Added a couple of benches along the trails with plans to add more. If anyone has any to donate, please let me know! (Facebook Marketplace is a great source for this!)
- Discovered that there was a William Bartram Trail marker installed in 2021 just across the river in Port Vincent. William Bartram was a naturalist who explored the southeast part of the United State extensively in 1773-1777. He documented flora and fauna of the region. The Bartram Trail Marker project marks the spots that Bartram mentions in his travels and the Amite River was his path to Baton Rouge and further up the river to Pointe Coupee, his most westerly point. So Bartram definitely passed by our spot as well! His book Travels of William Bartram has been in continuous print since the 1700's! There is also a sign on highway 431, one of the property boundaries that this area is part of the Atchafalaya Natural Heritage Area, which is culturally significant as well.



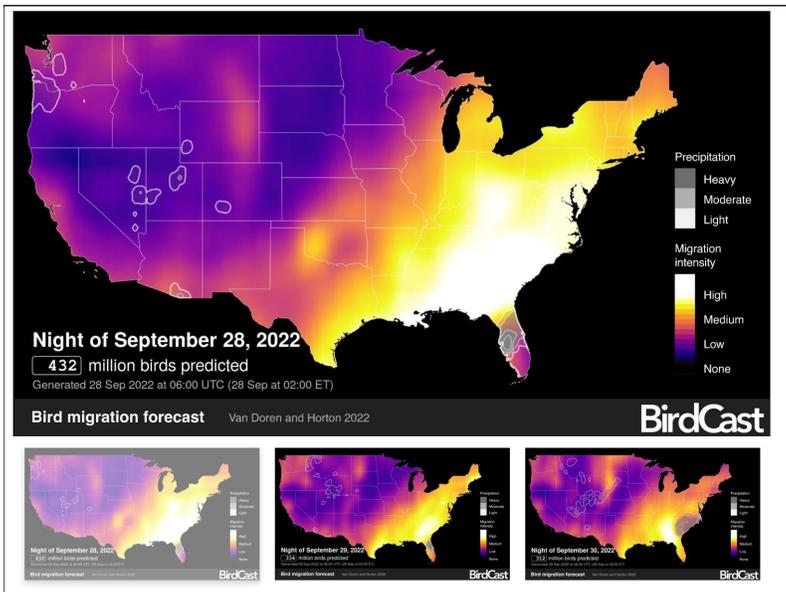


ARWS Volunteers!

- Kiosk constructed by Eagle Scout Robert Sayes of Prairieville (photo 1)
- Eagle Scout William Monroe directs his fellow scouts as they install fence posts for the parking area at the new sanctuary. Definitely a group effort! (photos 2-5, & 7)
- Volunteers identify plants using iNaturalist as a part of grant project to install interpretive signage at the ARWS (photos 6,8)



The birds are coming! The birds are coming!



most 1.5 million birds passed over Tangipahoa parish. They were flying an average of 33 mph at a height of 1700 feet (about a third of a mile). Peak time was 8:10 pm. Sometimes, if there is not an abundance of anthropogenic noise, you can even hear the birds as they are passing over!

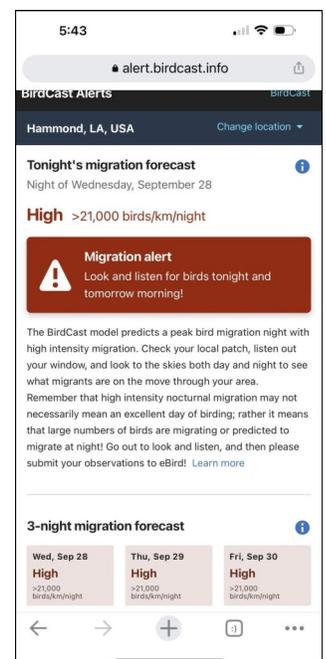
Some people can even identify the various species by their flight call notes (not me!).

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BirdCast (<https://birdcast.info>), also a product of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, is another fun tool to use to predict when the birds are coming, in a more real-time fashion. You may be old enough to remember the weatherman on the 6 o'clock news who would show the weather radar. As the circular radar swept the screen it would show rain events, but occasionally it would show something and he would say "that's not rain, that's just ground clutter." Well, depending on the time of year, that "ground clutter" could be birds, or bats or even insects that were taking off near sunset for their nocturnal migratory journeys. Ornithologists now use the ubiquitous radar weather stations to help determine and predict when birds will be flying over during migration!

In the example above, on September 28, 2022, according to Birdcast.info al-

Birdcast also has tools to predict when migration will be at its peak. Days following particularly active nights might be the best time to go out birding! These are also nights when it's important to turn off unnecessary outdoor lights which may confuse nocturnal migrants.



BRAS Program Schedule

The BRAS program committee has stacked the deck with some great speakers for the next six months, so mark these meeting dates on your calendars so you don't miss anything.

Meetings are now in person, but hybrid/ zooming capabilities are offered if you register in advance. Social hour is 6:30 p.m. and talks begin at 7 p.m. Please attend in person, if possible, to make our speakers feel welcome!

December 8:

Holiday Potluck Supper and featured program:

"Look Up: A Philosophy for Birding and Life"

We will share food and company first and then follow up with an inspiring program by fellow BRAS member Dr. Gail Suberbielle, a photographer and English professor who will treat us to her beautiful photos and "uplifting" philosophy. Katie Percy will also briefly cover the ins and outs of the Christmas Bird Count which will be held in Baton Rouge on January 2nd.

January 12, 2023:

"A Tour of the Galapagos"

BRAS officers Jane Patterson and Katherine Gividen will share a trip travelogue of Ecuador's Galapagos Islands including some amazing booby pictures!

February 9:

"Brown Pelican"

Our beloved pelican has been deemed a living fossil and one of the most dinosaur-like creatures. Dr. Rien (pronounced/ rye-en/) Fertel, noted author and Tulane University visiting professor, will share the story of humanity's complicated and often brutal relationship with the brown pelican over the past century from his latest book "Brown Pelican" by LSU Press.

March 9:

"BTNEP Native Garden"

The fastest disappearing landmass on earth is occurring in the Barataria and Terrebonne estuaries – causing a crisis for migrating birds and other wildlife and ecosystems.

Natalie Waters with Barataria- Terrebonne National Estuary Program will share with us their phenomenal coastal restoration native planting efforts and their expanding volunteer program.

April 13:

"Birding Without Borders" with Noah Strycker

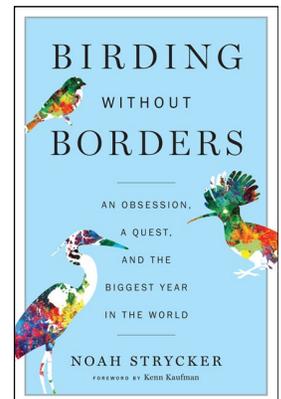


The Baton Rouge Audubon Society is proud to announce a talk by Noah Strycker, Associate Editor of **Birding** magazine, the official publication of the American Birding Association, and acclaimed author of *Birding Without Borders*, *The Thing with Feathers*, and co-author of the National Geographic Backyard Guide to the Birds of North America.

In 2015, bird nerd Noah Strycker of Oregon became the first human to see more than half of the planet's bird species in a single, year-long, round-the-world birding trip. Anything could have happened, and a lot did. He was scourged by blood-sucking leeches, suffered fevers and sleep deprivation, survived airline snafus, car breakdowns, mudslides, torrential floods, skirted war zones, and . . . had the time of his life. Birding on seven continents and carrying only a pack on his back, Strycker enlisted the enthusiastic support of local birders to tick more than 6,000 species, including Adelie Penguins in Antarctica, a Harpy Eagle in Brazil, a Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Thailand, and a Green-breasted Pitta in Uganda.

This humorous and inspiring presentation about Strycker's epic World Big Year will leave you with a new appreciation for the birds and birders of the world.

Noah's website:
noahstrycker.com



123rd Christmas Bird Count

Audubon's Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is the nation's longest-running community science bird project. Initiated by Dr. Frank Chapman in 1990 as an alternative to the traditional Christmas "Side Hunt" of that time, participants count, rather than hunt, every bird they see or hear within a given 15-mile diameter circle on a particular day within the count window (December 14 – January 5).

The Baton Rouge CBC circle is centered on the intersection of Highland Rd and Gardere Ln., and further subdivided into 17 areas. Each area has a designated leader, but anyone is welcome to join the count – we partner less experienced birders with more experienced birders and CBCers. We also welcome those who live inside the count circle to record and submit a list of the individual birds they count in their yard or at their feeders.

The Baton Rouge CBC is traditionally held on the last Saturday of the count period. Because that falls on New Year's Eve this year, we have opted to hold this year's count on Monday, January 2nd, 2023.

To participate in the Baton Rouge count, contact myself, Katie Percy at katiepercy@gmail.com

A plethora of information, including previous count results, a trends viewer, and a map of all count circles is available at www.christmasbirdcount.org

Citizen Science Projects

If you're a birder, you're likely aware that when you bird at locations specified as an eBird hotspot you enter your bird lists under that location and it accumulates everyone's sightings. That way it's easy to find the species that have been seen at that location.

For iNaturalist there are a couple of different ways to accumulate sightings. One way is to join a project that was created by someone for a location. That way when you add sightings at the location they are including in the project. The second way is a geographic location. The person that creates the project draws a perimeter around an area and any sightings in that area will be included in the project; joining the project is not necessary.

Below are the totals for both of these citizen science tools in the two Baton Rouge Audubon Sanctuaries. As of November 1, 2022:

Peveto Woods Sanctuary

eBird: 321 species (including exotic / escapees)
iNaturalist: 501 observations, 223 species identified
(join this project to add your sightings)

Amite River Wildlife Sanctuary

eBird: 95 species
iNaturalist: 537 observations, 233 species identified
(sightings automatically accumulated by location)



Pokeweed vs Pokeberry

It's not a weed!

by Jane Patterson

Let's start with the name. Most people call this beautiful plant "pokeweed" but that sets the wrong tone right off the bat. So let's all start referring to it as Pokeberry to help it garner the respect it deserves.

This native plant is a striking specimen with its garnet stems, lance shaped leaves and attractive berry drupes. The literature says it can get to 20 feet tall, but I've only seen it to about 10 feet here in south Louisiana. It's a perennial plant with a large tap root, so it's difficult to transplant. Because the fruit is eaten by many different types of wildlife, it can find its own way to your property very easily. Each berry holds 10 seeds and it seems the seeds can remain viable for 40 years in the soil! It will grow in sun or part shade and prefers moist soil. Do note that, despite being made famous by Elvis in

Poke Salad Annie, all parts of this plant are poisonous to humans. Yes, the young shoots can be prepared by repeated boilings but, honestly, we have many other options for greens without the risk! Let's just leave this plant to the wildlife.

Many mammals such as deer, gray fox, raccoons, skunks are said to eat this plant, as well as herps like box turtles. Ruby-throated hummingbirds will nectar on the flowers. It's the host plant for the giant Leopard moth. Bill Fontenot's Avian Frugivory report (updated as of Oct 2022) shows a whopping 24 species of birds helping themselves to the berries! Be sure to let Bill know if you've observed other birds eating the Pokeberry fruit. You can send observations to him directly or post them in the **Plants for Birds in Louisiana** facebook group (which is also a great way to discover other plants that are great for birds!)

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KidsWhoBird

KidsWhoBird is a club for kids aged 9-16 who have an interest in birds.

See <http://braudubon.org/education/bras-education> for more info

I've been struggling with how to resume in person meetings for the KidsWhoBird club. While Zoom meetings were fun, and necessary, during lockdown, there are many advantages to actually meeting in person. Unfortunately that does mean that those kids who don't live in this area won't be able to participate, but hopefully they'll find something to hold their interest where they live.

I've tossed around different locations and times as well. Saturdays are tough because it seems everyone has activities already lined up. Weeknights are rough because of having to make it to a meeting location through traffic after everyone has already had a long day of school and work. Plus, I wanted to find a location that would offer an opportunity to actually *see* birds. This is what I've come up with.

The Louisiana Bird Observatory group (professional and volunteer bird banders) band at Bluebonnet Swamp once a month on Sunday mornings before the park is open. There is so much educational opportunity for the kids to observe what these folks are doing and to actually see birds in the hand, that I think it's a great idea to dove-tail these events. So, we'll be meeting once a month on a Sunday morning at Bluebonnet Swamp. The banders start at dawn, but we'll meet from 8 to 9. We will observe the banding, but we may have other topics to discuss as well. I know that many folks attend church on Sundays but hopefully this is early enough that they can do that before church and still be able to participate. I'll announce the dates to the email list at least a week ahead of time and give you instructions for entering Bluebonnet Swamp since the front gate will be locked at that time.

Please pass this along to any families you know that may be interested. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me (education@braudubon.org)

- Jane Patterson

It's Pokeberry!

(Continued from page 8)

Observed: **Pileated Woodpecker**, E. Kingbird, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Red-eyed Vireo, E. Bluebird, Am. Robin, Gray Catbird, N. Mockingbird, Brown Thrasher, Carolina Chickadee, House Finch, **Prothonotary Warbler**, Nashville Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, Summer Tanager, N. Cardinal, Chipping Sparrow, Eastern Towhee, Painted Bunting, Indigo Bunting, **Orchard Oriole**, Baltimore Oriole, **RT Hummer**.



photos by Michael Thibodeaux

Baton Rouge Audubon YouTube Channel

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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 you have your 2022 sanctuary patch yet?

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

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

is published quarterly by the Baton Rouge chapter of the NAS. Submissions should be emailed to newsletter@braudubon.org

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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.)

Name: _____ Ph: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

E-mail: _____

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