

# The **BARRED OWL**

Newsletter of the Baton Rouge Audubon Society

Volume LIII - Number 1

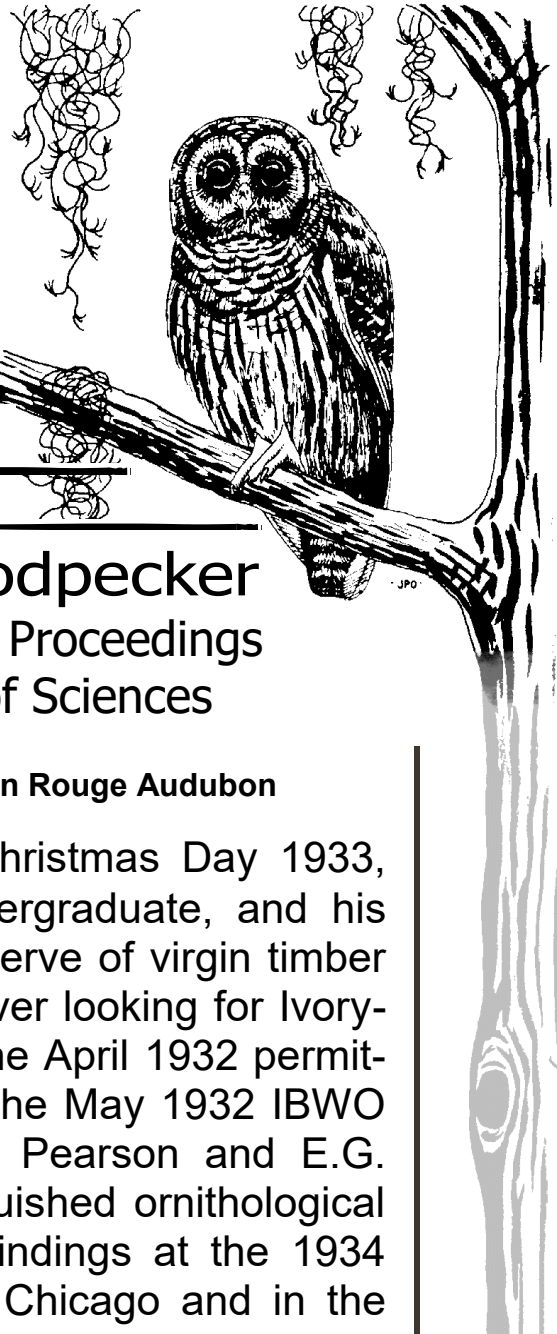
Spring 2026

## The Ivory-billed Woodpecker George Lowery, and the 1935 Proceedings of the Louisiana Academy of Sciences

by Richard Condrey, Conservation Chair, Baton Rouge Audubon

**For six days in June 1933** and on Christmas Day 1933, George Lowery, a 20 year-old LSU undergraduate, and his companions explored an 82,000-acre preserve of virgin timber located along north Louisiana's Tensas River looking for Ivory-billed Woodpeckers (IBWOs) – following the April 1932 permitted take of an IBWO by M. Spencer and the May 1932 IBWO observations by National Audubon's T.P. Pearson and E.G. Holt. Lowery, well on his way to a distinguished ornithological career, reported his group's efforts and findings at the 1934 American Ornithologist Union meeting in Chicago and in the March 1935 Proceedings of the Louisiana Academy of Sciences (PLAS, volume 2: pages 84-86). I hope you find his PLAS paper as exciting as I did.

The adventure begins  
on Page 7



## URGENT

# ! BRAS Program Coordinator Needed !

**We urgently need** a Program coordinator for BR Audubon. If we cannot find someone to spearhead our programs for next year, we may have to switch to Zoom only programs.

We generally offer programs January through April and September through November (7 months).

### Duties include:

- Work with other board members and the community to find speakers.
- Contact speakers and schedule them to speak. Request a bio of the speaker and a description of the talk.
- Report to the board about scheduled speakers.
- Ideally, log in to the website editor and add information about future programs to the Events page. (Jane can do this if necessary).
- Remind speaker about date a few weeks before speaking date.
- Send out an email announcement to the braudubon email list two weeks before the event and two days prior.
- Check with the speaker to see if they have their own laptop. If they don't, arrange for a laptop to be available that can run Zoom.
- On the evening of the event, meet the speaker at the Goodwood library. Set up the Zoom session and verify remote viewers can see and hear.
- Introduce the speaker.
- Set the Zoom session to be recorded.
- Check the Chat session once the program is completed and field questions.
- Complete the recording of the Zoom session.
- Upload the Zoom recording to the BR Audubon YouTube channel.
- Send out an email to the braudubon email group with a link to the YouTube recording.

Please contact Jane -  
[president@braudubon.org](mailto:president@braudubon.org)  
- if you can help with this important responsibility.



### Do you have your 2026 Baton Rouge Audubon Sanctuary patch?

The 2026 BR Audubon sanctuary patch features an adult male Cape May warbler, rendered in wonderful detail by Donna Dittman. If you are an active BR Audubon member and you wish to receive a 2026 patch, please contact Mark Pethke at

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

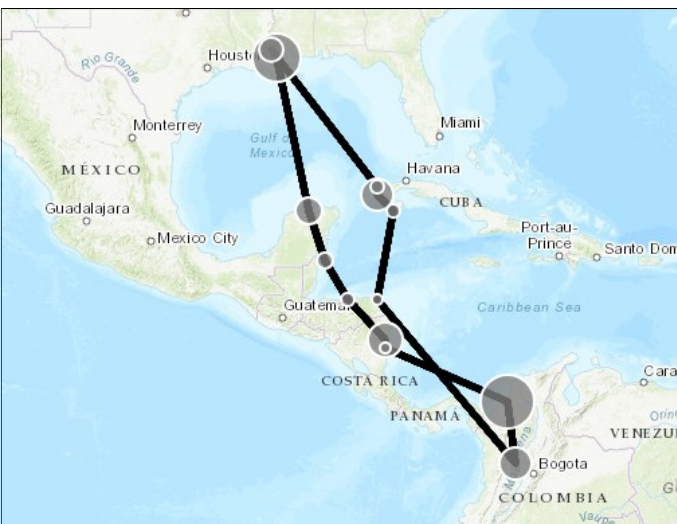
# A Year in the Life of a Prothonotary Warbler

In summer of 2024, two adult male Prothonotary Warblers were outfitted with bands and geolocator devices at the Baton Rouge Audubon Amite River sanctuary in Prairieville. One of the males had a black band installed on his left leg. The other had a green band installed. The geolocator is a tiny device that weighs a miniscule amount that is attached to the bird. It cannot be tracked in real time; it collects solar data and with analysis, it can tell us where the bird has traveled around the globe. The catch is that the device has to be retrieved from the bird for the data to be analyzed. Previous research on Prothonotary Warblers show that most of these birds overwinter in the area of Colombia, South America.

In March 2025, both of these birds returned from their wintering grounds to the Amite River sanctuary. The green-banded male was in the vicinity of nesting box 3, which he had used last year. The black-banded male was near box 5. Unfortunately, the black-banded bird was observed in a violent territory dispute with another unbanded adult male Prothonotary warbler and apparently lost the battle, as he was not seen again. However, researchers were able to capture and remove the geolocator from the green-banded male. I'm going to use the initials 'GB' for this bird for this account.

Analysis of the data on the geolocator showed that GB left Louisiana about Sept 3, 2024 and flew to the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico. He stayed in the Yucatan until approx Sept 12 and then flew south to the east coast of Honduras where he hung out until about Oct 6. By October 7, he was with all his buddies in the northern part of Colombia. These were his wintering grounds and he stayed until March 7, 2025. By March 9, GB had passed through Nicaragua and Honduras again and landed in western Cuba. Then he bopped back over to the Yucatan and headed north about March 26 which is when he likely returned to the Amite River sanctuary. He was photographed there on March 30.

As the crow flies, that's a straight line trip of 1650 miles. But of course, he didn't fly straight there, so his trip was likely closer to 2000 miles each way. It took him about a month to get to his wintering grounds and 17 days to return in the spring!



The particular geolocator also gathered altitude information which will help researchers understand how high the birds fly in migration. Information like this can be used to advise about things like offshore wind farms which may impact migratory birds.

This bird had another geolocator installed in summer of 2025, so keep your fingers crossed that he makes it back to the sanctuary again!

It's amazing what technology can help us learn about our migratory birds!

# Young Girl Scout Troop Experiences a Fantastic Tickfaw State Park Camping Weekend!

by Jessica Diez

**I'm a troop leader** for a Brownie/Junior (3rd/4th grade) Girl Scout troop at BR FLAIM elementary school, a foreign language immersion school in Baton Rouge. We just wrapped up the BEST camping weekend with our troop at Tickfaw State Park. We rented a group cabin and the girls were able to hike, make campfire s'mores, create their own pizzas, & bond over stories and activities!

The trip ended with a bird walk and watch led by Jane Patterson with the Baton Rouge Audubon Society to help the girls on their journey to get their Animal Habitats badge. Jane equipped all of the girls with binoculars and instructed them on how to use them before we set off on our walk through the park. This was the first time some girls have ever held a pair of binoculars and they got some good practice before setting off on the walk. Jane taught the girls several ways to attract birds by using calls on her phone, making the "psssst" sound with our mouths, and how to make our backyards friendly for birds to visit. A few of the birds we saw that day were Carolina Wrens, Black-capped chickadees, Yellow Rumped Warblers, and Eastern Phoe-



bes. The girls had so many questions and the walk sparked some real interest in these city kids. We couldn't have asked for a better walk leader and educator than Jane!



When we started our kindergarten troop years ago, all we wanted was for our scouts to find sisterhood in each other. Years later, we are so blessed to witness how strong their bonds have gotten! We have girls from all walks of life now bound together by years of friendship. We couldn't have asked for a better group of scouts!



# Taking On Invasive Species At Amite!

Thanks for members of the Louisiana Master Naturalist of Greater Baton Rouge for helping us with invasive species removal at the Amite River Wildlife Sanctuary. Here is their leader Lori's report:

On February 28th a group of 5 Master Naturalists (Danielle and Patrick Bussell, Emily Taylor, Terry Kidd and Lori Radunzel-Davis) joined 2 Audubon volunteers (Sue Broussard and Mark LaCour) to attack a patch of Ardesia near the new outside classroom at the Amite River Sanctuary. It was a beautiful afternoon and it was different having the temperature start warm and cool off as the time went by. The area had quite a bit of brush, so it was slower to dig out the Ardesia than usual, but we still managed to fill 5 garbage bags and at least as many seed bags. And have a feeling of accomplishment looking at the clearer understory!



## Baton Rouge Audubon - Christmas Bird Count Summary

by **Katie Percy**

**The Christmas Bird Count (CBC)**, our nation's longest-running community science bird project, marked its 126th season of data collection this Winter. The count period ran from December 14 through January 5, and the Baton Rouge circle held its count on Saturday, January 3, 2026. Approximately 70 people participated—the highest turnout of any circle in Louisiana. Weather conditions were favorable, with no rain and temperatures ranging from 60 to 79°F.

Observers recorded a total of 139 species, a number on par with the circle's long-term average (range 114–150) and represents an uptick from the past two years, each of which tallied 133 species.

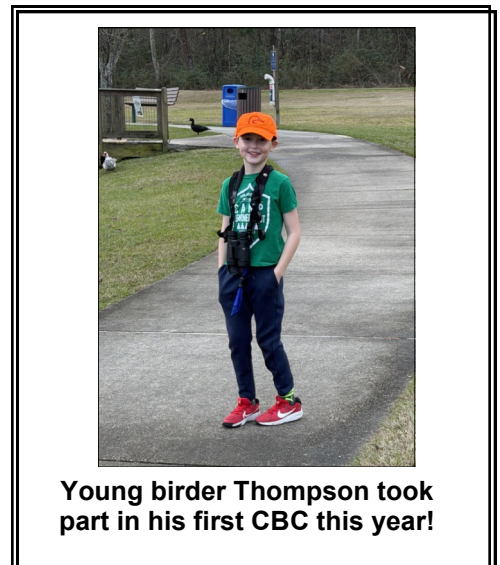
We added one new species to the Baton Rouge count this year: a brilliant Prothonotary Warbler, spotted near Capitol Lake by Jane Patterson,

Katherine Gividen and Alicia Barnes! We also documented a Yellow-headed Blackbird this year – only the second time this species has been recorded during the Baton Rouge CBC.

Additional rarities (with exact count in parentheses) included: Ross's Goose (2), Common Gallinule (20; new high count record), Brown Pelican (1), Krider's Red-tailed Hawk (1), Limpkin (2), Broad-tailed Hummingbird (1), Calliope Hummingbird (3), Say's Phoebe (1), Vermillion Flycatcher (1), Ash-throated Flycatcher (1), Black-and-white Warbler (2), Yellow-throated Warbler (1; Count Week only), Summer Tanager (3), Painted Bunting (1), and Baltimore Oriole (2).

Thank you to all the birders, new and returning, who joined us in the field and at feeders. Your dedication is what keeps our circle strong and our data meaningful.

A reminder that historical CBC records for all count circles and species can be accessed through the National Audubon Society website. If you have specific questions about the Baton Rouge count, please feel free to contact our compiler, Katie Percy ([katiepercy@gmail.com](mailto:katiepercy@gmail.com)).



Plants for Birds

# Red Buckeye

Red buckeye (*Aesculus pavia*) is one of Louisiana's most charismatic native understory trees, blending deep history with real ecological punch.

## Historic notes

Early European settlers in the South reportedly made a soap substitute from red buckeye roots, and used the bark and wood for folk medicines and dyes. Several Native American groups crushed buckeye branches and seeds to "dope" fish, slowing them down in streams so they were easier to catch. The large, glossy seed is said to resemble a deer's eye, which is where the "buckeye" name comes from and why people carried them as pocket "good-luck" charms.

## Ecological role in Louisiana

In Louisiana woods, red buckeye naturally tucks into the understory, thriving along streams, in thickets, and at the edges of hardwood forests from the hill country down into the coastal plain. It's a pioneer species on disturbed or clear-cut sites, helping quickly green up gaps with shade-tolerant foliage and early spring flowers. The plant contains natural toxins, so most birds and mammals avoid eating the leaves and seeds, but squirrels will still take the nuts.

## Hummingbirds & early pollinators

Those red "firecracker" flower spikes are timed almost perfectly with the arrival of ruby-throated hummingbirds, making red buckeye one of the first native nectar sta-



tions to open in spring. In Louisiana, ruby-throats are the only breeding hummingbird species, and buckeye blooms offer a critical fuel stop as they move through woodlands, swamps, and riparian corridors. Butterflies and native bees also work the nectar, so one small tree can light up an entire shady corner with wildlife activity.

## Understory beauty & garden use

Typically growing 15–20 feet tall, red buckeye is perfectly sized for a semi-shaded Louisiana yard, where it fits under oaks, sweetgum, or tupelo as a graceful, multi-stem small tree. It is remarkable in the spring when blooming and then fades into the background during summer and loses its leaves early before fall. It handles full sun to shade if the soil stays reasonably moist, and its palmate leaves and spring flower plumes give it real presence in a naturalistic, woodland, or bird-focused garden. Plant one along a path or near a porch and you're essentially installing a living hummingbird feeder with a couple of centuries of cultural stories built in.



# THE IVORY-BILLED WOODPECKER IN LOUISIANA

by **GEORGE H. LOWERY, JR.**  
Louisiana State University

In 1931, the publications on the birds of the United States listed the ivory-billed woodpecker (*Campephilus principalis*) as being extinct throughout its former range, except possibly in the swamps of Louisiana and Florida.

In April 1932, however, came the startling news to the ornithological world that a certain Mr. Mason Spencer, a lawyer from Talulah, Louisiana, had collected a specimen of this rare bird in the northeastern part of the state on a state game preserve. As far as it can be ascertained, the collecting of this specimen which was done under special permit from the State Conservation Department established the first definite record of the occurrence of the species in Louisiana since Doctor George Beyer of Tulane University found it in 1899, thirty-three years before.

By way of explanation, the preserve on which the bird was collected is in what is referred to as the Mississippi Flood Plain. This strip of land of ten to fifty miles width borders the west bank of the Mississippi. It is typical alluvial land characterized by a subclimax formation of oak, gum, hickory, and, in the swamps, cypress and Tupelo. Few people live in this area, for it is largely unreclaimed swamp with plantations evident along the waterways. The preserve is in the very heart of this primeval forest. Wild life is apparently just as plentiful as ever; wild turkeys, deer, Louisiana black bears, wolves, otters and cougars are among its most characteristic fauna. Wolves are so plentiful that extensive campaigns must be waged against them to minimize the depredations on the turkeys and other forms of wild life.

This description of the habitat is given to show the primitiveness of the forest and to picture for you a natural background for the ivory-billed woodpecker that is part of that association.

My first attempt to locate the birds was in June, 1933, when in company with John S. Campbell, an entire week was spent in the heart of the "big

woods". From fifteen to twenty miles was covered each day on foot, tramping about the forest, listening for the call notes of the woodpeckers, and tracing down most of the loud peckings that we heard made on the side of trees. On the evening of the sixth day we left the forest with no story to tell of the ivory-bills. However, the sight of many wild turkeys, deer, and other interesting wild things, including the rare swallow-tailed kite, left us not entirely disappointed over our failure to locate the woodpeckers.

Again on Christmas Eve of last year [1933], we returned to the Preserve with hopes even higher than the summer before. Christmas Eve night was spent in the woods.

Upon the break of day, we were afoot, the weather being moderately cold with frequent downpours of rain that soon had us drenched to the skin. Frequent thrills throughout the morning kept our spirits up, and we continued to humor ourselves into thinking that any minute an ivory-billed would edge around the side of a tree. Our guide succeeded in calling up to within 30 feet, eight large turkey gobblers. A slight movement by one of the members of the party sent the great birds crashing through the tree tops. Later at a distance of not over a hundred yards, we heard the sounds of clashing antlers... Bucks fighting!

After walking about in the rain for several hours our hopes were severely dampened, needless to say; but when things looked most discouraging—it happened.

Through the woods came the loud, clear, high-pitched "*yaamp-yaamp*", unmistakably the call notes of the ivorybilled woodpecker.

With utmost caution we approached the spot from whence the sounds were coming and in the next minute gazed upon two males and two females feeding energetically on a dead tree.

To stand there in the midst of one of Nature's last strongholds and look at four birds that might

(Continued on page 8)

# THE IVORY-BILLED WOODPECKER IN LOUISIANA

(Continued from page 7)

possibly be the last surviving individuals of a vanishing species was thrilling to the extreme. I have regrets for any ornithologist, or anyone interested in the least in natural history who would not be impressively affected by such a picture.

We watched the birds at fifty feet for some fifteen minutes, until they finally retreated into the taller timbers, ceased calling and were lost from view.

The birds, both male and female, called frequently as they energetically dug into the dead bark of the tree. The birds, especially the male with his scarlet crown patch accentuated by the iridescent black and immaculate white of the plumage, were a sight to behold. When they flew to another tree it was in the characteristic manner of all woodpeckers, undulating and jerky. In flight, the predominance of white in the plumage, makes the birds appear almost entirely white, especially when flying away from one. In manner and disposition the birds are very quarrelsome, although only in a vocal way.

Its notes are clear and distinct, and yet rather plaintive. They may be heard at a considerable distance, perhaps a half mile, and have been likened to the false high notes of a clarinet or a ten-penny horn. From my experience I would not say that the notes are repeated any definite number of times in succession. As mentioned before, the notes can be described as a monosyllabic "yaamp-yaamp" with a decided nasal twang.

It is a fact that the birds occur in small numbers in other parts of the area, and it would not be surprising to find them rather sparingly up and down the alluvial swamps of the Mississippi and Atchafalaya Rivers. There are hundreds of square miles throughout this area seldom penetrated by man. Forms of wild life such as bears, deer, cougars, etc., are abundant, and most likely the ivory-billed woodpeckers occur there also. I have several localities in mind that I hope to explore soon. Possibly in the near future, it

can be reported that the rarest bird in North America is not as rare as we have believed. But the difficulties of finding the birds, if they are present in these areas, are many. Hunting for a dozen birds-if there are a dozen-in a 100,000 acre primeval forest is much like looking for the proverbial needle in the haystack. Furthermore, it must not be confused with the pileated woodpecker, or "log-god" with which it bears a close resemblance and which is quite abundant in all sections of the state.

That the birds be given unlimited protection, the State Department of Conservation is doing its part. There are special wardens on the Preserve whose sole job is to watch the colony of woodpeckers. It must be said that these wardens are an efficient lot, just as interested in those woodpeckers as we are. For this reason the personnel of the Louisiana Department of Conservation is to be commended. A continuation of their good work along with the wholehearted cooperation of the public should maintain Louisiana as a refuge in which our rarest bird can make its last stand against civilization and, we hope, survive.

I will be exploring the continuing relevance of Lowery's 1935, IBWO paper and will let you know what I find.

- GEORGE H. LOWERY, JR. (1933)



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The shirts feature the beautiful artwork used for  
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our channel. All of our monthly programs will be stored there, as well  
as other special programs.

## *Do we have your email address?*

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the email list, simply send an email with only your name in the body of the email  
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**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)

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## The Barred Owl

is published quarterly by the  
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Submissions should be emailed to  
[newsletter@braudubon.org](mailto:newsletter@braudubon.org)

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

Baton Rouge  
Audubon Society  
P.O. Box 67016  
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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:

- \$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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