

The **BARRED OWL**

Newsletter of the Baton Rouge Audubon Society

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3rd Quarter, 2010

Reports From The Gulf

NAS MOBILIZES TO BATTLE SPILL

National Audubon Society mobilized quickly in the face of the oil spill to gather volunteers who could help with the oil spill response, help coordinate bird monitoring efforts across the Gulf Coast, and continue our habitat restoration and protection efforts that are so important to giving birds a home to return to when the oil spill is finally stopped.

Our newly opened Volunteer Response Center in Moss Point, Mississippi is now serving as our hub for Audubon's emergency and long-term restoration efforts throughout the Gulf. More than 20,000 volunteers have now registered with Audubon nationwide—the number has grown substantially since the volunteer center was launched.

Frank Gill, Audubon's president, and Tom Bancroft, Vice President of Science, were on hand as volunteers were trained for participation in the new Audubon Coastal Bird Survey, which will provide valuable citizen science data to assess the impact of the spill on species and habitats and to help shape

plans for long-term restoration. The oiled bird monitoring protocol was developed by Jared Wolfe and Erik Johnson, two LSU graduate students who have had birders, including some BRAS members, surveying for oiled birds since the first week or so of the spill. The first Audubon survey volunteers hit the beaches in Mississippi in early June, and the effort will quickly expand to enable Audubon volunteers to play a vital role in understanding and mitigating the impacts of the spill across the region. Local press covered the Beach Survey outing. Volunteers are also being deployed for a range of other important tasks, including assisting in the transport of injured and oiled birds, making cages, nets and other materials to aid in the capture of injured birds, and manning the center's Bird Hotline.

Audubon's Melanie Driscoll and Dr. Paul Kemp continue to meet and coordinate with lead federal, state and non-governmental response agencies.

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Egrets on a oil boom....



Photo by Richard Gibbons

A Message From Our President...

Uuuggghh,

I'm sure we can all agree that watching this oil spill has been incredibly sad and incredibly frustrating. First, I'd like to publicly extend my condolences to the friends and family of the eleven workers who were killed in the explosion. Hopefully this tragic event will lead to better safety measures and more emphasis on cleaner and safer forms of energy.

One encouraging by-product from this has been the dozens of offers from people around the country to volunteer that I've personally received through the BRAS website. My understanding is that there have been thousands who have registered on the National Audubon website. Unfortunately for various reasons there are only a handful of jobs available to volunteers compounding our feeling of impotence to do anything about the still-spewing oil.

While we are unable to help clean birds, beaches or marsh, some in our chapter have been able to fill important leadership roles in the mitigation of this disaster. As you will read later in the newsletter Paul Kemp and Melanie Driscoll have been exceptionally busy. Shortly after the rig explosion our newly elected program chair, Jared Wolfe in conjunction with Erik Johnson, both Ornithology graduate students at LSU developed a study protocol for oiled birds. This is based on earlier studies by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service dealing with oiled birds in California. This is a citizen-science survey focusing specifically on the extent of oiling and its' effects on bird behavior. It has been endorsed by National Audubon and has been implemented Gulf-wide. Those interested in participating can contact me via phone or email.

At our recent program a fund was created to help volunteers defray transportation costs associated with performing this survey as well as other oil spill related volunteer operations. The thinking behind this fund was that those able and willing to devote their time and talents should be able to do so with a little less concern as to whether or not they could afford the gas. In addition to many individuals who have already contributed, The American Birding Association and its' members have generously sent \$3000 to aid our efforts. If you are interested in contributing to this fund please send a check with "oil spill" in the memo section.

This April I was fortunate enough to spend a beautiful day on Grand Terre near Grand Isle. To see the recent photos of fouled beaches, marshes and oiled and dead wildlife has been heart-breaking. Now that oil is turning up on the white, condo-lined beaches of Florida attention will soon turn away from the beaches and marsh of Louisiana. It will be our task to keep attention focused on this incredibly rich habitat and to document the effects of the spill on it. By doing so we might better understand the effects of these pollutants on our coastal bird populations and hopefully mitigate their effects in the future.

Would those who have recently sent in their membership renewals and donations please excuse us for not mentioning you in this newsletter. Our Treasurer has been visiting his children in the Far East.

Best Wishes,

Eric Liffmann

Baton Rouge Audubon Officers

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correspondence should be sent
to:

**Baton Rouge
Audubon Society
P.O. Box 67016
Baton Rouge, LA 70896**

BRAS EDUCATION IN ACTION

THANKS TO NAS GRANT AND BRAS KNOW-HOW

Tanglewood Elementary Gets Nature

Thanks to a small Chapter grant from National Audubon, Baton Rouge Audubon was able to work with one of our local elementary schools to put in another garden for bird and butterflies. Julie Nall is the Science and Math coordinator for the Central School District. She and her husband Milton are Baton Rouge Audubon members. Julie talked to me about coming to talk to the kids at Tanglewood Elementary about Louisiana birds. This school is limited to the second and third grades. I did a program for the third-graders in February. They were so excited to learn about our birds and

eager to learn more. I talked to the principal Ms. Sandy Davis and assistant principal Jason Fountain about putting in a garden at the school so the kids would have an opportunity to see birds (and butterflies) up close and personal and learn more about them. Julie and I surveyed the school to find a good location for the garden. We found the perfect spot. It would be visible from 3 sides so the kids would be able to see the birds coming and going. It was near one of the wonderful live oaks on campus, so the birds would have cover as they visited the feeders. Unfortunately, the soil where we hoped to construct the garden was not going to be friendly -- it was a thin layer of very poor top soil over rock hard clay. There was no hope for digging it. Raised garden beds were a possibility but were not going to be cost effective for our slim budget. In the end, I decided to put in a container garden. The kids were psyched to help.



Their favorite part was getting into mud up to their elbows. They all loved the idea that this little garden would bring birds right into their school yard. Hopefully the garden will get watered over the summer and the two second grade classes will come back to Tanglewood Elementary next year and see their garden in full bloom and be able to watch the birds that visit their garden daily. Thanks so much to Ms. Tara Thompson and Ms. Mallory Weaver's second grade classes for their hard work in the hot sun to plant the garden!



SPRING PROGRAM RAPTOR RECAP

Our featured speakers for the recent Spring Program, Steve Cardiff and Donna Dittmann, delivered a soaring presentation on raptor identification. From basic shapes and colorations to different options for field guides, they enlightened the audience with a better understanding of the raptor species seen not only around Louisiana but also across the United States. Thank you, Steve and Donna, for sharing your personal knowledge of raptors with the rest of us.

In addition to the raptor presentation, our Annual Meeting included the presentation of awards and election of officers. We presented awards to two of our very own officers--Jane Patterson, our Education chair, and Dave Patton, our Sanctuary chair--whose endless time, effort, and passion for their work deserved special recognition. Thanks to both of you for everything you do to enhance the Audubon Society. Our slate of officers remains the same as last year with the exception of myself stepping down as program chair. Jared

Wolfe, a PHD student at LSU, will be taking my place. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time in this position over the past few years. The business and social times spent with members of the board and the many Audubon members have been enriching and the memories will last a lifetime. Because my own brood is expanding, I feel it is time to return to the nest. By the time you read this, I will be cuddling a new little birder.

Lindsay Seely
Program Chair

Jared's Oil Spill Experience

by Jared Wolfe

“**O**ne moment....” I told the slightly annoyed Raising Cane’s Fried Chicken cashier as I fumbled for my vibrating phone. The area code displayed on my cell phone was unfamiliar which aroused my suspicion of a telemarketer. I considered my usual reaction: turning off the phone. However, since the inception of our oiled-bird monitoring efforts, my collaborator Erik Johnson and I had been receiving calls from interested and concerned citizens from around the country. This particular caller was a man from Ohio who had previously visited Louisiana’s gulf coast and fell in love with the area and wildlife. Audibly distraught, he asked how he could help conservation efforts in Louisiana. Several minutes into our discussion he literally began sobbing. I uncomfortably, and ultimately unsuccessfully, tried to console the stranger. The caller’s reaction reflects the gravity of the current situation: the worst environmental catastrophe in our country’s history is unfolding in our back yard.

The Deepwater Horizon was a BP operated ultra-deepwater oil-drilling rig that caught fire on 20-April-2010. Two days later a second explosion occurred and the Deepwater Horizon sank. Tragically, eleven workers are presumed dead. Recognizing the potential impact of the Deepwater Horizon tragedy on our coastal bird communities, Erik Johnson and I drafted “**A Citizen Scientist’s Protocol for Monitoring Oiled Birds in Louisiana**” on 8-May-2010 in collaboration with Baton Rouge Audubon. Most other survey-methodologies focus on birds without differentiating between those who show either visual or behavioral effects of oil contamination. During oil spills, surveyors (and the media) often focus on oiled, immobile or dead wildlife often addressing those animals which are in the most immediate danger. The Louisiana Citizen Scientist protocol is designed to document individual birds with even small patches of oil

on their plumage, or birds exhibiting unusual behavior because even a small amount of oil on an apparently healthy bird can be preened and ingested, potentially causing abnormal behavior or death.

The Louisiana Citizen Scientist protocol has been adopted by National Audubon as the official monitoring protocol throughout the Gulf Coast region. The data are easy to collect and can yield powerful results. For example, surveys are similar to typical birding trips except we ask volunteers to record time spent surveying, number of individuals of each species observed, document odd behavior and amount of oil observed. Once collected, we will use the data to estimate abundance of birds, frequency of oiled-birds, and species specific patterns of oil contamination across the gulf coast. Next, we plan on associating our citizen science monitoring data with bird mortality estimates in order to calculate number of total casualties throughout the impacted region. In order to reach our lofty goals, Baton Rouge Audubon and collaborators are working diligently to build capacity.

Already we have a computer technician designing an interface for Citizen Scientists to enter data online and we have arranged for a fulltime intern to join us in order to conduct surveys and enter hard-copy data. Mississippi Audubon has been conducting protocol training sessions and coordinating rotating groups of Citizen Scientists to continually monitor their coastline. National Audubon is using their enormous volunteer database to solicit Citizen Scientists to help with the monitoring effort and is interested in keeping the oiled-bird monitoring program active in the coming years in order to gauge the long-term impacts of the Deep Horizon spill on our coastal bird communities. Our partners at the American Birding Association have generously donated \$3,000 to Baton Rouge Audubon in order to support our on-going oiled bird monitoring efforts.

As concerned citizens we are frustrated with our inability to stop the oil spill from damaging the Gulf Coast’s fragile ecosystems. Although our collective ability to avert damage is limited, our collective ability to document damage is critical. As the crisis unfolds, we hope to tell the birds’ story through analysis and by sharing our data with interested parties for upcoming litigation and mitigation. If you have not done so already, please consider joining us in this unique effort to monitor our bird communities’ response to the Deepwater Horizon spill.

For more information about volunteer opportunities please contact Erik Johnson and Jared Wolfe at labirdresponse@gmail.com



KIDSWHOBIRD

The KidsWhoBird club (and guests) visited the Wings of Hope Wildlife Sanctuary in Livingston earlier this month. WoH is a rehabilitation facility for injured and abandoned wildlife. Spring is an especially busy time for the facility. There were several raccoons and a few opossums and squirrels, as well as many different types of birds being cared for. It was fun for the kids to see the animals up close and, in some cases, to be able to touch and play with the animals. Leslie Lattimore and her staff run the Wings of Hope with donations from friends and supporters, and of course, with her own resources. It's a wonderful place that plays such an important role in supporting Louisiana wildlife. Visit <http://www.wingsofhoperehab.org/> for more information.

-- Jane Patterson



Jane Patterson, Education Chair and Dave Patton, Sanctuary Chair receiving awards of recognition from BRAS

NAS Mobilizes to Battle Gulf Catastrophe

(Continued from page 1)

Efforts are underway to determine how Audubon experts can aid in the assessment of species' impacts in oiled areas that are now off-limits. Careful immediate and future monitoring will be essential to ensuring the continued well-being of the recently de-listed brown pelican and other species. Melanie is deeply involved in Audubon's conservation planning for the Gulf Coast, a process designed to help develop and prioritize strategies to deal with threats including not only the oil spill, but ongoing marsh and barrier island loss due to inappropriate management of the Mississippi River. Paul Kemp is also leading NGO discussions on the viability of calling for alteration of controlled Mississippi River flows to help cleanse and protect sensitive marsh areas.

Audubon's efforts continue to gain widespread national and local media coverage. In early June, Senior Government Relations Director Mike Daulton appeared on

CSPAN's Washington Journal to highlight the oil spill's grim impacts on birds and habitat. He also underscored the importance of sound conservation policy like the Migratory Bird Treaty Act to protect vulnerable wildlife. State offices and chapters continue to use media to showcase concerns and response efforts. Dr. Paul Kemp has a recent opinion piece on CNN about the need to use the Mississippi River to help keep oil out of the marshes.

Today, America Online is featuring the much-reported work of Olivia, a young artist who is using her bird paintings to help secure donations to Audubon. We anticipate significant added donations as a result of her efforts and the exciting, high-profile AOL promotion featured on its home page. Enhanced web coverage of the spill and the Audubon response (including the Audubon magazine blog) have already raised nearly \$250,000 in online donations from more than 2,000 individuals. The Volunteer Response Center itself is underwritten with a generous donation from

Chevron and we are talking with other corporate benefactors.

Vote for Audubon Support

Audubon is also in the running for a \$200,000 contribution from the American Express Member's Project. Their Take Part initiative heavily promotes non-profit causes, directing audiences to a web site where they vote for their favorite in each category. The winner in each group gets the donation. Please help Audubon's efforts by visiting www.takepart.com/membersproject/vote

Register. Then vote now and again once-a-week 'til August 21. Once you vote, you'll see the current standings. Right now Audubon is in the lead. So take a moment to vote now. And tell your friends and family too!

Melanie Driscoll
Director of Bird Conservation
National Audubon Society
Baton Rouge, LA



ENROLL NOW!

BRAS Summer "Junior Birder" Class

"Junior Birder" class to be offered by Baton Rouge Audubon this summer! Kids aged 9-16 will learn to identify Louisiana's most commonly seen birds by sight and sound. Jane Patterson will discuss habitats, migration, ecology and class will include a field trip to a local "hot spot" where students will use scopes and binoculars to view birds in the wild! There are 4 class sessions starting

July 10, 2010, ending July 31, 2010 that will meet Saturday 9:00 am - 10:30 am. Most classes will meet in Foster Hall, however for one of the sessions, students will meet off campus (location TBD) and caravan to Sherburne South Farm on July 24, 2010 for the Wood Stork and Wading Bird Event. A parent or guardian must provide transportation and accompany student on field trip. A parent or guardian is welcome to accompany student to all other classes. This class is offered

through the LSU Union Leisure class system (www.lsu.edu/leisureclasses) Register online.

Fee: \$66.00

Member Fee: \$53.00

Contact: Jane Patterson at Education@braudubon.org or 225-278-0667 if you have questions or need additional information.



Donna Dittmann pointing out field guides to use when identifying raptors

What Our Friends Are Doing

July 30 & 31: Feliciana Hummingbird Celebration,
St. Francisville, LA .

Additional information at
www.audubonbirdfest.com or 225-635-6502.

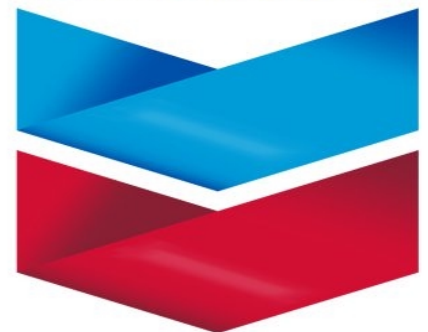
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Keeping your membership current is important!

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 mailing the form below. 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
- # _____ of patches (indicate 1 which is free with BRAS membership; additional patches \$10 each; NAS member patches @ \$10 each; no patch will be sent if there is no indication.)

Name: _____ Ph: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

E-mail: _____

MAIL COMPLETE FORM TO:
Baton Rouge Audubon Society; PO Box 67016; Baton Rouge, LA 70896