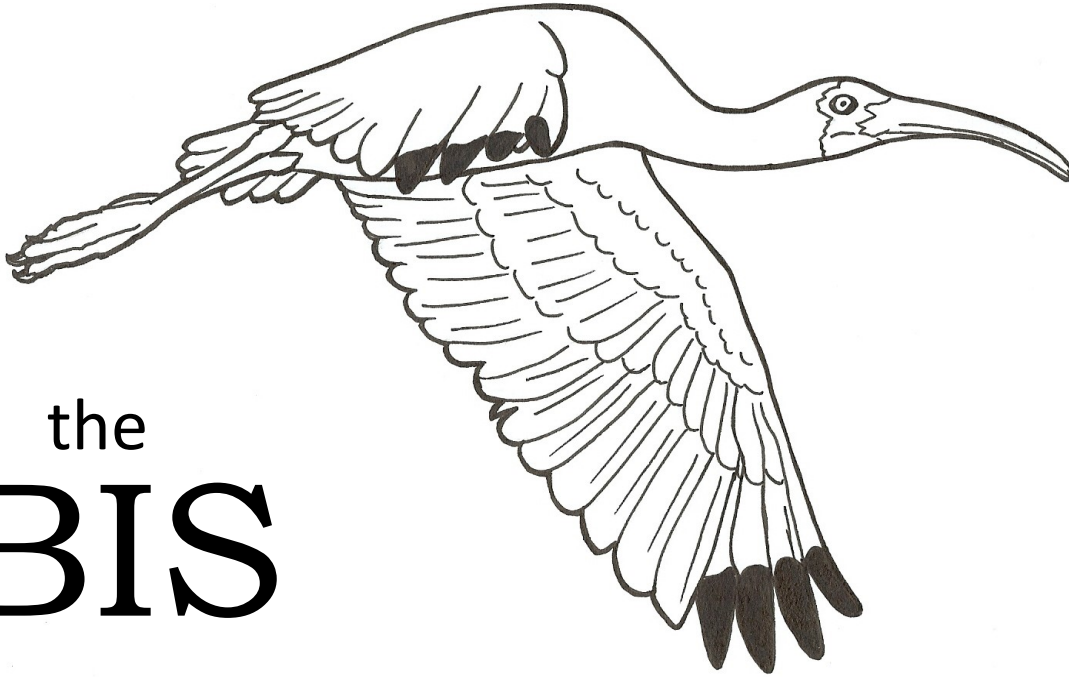


the IBIS



Newsletter of the Orleans Audubon Society.

A Chapter of the National Audubon Society.

Volume: XXXVIII Issue: 3

January 2015/February 2015

HONDURAS: UNKNOWN, UNDERRATED, MISUNDERSTOOD, AND DAT'S UNDERSTATED!

By Nicole Breaux Hymel and Todd Hymel February 24, 2015 Social starting at 6:30 p.m., program at 7:00 p.m.
Community Church Unitarian Universalist

Join us for an exploration of this Mesoamerican country that has an unique connection to the Crescent City. Houinduras! After a brief introduction of the lay of the land, we will profile what we call the 3 "R"s...reef, ruins, and rainforest. And of course, the birds will be the star of the show! Add to that, lagnaipe in the form of soaring mountains, lush cloud forests, stunning alpine lakes, charming colonial towns, and pristine mangrove swamps, you are sure to have the recipe for an enjoyable evening of dreaming about your next trip to this amazing Central American country.



White-crowned Sparrow

photo by Marshall Faintich,
2014GBBC Participant, courtesy
of National Audubon Society

18th Annual Great Backyard Bird Count February 13-16, 2015

The 18th annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is Friday, February 13, through Monday, February 16, 2015. This a four-day, international bird count is open to birders of all ages and abilities. The citizen science data that the GBBC collects gives researchers information about the location and size of bird populations each February.

Bird populations are always shifting and changing. For example, 2014 GBBC data highlighted a large irruption of Snowy Owls across the northeastern, mid-Atlantic and Great Lakes areas of the U.S. The data also showed the effects that the polar vortex had on bird movement around the country.

During the 2014 GBBC, there were 34.5 million bird observations reported on more than 144,000 checklists! This was the most detailed four-day snapshot of global bird populations ever undertaken. Participants reported 4,296 species, including a record 644 species in the U.S. Please help these numbers grow in 2015.

On the www.birdcount.org website, participants can explore real-time maps and charts that show what others are reporting during and after the count. All participants are entered in a drawing for prizes that include bird feeders, binoculars, books, CDs, and many other great products. To participate please visit www.birdcount.org. This citizen science bird monitoring program is sponsored by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society.

Spring 2015 Field Trips

Bring binoculars, field guides, bug spray, rain gear, sun screen and refreshments. Boots may be useful; walkie-talkie radios may be helpful if you have them. For trip information, contact the leader.

Winter Birding in Couturie Forest, City Park (half-day trip)

Saturday, February 7

Time: 8:00 a.m. Meet in the Couturie Forest parking lot on Harrison Ave. in City Park.

Leader: Tommy Harold (504) 222-6035

Birding Diamond

Saturday, February 21 **Time:** 7:30 a.m. (half-day trip)

Meet in the parking lot of Balestra's IGA Foodliner (Town View Cafe), 7902 Hwy 23 (Belle Chasse Hwy.), 4.6 miles south of the West Bank Expressway. Take CCC to West Bank, exit Lafayette St. (Hwy 23), and proceed south towards the town of Belle Chasse.

Leader: Ed Wallace (504) 343-1433

Birding Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge

Saturday, March 7 (half-day trip) **Time:** 7:30 a.m.

Meet at the Bayou Ridge Trail entrance located on the left side of U.S. 90 (Chef Menteur Highway). Take the I-510 Exit off of I-10, turn left on Chef Hwy and proceed about 4 miles.

Leader: Phillip Wallace (504) 628-0146

Birding Jean Lafitte National Park

Saturday, March 21 **Time:** 7:30 a.m. (half-day trip)

Meet at the Visitors' Center Parking Lot in the Barataria Unit of the park located on Hwy. 45. Follow signs off of the West Bank Exp. for the National Park.

Leader: Wendy Rihner (330) 348-3810

Great Louisiana BirdFest-Northlake Nature Center-Mandeville

April 10-12 <http://www.northlakenature.org/>

Grand Isle Migratory Bird Celebration

April 17-18 <http://www.grandisle.btneq.org/>

For more information call: Grand Isle Port Commission 985-787-2229 or BTNEP 1-800-259-0869 or email: ilandry@TNC.ORG or sandra@btneq.org

Louisiana Ornithological Society Spring Meeting, Cameron

April 24-26

Check the LOS website at <http://www.losbird.org> for details or contact Joelle Finley at (504) 715-2647 or Judith O'Neale at (337) 981-1011.

To bird in a Louisiana Wildlife Management Area you will need a hunting or fishing license, or a Wild Louisiana Annual Stamp (\$5.00), or a Wild Louisiana One Day Stamp (\$2.00). If you are a resident of Louisiana and are at least 60 years old, you are exempt. These stamps are sold at WalMart, Puglia's Sporting goods, 1925 Veterans Blvd., 504-837-0291 or LADWF offices (<http://www.wlf.state.la.us>)

Birding Big Branch National Wildlife Refuge

Saturday, May 2 **Time:** 8:00 a.m. (half-day trip)

Meet at Boy Scout Road parking lot. Take Hwy 190 2.7 miles east of Lacombe to Transmitter Rd; turn toward Lake Pontchartrain and drive to T-junction; turn right and go to the second parking lot on the left.

Leader: Ed Wallace (504) 343-1433

Bonnet Carre Spillway

Saturday, May 9 **Time:** 7:00 a.m. (half-day trip)

Meet at the Norco Boat Launch. Take Airline Hwy (US 61) west, turn right onto the east Spillway levee, and turn left down to the boat launch.

May need rubber boots

Leader: Chris Brantley (504) 234-4560

Birding Bogue Chitto National Wildlife Refuge and Honey Island

Saturday, May 23 **Time:** 7:00 a.m. (half-day trip)

Meet at the entrance to Pearl River Wildlife Management Area, Exit 5b (Honey Island Swamp) off of I-59. Good chance to see Swallow-tailed Kite and 10 species of breeding warblers, including Swainson's.

Leader: Glenn Ousset (504) 495-4284

GRAND ISLE AIR POTATO ROUND-UP

An invasive species is smothering the important maritime forest on Grand Isle. Jean Landry of the Louisiana Nature Conservancy and her dedicated teams of volunteers are attempting to rid the oak forest of those pesky potatoes and protect bird habitat! You can help. There will be several round-ups starting in March. Contact Jean Landry jlandry@tnc.org or 985-688-3871 for specific dates. Join in the fun!

When: March 14, 2015. 9:30am-2:30pm.

Where: The Landry-Leblanc Tract on Post Lane behind the Sureway Grocery Store

Lunch, water and soft drinks will be provided by TNC along with potato buckets and gloves. Wear long sleeves, long pants and have some fun!



YOUNG BIRDERS ASSOCIATION

A bird watching club for teens

New Orleans Recreation Development Commission (NORDC) and Orleans Audubon Society are working together to create a group for teens interested in birds and birdwatching. On the second Saturday of each month, the group will take a field trip to one of New Orleans' birding hotspots.

Outings are *generally* on the second Saturday of the month, 9:30-11:30am. (It seems early, but that's when the birds are up!). The locations vary and there are complimentary shuttles from the nearest NORDC rec center.

Why: Bird watching fosters a huge number of skills necessary for a successful life, such as focus, patience, critical thinking, and closeness to nature. For those interested in a career in any kind of field science, it also teaches observation and analytical skills, identification, the ability to use and compile research data, and nature literacy. It may also open the opportunity to do real citizen science and make a difference for our local birds.

For dates, locations and further details, visit <http://www.nola.gov/nordc/outdoor-programs/#birders> or contact Wendy Rihner at

wrihner@gmail.com.

Waders in Working Wetlands: Shorebird Extravaganza

April 29—May 3, 2015

Location: Jennings, LA, at The Hampton Inn and Suites

Festival Coordinator: Avian Events Support Team

Birders, farmers, and conservation organizations will gather in SW Louisiana to experience the spectacle of spring shorebird migration. Festival events include shorebird field trips, shorebird ID workshops-fieldtrips, a tour of a crayfish farm and processing facility, and evening get-togethers: a crawfish boil with Cajun music, and an evening of entertainment at the local Strand Theatre with R. Bruce Richardson (birder-entertainer). Although shorebirds will be the focus of the festival, there will also be field trips to target Louisiana's breeding/migrant species in longleaf pineywoods, bottomland hardwoods, and along the Cameron Gulf coast. For more information visit:

http://www.snowyegretenterprises.com/Snowy_Egret_Enterprises/Shorebird_Extravaganza.html

Audubon Convention 2015

SAVE THE DATE: July 10-13, 2015

Prepare to join Audubon's amazing network of dedicated chapter, centers, state and national leaders to celebrate One Audubon! The next biennial Audubon Convention will take place at the Lansdowne Resort on the banks of the Potomac River, near historic Leesburg, Virginia on July 10-13, 2015. Enjoy four full days of exciting field trips, inspiring speakers, in-depth hands-on workshops and the camaraderie only Audubon can provide. Registration and lodging details will be available this fall.

Woodlands Conservancy

Bird Observatory

Woodlands Conservancy was organized as a nonprofit land trust in 2001 to conserve and protect critical lands that provide habitat for wildlife and migratory birds. It manages the 609 acre Woodlands Trail in Belle Chasse and owns and manages the 190 acre Delacroix Preserve in Orleans Parish. Birding surveys show 163 documented species utilize the two properties. Woodlands Conservancy initiated bird banding stations at both Woodlands Trail and Delacroix Preserve in December 2013 with start-up funding provided by Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program. Woodlands Conservancy's stations focus on studying bird usage of healthy forested wetland areas in comparison to areas that are undergoing native plant restoration following intensive hurricane damage from Katrina and Gustav and subsequent invasive species proliferation. On a broader scale, the Woodlands Conservancy data comprises one of the five sites under the Louisiana Bird Observatory partnership and will further LABO's goal of measuring bird demographics at large landscape levels, support training for students and provide research opportunities for universities in the New Orleans area.

The Woodlands Conservancy Bird Observatory has been run at both sites on a monthly basis. The net lanes were set up by Master Bander, Don Norman who began running the stations in December 2013 and ran both stations for several months. Ashley Peele ran the stations April through December 2014. We are currently looking for a bander to operate both stations.

To date, data has been gathered on a total of 506 birds with 428 being banded and 78 recaptured. Delacroix, the 190 acre forested wetland acquired by the land trust in December 2013, setup net lanes in two sections, one that was heavily infested with Chinese Privet and one section that is a relatively intact forested wetland. Twenty seven species have been banded at the Delacroix Preserve with three species unique to the site compared to thirty-three species have been banded at the Woodlands Trail with ten species unique to the site. The species banded to date include the following with those unique to Delacroix indicated with a (D) and those unique to the Woodlands Trail site indicated with a (W): Indigo Bunting, Northern Cardinal, Painted Bunting (W), Yellow-billed Cuckoo (D), Swamp Sparrow (W), White-throated Sparrow (W), Common Grackle, Gray Catbird, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Black-and-White Warbler (W), Common Yellowthroat, Hooded Warbler, Kentucky Warbler (D), Myrtle Warbler, Northern Waterthrush, Orange-crowned Warbler, Oven Bird, Pine Warbler, Prothonotary Warber, Tennessee Warber (W), Worm-Eating Warbler, Downy Woodpecker

(D), Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (W), Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Carolina Wren, House Wren (W), American Robin, Hermit Thrush, Swainson's Thrush (W), Acadian Flycatcher (W), Eastern Phoebe, Blue-headed Vireo (W), Red-Eyed Vireo and White-Eyed Vireo.

Woodlands Conservancy plans to expand outreach opportunities in 2015 to provide the public with opportunities to view some of these magnificent birds up close that inhabit these forested wetlands and provide further opportunities to share with the public the value of the Woodlands properties that comprise one of the few remaining fragments of this habitat south of Lake Pontchartrain.



Blue-headed Vireo from first banding session at Delacroix Preserve

Woodlands Trail has over ten miles of trails and is open to the public from dawn to dusk. Delacroix Preserve is currently used by participants in bird banding, ecosystem restoration and other scheduled activities. To volunteer for bird banding sessions, send an email to volunteer@woodlandsconservancy.org and ask to be placed on the bird banding contact list. If you can help support the activities at the Woodlands Conservancy's Bird Observatory, you can become a member or donate by visiting www.woodlandsconservancy.org or call 504.433.4000 for more information.

Directions to Woodlands Trail: From downtown New Orleans, take the Crescent City Connection to the Westbank. Take the General DeGaulle East exit (9B). Merge onto General DeGaulle and travel 2.9 miles, continuing over the Intracoastal Canal. Enter the traffic circle at the end of the bridge ramp and exit left to go under the bridge. Drive 0.6 miles on Highway 406/Woodland Hwy to the caution light. Turn left at the caution light onto F. Edward Hebert Blvd. Continue 0.6 Miles. The entrance is on the left. Drive on the dirt road along the canal to the parking area at the trailhead.

Directions to Delacroix Preserve: From downtown New Orleans, take the Crescent City Connection to the Westbank. Take the General DeGaulle East exit (9B). Merge onto General DeGaulle and travel 2.9 miles, continuing over the Intracoastal Canal. Turn right at the end of the ramp and drive 3.7 miles until you come to Delacroix Road on your right. Turn right on Delacroix Road. Delacroix Preserve is located on the left side of the road, approximately 1 mile down.

The Yellow Rails and Rice Festival 2014

By Jennifer Coulson

What kind of creature remains hidden in thick grasses for its entire life? Rails do. They are adept at navigating through this tall, tangled world, with their extremely thin, laterally compressed bodies, and long, thin legs and toes. Camouflaged plumage renders them invisible to many an anxious birder. While expert at traipsing through marshes, rails are most reluctant flyers. Once you've seen one fly, you'll understand why.



This birding festival's draw is the Yellow Rail. Birders travel from all over the country to see them and everybody wants a Yellow Rail for their life list. In 2014 my husband, Tom, and I volunteered to help out with the Yellow Rails and Rice Festival in the rice country of southwest Louisiana. Prior to this festival, we had only ever seen one Yellow Rail on a defunct landfill north of Arabi. We were banding LeConte's Sparrows with Christie Riehl and managed to capture the rail in a mist nest and band it. On October 30th, we assembled at the Hampton Inn & Suites in Jennings. Each participant's goodie bag included a bag of ground coffee especially made for the festival, a bag of rice, ear plugs and a dust mask (to be explained shortly). At the registration/vendor area the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries exhibited a display on the reintroduction of the Whooping Crane. Donna Dittmann's beautiful art work was also on display and for sale, with some most exquisite paintings of Yellow Rails.

We then traveled a short distance by car to a small church in Thornwell for the orientation. Rice farmer, Kevin Berken, explained that we were here for the second rice harvest, also known as the ratoon. In the first harvest, the roots and lower parts of the rice plants are purposely not cut so that these may produce new tillers. These new tillers mature and produce seeds to become the ratoon. Next we caravanned to the nearby harvest site. Participants were allowed to ride on the combine or follow alongside on the edge of the rice crop. Everyone who wanted to had a turn riding on the combine, equipped with their ear plugs and dust masks. When the wind blew toward you, it created a mini dustbowl. So what is this all about, exactly? Several species of rails use the rice crops as their winter homes. During the harvest, the rails are flushed by the moving combine and fly out toward the onlookers. Fortunately, the crop before us held a lot of rails, so it was even chaotic, with rails sometimes darting right by your face! In that one field the combine flushed 15 Yellow Rails, 25 Soras, 3 Virginia Rails, dozens of Marsh Wrens, and a few Sedge Wrens and Le Conte's Sparrows.

The two rails that breed in Louisiana are the large King Rail and Clapper Rail. Rails wintering here include these two and the Virginia Rail, Sora, Yellow Rail and Black Rail. Of the latter two, Yellow Rails are very uncommon and Black Rails are downright rare. The rail common in winter and most similar in appearance to the Yellow Rail but one-third larger, is the Sora. The Yellow Rail is very small, weighing in at 1.8 ounces (50 grams), and the Black Rail is tiny, weighing only 1.1 ounces (30 grams). The smallest rail on the planet is Swinhoe's Rail, weighing all of 0.88 ounce (25 grams). Oddly enough, it is the closest relative of the Yellow Rail. Swinhoe's Rail breeds in Russia and China and winters in North and South Korea and Japan. Its appearance is so similar that until 1990, it was considered a subspecies of the Yellow Rail. Listed by the ICUN as vulnerable, almost nothing is known about the current range, its lifestyle or ecology.

Do they eat rice? Steve Cardiff and Donna Dittmann of the LSU Museum of Natural Science examined stomach contents of Yellow Rails collected in Louisiana. Seventy percent of rails had rice in their stomachs. Other dietary staples included other seeds, small insects, and snails. Steve and Donna put together an interesting slideshow about their study:

http://training.fws.gov/topic/online-training/webinars/documents/yellowrail/session_III/presentation_cardiff_sessionIII.pdf

The Yellow Rail breeds in eastern and central Canada and in the northernmost United States (North Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan). In the fall it migrates south to warmer wintering grounds along the Gulf and southern Atlantic coast, from south Texas to North Carolina. Although extremely rare in California, recent breeding season records indicate that this species may still nest there. Yellow Rails also formerly bred in one locality in central Mexico: the last record for the Goldman's Yellow Rail occurred on July 22, 1964, in the marshes of Rio Lerma Valley.

Back to the festival, it was a beautiful day to be birding in southwest Louisiana. Greater White-fronted Geese passed over in formation almost continually. Two adult Bald Eagles soared in the distance. Then two female American Kestrels appeared and attacked one another in an aerial battle waged over unknown affronts. I spied a Peregrine on the horizon and took great pains to point it out to participants, only to have it turn sharply toward us and fly right over our heads. A raccoon and a stinkpot (common musk turtle) were among the non-birds displaced by the combine. Southwest Louisiana in fall is a spectacular place to bird and enjoy wildlife!



Birding trips and bird banding workshops are some of the other festival activities. That evening Tom and I attended the jambalaya dinner and brought out a trained Harris's Hawk and Great Horned Owl for everyone to see. Then Les Frères Michot, a traditional Cajun band, led by my friend, Tommy Michot, started to play and dancing followed. This provided us with an opportunity to put the raptors away and get in line for the dinner. The jambalaya was delicious, so I shot the chef a quick, "Who knew that Yellow Rails were so good with rice?" And he fired back, "Not as good as Swallow-tailed Kite." Ouch!

The festival is sponsored by the non-profit Avian Events Support Team, the brain child of Donna Dittmann and Steve Cardiff. Advance registration is required and space is limited. The festival organizers need volunteers, especially birders who can identify the local rails and other birds found in the rice fields.

Swallow-tailed Kite Conservation Alliance Meeting in Georgia

By Jennifer Coulson

The Swallow-tailed Kite Conservation Alliance met from September 16-18, 2014, at the rustic Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center in Mansfield, Georgia. Wildlife biologists and managers from state, federal, non-profit organizations and the timber industry met to discuss management, research, monitoring and outreach; identify priority needs; and develop strategies for addressing these needs. Representing kite interests in Louisiana were Michael Seymour and Donald "Duck" Locascio from the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. Our Mississippi collaborator, Nick Winstead also attended, representing the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science and Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks. I represented Orleans Audubon Society (OAS) and our kite research and monitoring work in Texas (the Sabine River Basin), Louisiana, and Mississippi. It was encouraging to have so many professionals with a wide diversity of expertise assembled to support kite conservation.

On the first day, researchers from southeastern coastal states reported preliminary results from the range wide roost surveys that took place from 2009–2011. The group then discussed how the data might be used to develop a population index for tracking population trends. Michael Seymour and I gave a presentation, "Identifying important roosting areas in river basins" where we highlighted several approaches to ranking which roosting areas were most important to kites based on several criteria: 1) repeated use of an area for roosting, 2) roost size (number of kites in a roost), and 3) the density of kites roosting over several miles of river. I also presented updates on roost and nest survey work that OAS is conducting in Louisiana and Mississippi.



On the second day, I gave a PowerPoint presentation entitled, "Great Horned Owls and urbanization pose and ecological trap" and discussed how owl predation rates on nesting adults were higher in suburban-urban areas. Then Ken Meyer presented a breeding habitat model that the Avian Research and Conservation Institute developed for Swallow-tailed Kites nesting in Florida. After this presentation the group brainstormed about producing habitat management recommendations for the timber industry and public lands managers and foresters. For example, The Nature Conservancy of South Carolina has increased the recommended width of streamside management zones (riparian buffers) in forested areas used by Swallow-tailed Kites from the typical 50–100 feet to 300 feet on either side of the stream. The last day was spent identifying and prioritizing conservation needs for Swallow-tailed Kites.

10th Annual Eagle Expo

The 10th Annual Eagle Expo, scheduled February 26–28, 2015, in Morgan City, will feature seminars from wildlife and nature experts, a live raptor presentation, boat tours to view eagles, a photography exhibit and opportunities to meet fellow birders.

The Eagle Expo is a tribute to the return of the Bald Eagle to Louisiana, which was removed from the endangered species list in June 2007. Laws banning the use of harmful pesticides such as DDT and greater public awareness and education have increased the bald eagle population throughout Louisiana and the United States. Currently, there are 284 active nests in Louisiana with a large concentration in St. Mary and Terrebonne parishes.

The Cajun Coast Visitors & Convention Bureau is sponsoring an "Eagle Expo" photography exhibit at its new Welcome Center located at 900 Dr. MLK Boulevard, Morgan City. Priority will be given to photographs taken during the last 10 years of Eagle Expos that reflect anything beautifully captured during the event including all forms of wildlife, fauna of the region as well as the people that call the Cajun Coast home. All other nature based

photographs will be considered for remaining space.

This year's Expo includes a presentation by Extreme Raptors on Thursday, February 26th, from 6:00–7:30 p.m. at the Patterson Civic Center. This lively presentation showcases an array of eagles, falcons, hawks and owls soaring overhead.

A photography workshop taught by renowned wildlife photographer C.C. Lockwood will be held on Friday, February 27, 2015. The workshop includes a seminar at 9:00 a.m. at the Cajun Coast Visitors & Convention Bureau's Welcome Center and a boating trip to Bayou Black at noon focused on birding and marsh landscapes. The registration fee is \$195.00. Contact C.C. Lockwood at 225-769-4766 to register.

Tours to view eagles take place Friday, February 27th and Saturday, February 28th. Featured waterways include the Atchafalaya Basin, Bayou Black, Turtle Bayou and Bayou Long. Tours run from 9:00–11:00 a.m. and 1:00–3:00 p.m. on Friday, and 9:00–11:00 a.m. and 2:30–4:00 p.m. on Saturday.

Friday evening features a dinner

and presentation, *A Life Gone to the Birds*, by Al Batt, at the Petroleum Club of Morgan City from 6:30–8:30 p.m. Cost is \$40.00 per person.

Saturday, February 28th, features breakfast and a variety of speakers in the morning with boat tours in the afternoon. Speakers for the morning seminars include: Michael Sealy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Dr. Erik Johnson, Director of Bird Conservation, Audubon Louisiana, and Kathy Adams, professional nature photographer, and speaker from the LSU Raptor Rehab program.

Full registration includes the seminars Saturday morning, breakfast Saturday morning, a t-shirt, one boat tour, and the Extreme Raptors presentation on Thursday evening. Registration fees start at \$115 for adults and \$65 for children for full registration. One day registration starts at \$90 for adults and \$55 for children includes seminars, one boat tour, and Saturday breakfast. Boat tours only start at \$60 for adults and \$40 for children. For a complete event schedule, costs, and registration forms, contact the Cajun Coast Visitors and Convention Bureau at 985-380-8224, visit online at www.cajuncoast.com/eagleexpo or email info@cajuncoast.com.

Rusty Blackbirds: Looking Forward, Looking Back

Author: Judith Scarl, International Coordinator, Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz



A female Rusty Blackbird huddles on a Minnesota rooftop during a blizzard, fluffing herself into a ball to keep warm. A male flips leaves in a roadside ditch in Maryland, navigating partially frozen mud to hunt for spring's first invertebrates. A noisy, mixed flock of Red-winged Blackbirds, Brown-headed Cowbirds, and the occasional Rusty lifts off from an Ohio cornfield, seeking safety in nearby trees.

These snapshots highlight the adventures and challenges of Rusty Blackbird spring migration, a journey that takes this species from its flooded forest wintering grounds in the southeastern U.S. northward to the boreal forests of Canada, Alaska, and far northern New England. Rusty Blackbirds pose both a conservation challenge and an environmental mystery. This species has experienced one of the most precipitous declines of any once-common landbird, losing up to 95% of its population over a 40-year span. Until the late 1990s, no one noticed this decline, much less understood it. Today, although some of the bird's habits remain unstudied, our new understanding of Rusty Blackbird breeding and wintering ecology enables scientists to formulate conservation strategies for this species on both ends of its migratory range. However, we know little about Rusty Blackbird migration ecology, a critical element to ensure that the species is protected throughout its full annual cycle.

To identify migratory hotspots, understand migration timing, and inspire the public to support Rusty Blackbird conservation, the International Rusty Blackbird Working Group, in partnership with the Vermont Center for Ecostudies, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and dozens of state and local partners, including Louisiana State University, developed and launched a three-year Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz in March 2014. This Blitz challenges birders across 38 states, 9 provinces, and 3 Canadian territories to search for Rusty Blackbirds during their northward migratory journey. While rangewide Blitz dates span the beginning of March through mid-June, each state and province focuses efforts during peak Rusty migratory activity for its region. Here in Louisiana, our peak Blitz dates include all of March, when the majority of Rusties will travel through our region. To participate, birders scour the landscape for Rusties and report their data to eBird under the "Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz" observation type, allowing the Blitz to tap into an existing network of citizen scientists and to encourage new supporters to use a broad-based conservation tool. These data will be used to identify Rusty Blackbird hotspots across the landscape and assess whether critical stopover areas are adequately protected. The ultimate goal is to ensure that Rusty Blackbirds have access to high-quality habitat throughout a journey that is energetically costly and already fraught with peril.

Between 1 March and 15 June 2014, 4750 observers submitted 13,400 Rusty Blackbird observations to eBird, a 61% increase in submissions over 2013, the year before the Blitz. In Louisiana in 2013 we had 16 submissions containing Rusties. In 2014 we had 57 – that's an increase of 256% over the previous year! Data from this pioneer Blitz year will guide our 2015 and 2016 Spring Migration Blitz efforts; based on where observers reported large flocks of Rusties in 2014, we've identified potential hotspots that need to be revisited in 2015 to evaluate whether Rusties rely on the same areas year after year. Of course, the Blitz effort will still be looking for new hotspots in 2015, so birders are encouraged to search far and wide for Rusties and report all observations to eBird.

Our goal for Louisiana is to increase our statewide coverage; including birding 2015's Areas of Interest and expanding visits into flooded forests, shallow swamps, and swamp edges. Northern Louisiana and potentially important areas, such as Maurepas Swamp and the Atchafalaya Basin, could be visited much more.

As the Rusties' namesake plumage fades to black (for males) and charcoal gray (for females) in the spring and summer, Rusties can be challenging to identify even for more experienced birders. To ensure that the Spring Migration Blitz collects high-quality data, we ask that birders brush up on their Rusty Blackbird identification skills before participating in the Blitz. The International Rusty Blackbird Working Group Spring Migration Blitz web pages (<http://rustyblackbird.org/outreach/migration-blitz/>) contain several resources to help birders discriminate between Rusties and look-alike species, such as Brewer's Blackbird, Common Grackles, Brown-headed Cowbirds, and European Starlings. If you are confident that you've seen a Rusty Blackbird, we welcome your report in eBird!

So, whether you're looking for the first spring crocuses, walking your dog, hiking near wooded wetlands, or specifically out birding, keep your ears open for a squeaky-hinge call and look around for Rusty Blackbirds- your efforts will help to solve one of the final pieces of the Rusty Blackbird conservation puzzle.

To learn more about the Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz and how to participate, visit our website at <http://rustyblackbird.org/outreach/migration-blitz/> or contact your state/provincial coordinator Sinead Borchert (sborch2@tigers.lsu.edu).

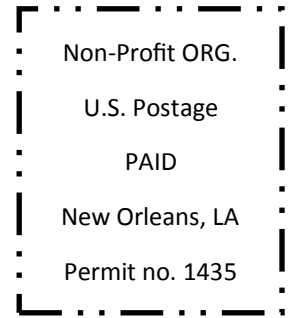
This piece is adapted from an article, authored by Judith Scarl, that originally appeared in the Spring 2014 version of the Vermont Center for Ecostudies' "Field Notes" publication.

The SE Louisiana Chapter of the National Audubon Society

Orleans Audubon Society

801 Rue Dauphine Apt. 304

Metairie, LA 70005-4608



Call for Nomination of Officers

It is time to nominate officers for the Orleans Audubon Society for the 2015–2017 term. If you are a member of OAS and would like to nominate someone for the office of President, Vice-President, Secretary or Treasurer, please confirm the nominee’s interest and contact a member of the Nominating Committee no later than March 31, 2015.

Dan Purrington, Chair, (504) 717-3283, 4700 Bissonet Dr., Metairie, LA 70003

Glenn Ousset, (504) 495-4284, 2012 E. Beauregard St., Chalmette, LA 70043