

The **BARRED OWL**

Newsletter of the Baton Rouge Audubon Society

Volume XXXIX, Number 2

2nd Quarter, 2012

A BIG Louisiana Year

Dr. Jay Huner's quest to see as many species as possible in 2012

*by Erik I. Johnson
Vice President, BRAS*

Dr. Jay Huner, a retired professor from University of Louisiana at Lafayette, is taking on an epic year-long challenge to see as many birds as possible in the great state of Louisiana in this year of 2012. His goals in doing this Big Louisiana Year is to raise awareness about the importance of protecting habitats and to raise money to support Baton Rouge Audubon Society's mission to protect lands for Louisiana's birds. Dr. Huner expects to see at least 300 different species of birds over these 12 months, perhaps approaching or even surpassing 350 species! We can't wait to hear what he finds! He is not asking for anything in return, except that the birding community shares any exciting bird sightings with him so that he might see it and perhaps offer an occasional place to stay during his travels around the state.

While serving as Director of the Crawfish Research Center at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette for 18 years, his research highlighted the positive interaction between waterbirds and the crawfish and rice agricultural practices in our region. His passion for bird watching, habitat protection, and agrotourism stems from his studies and

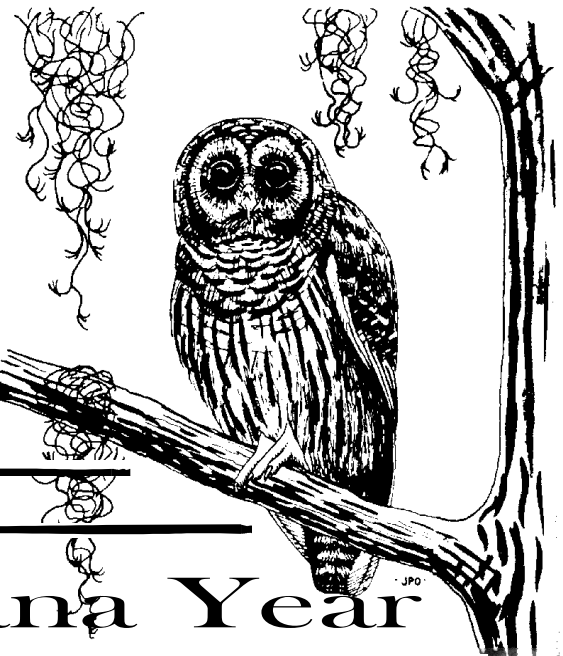
research. To continue this mission, a portion of the funds raised through Dr. Huner's Big Louisiana Year will be donated by Baton Rouge Audubon to help support the Yellow Rails and Rice Festival, which takes place each year in late October. After three years, this festival is becoming an international sensation, highlighting how rice and crawfish agriculture provides important habitat for birds and providing an opportunity for visitors to experience this fascinating landscape by seeing an incredibly high number and diversity of waterbirds, including the secretive Yellow Rail, a species of high conservation concern.

The majority of donation moneys raised through Dr. Huner's Big Louisiana Year will be used by the Baton Rouge Audubon Society to establish a land acquisition fund, which will support our mission to purchase, restore, and protect important bird habitat near Baton Rouge that will be accessible to bird watchers and nature enthusiasts. Purchasing new land for bird conservation will build upon Audubon's tradition and history of land preservation, as highlighted by Baton Rouge Audubon Society's 40-acre Peveto Woods Sanctuary near Johnson's Bayou, LA in Cameron Parish.

As of March 11th, Dr. Huner has recorded a remarkable 224 species, including several that he has never before seen in Louisiana since keeping track in the late 1990's: White-tailed Hawk, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Spotted Towhee, Lark Bunting, and Red Crossbill. He has also recorded a number of additional Louisiana Bird Records Committee "review-list" birds: Burrowing Owl, Anna's Hummingbird, Tropical Kingbird, Say's Phoebe, Green-tailed Towhee, Black-headed Grosbeak, and Scott's Oriole. Dr. Huner humbly admits that he would never have found these rare birds if very generous fellow birders had not reported the birds in the first place. Dr. Huner seems well on his way to the 300 species-mark with the excitement of spring migration about to begin!

Please help support Baton Rouge Audubon Society's Annual Fund-raiser through Dr. Jay Huner's Big Louisiana Year by pledging a dollar amount for each species that he finds in 2012. For example, a \$0.10 per bird pledge would contribute \$30-\$35 for the year. You can track Dr. Jay Huner's progress through the Baton Rouge Audubon society web page:

www.braudubon.org.



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Mark Your Calendars! Upcoming BRAS Monthly Presentations

by Jared Wolfe (BRAS Programs Chair)

BRAS's monthly presentation series proudly serves a unique role in Baton Rouge: we provide our community the opportunity to learn from scientists and bird experts in an entertaining, non-technical and interactive format. Over the past six months we have heard stories from the next generation of young birders, learned about Amazonian bird conservation, the birds of Borneo, and the annual cycle of Louisiana's waterfowl. BRAS selects potential speakers from pools of local experts and funds travel expenses for out-of-town presenters in collaboration with LSU's Museum of Natural Science (LSUMNS) and the School of Renewable Natural Resources. For example, most recently, BRAS has partnered with LSUMNS to provide Dr. Chris Clark, from Yale University, the travel funds necessary to deliver an interactive presentation at the Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center on May 3rd detailing hummingbird courtship displays. Dr. Clark's presentation will feature a number of high definition videos of displaying hummingbirds, detailed descriptions of hummingbird natural history, and associated stories from his field work (see the recent New York Times article about Dr. Clark's work: <http://dotearth.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/09/08/a-hummingbirds-musical-tail/>).

Prior to Dr. Clark's visit in May, BRAS has scheduled two exciting local speakers. On March 29th, 6:15pm at the Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center, former BRAS vice-president Dr. Richard Gibbons will provide the first summary presentation of the Louisiana Winter Bird Atlas. Now in its sixth year, the atlas has received more than 15,000 hours of volunteer effort by the best field observers in Louisiana. The results are impressive with large swaths of Louisiana sampled leading to many surprising discoveries and stories. On April 19th, 6:15pm at the Bluebonnet Nature Center, National Audubon Society volunteer programs manager, Dustin Renaud, will talk about the ecology of birds that nest on Gulf Coast beaches and how Audubon is working to study and protect these birds. With help from volunteers and partner organizations, Dustin works to protect vulnerable nesting birds of conservation concern like Wilson's and Snowy Plovers, Least Terns, and Black Skimmers.

After the upcoming summer hiatus, the fall 2012 monthly presentation series promises to be very exciting. BRAS has worked hard to reach tentative agreements with renowned birders and scientists for upcoming fall and winter presentations that will guarantee another successful year of entertaining and informative programs for the Baton Rouge community.

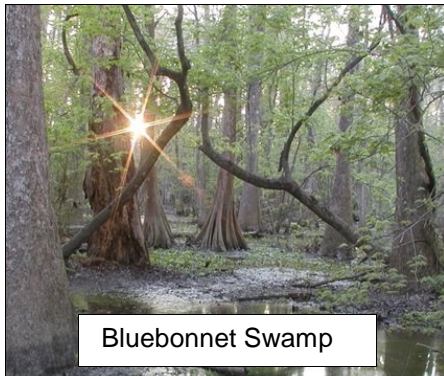
Audubon Coastal Bird Survey

The spring pulse of the Audubon Coastal Bird Survey is from March 20 – May 30. The target survey dates are March 25, April 5, April 15, April 25, May 5, May 15, May 25 plus or minus 3 days. If you would like to conduct one or more surveys on Grand Isle or in Cameron Parish, please contact Dustin Renaud at drenaud@audubon.org.

Determining the Value of Baton Rouge Nature Preserves for Local Bird Communities

by Jared Wolfe
(BRAS Programs Chair)

According to the United Nations, 78% of the Earth's arable land (areas suitable for farming) has been converted to agriculture. In addition to changing wild areas to farmland, dense urban centers continue to encroach upon rural landscapes further limiting available habitat for many bird species. As large tracts of contiguous habitat become scarce, small nature preserves may play an increasingly important role in ensuring the persistence of sensitive bird populations. In central Louisiana, the Recreation and Park Commission for the Parish of East Baton Rouge (BREC) manages several relatively small preserves, or conservation areas, within the city of Baton Rouge which provide habitat for birds as well as venues for local nature enthusiasts to enjoy wild areas without having to leave the capital city.



Bluebonnet Swamp

For example, the Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center is a BREC managed preserve which currently protects 103 acres of Bald Cypress-Tupelo Swamp and adjacent upland forest within the city limits of Baton Rouge. Bluebonnet was originally a small floodplain prior to the construction of Highland Road which served as a supply route for eighteenth century plantations; Highland Road subsequently blocked drainage outlets resulting in the present day swamp. Bluebonnet came un-

der threat of urban development throughout the latter half of the 20th Century when it was purchased by the Nature Conservancy and subsequently adopted by BREC and designated as a conservation area in 1997. Bluebonnet Swamp now represents an isolated patch of protected forest completely surrounded by the dense urban matrix of Baton Rouge.

Because nature preserves like Bluebonnet are virtual islands of habitat within the oceanic sprawl of urban encroachment, the ecological value of such small and isolated preserves have been the subject of much debate since the mid-1970s. Many argue that small nature preserves are comprised of too much interface, or 'edge', between urban sprawl and the interior of the preserve which can negatively impact resident wildlife; associated 'edge effects' include feral cat predation, Brown-headed Cowbird nest parasitism, European Starling nest-cavity competition, invasive species proliferation and food resource instability. Small nature preserves, such as Bluebonnet, may also act as 'ecological traps' where bird populations are perpetually declining towards local extinction only to be rescued by continual dispersal from more productive areas.

To determine the ecological value of Bluebonnet for local bird populations, BRAS has been systematically monitoring birds at the swamp for the past two years. Twice a month, volunteers arrive at Bluebonnet 15 minutes before sunrise, armed with coffee and doughnuts, to erect fifteen large stationary nets (used to safely capture birds) strategically located throughout the swamp. Each session is operated for five hours where captured birds have their age, sex and physiological condition recorded, are marked with a small, uniquely-numbered federally-issued aluminum band

All photos by John Hartgerink

around one leg, and safely released back into the preserve. By continually capturing new, and recapturing previously banded individual birds, volunteers have begun to estimate annual survival and population



Prothonotary Warbler being banded at Bluebonnet

growth for a number of bird species residing within the preserve.

Recently, in partnership with BREC, Bluebonnet volunteer bird banders drafted and submitted a scientific manuscript for peer-review which details the annual survival of six common bird species captured at the swamp. The study also compares our results with regional baseline estimates from the Institute of Bird Populations to determine if Bluebonnet's birds are faring better, worse or the same as counterpart populations throughout Southeastern United States. Our research indicates that annual survival of Bluebonnet's bird community is strikingly similar to regional baseline estimates indicating that the swamp's 103 hectares provides quality habitat to a diversity of species. Surprisingly, only the very common Northern Cardinal exhibited survival esti-

(Continued on page 4)

- HELP SUPPORT -
Dr. Jay Huner's BIG Louisiana Year



Dr. Jay Huner birding the White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area, Vermilion Parish, LA. (SEE STORY, PAGE ONE)

Our Local Bird Communities



Hermit Thrush in mist net at Bluebonnet

(Continued from page 3)

mates slightly lower than regional values which may be explained by some fascinating behavior: it appears that Northern Cardinal populations partake in semiannual movements in and out of Bluebonnet Swamp where numbers peak in the winter and steadily decline throughout the spring and summer. It has become common for individual Cardinals to be captured in the winter multiple times, leave the preserve during the summer months only to be encountered again the following winter. Possibly, Bluebonnet Swamp may act as semiannual refuge for certain species by providing the necessary resources for local populations to persist during winter months when, maybe, food resources within the urban matrix of Baton Rouge become scarce.

BRAS remains committed to continually monitoring Baton Rouge's nature preserves to inform local management decisions, identify sensitive species and to ensure that our common birds remain common. Visit the BRAS website to learn more about the Bluebonnet Bird Monitoring Project: <http://braudubon.org/bluebonnet-swamp-bird-monitoring.php>



Baton Rouge Audubon Society

Home JOIN BRAS Where To Bird Calendar Field Trips Programs Newsletters Links SHOP



Visit www.braudubon.org for the latest information regarding Baton Rouge Audubon news and events!

Bayou Birding Bon Temps!

Good People, Good Birds, Good Times

April in Louisiana is spectacular, really. The spectacle of bird migration is evident in coastal cheniers, rice country mudflats, coastal and inland marshes, and forests low and high. The Bayou Birding Bon Temps is a month-long birding event that encourages new and seasoned birders to explore Louisiana's birding largesse. With several categories to choose from and no registration or fees required, it couldn't be much easier to participate. Simply pick a site from the many Louisiana Birding Trails, Louisiana Wildlife Management Areas, State Parks, or National Wildlife Refuges and go birding. When you're done, enter your checklist to the free eBird website and we'll do the rest. With many categories at the regional and local scale, your chances of winning a Bayou Birding Bon Temps commemorative tile are excellent. *Come on out, the birds are great.*



Dr. Doug Meffert Helps Launch Audubon Louisiana State Office

by Melanie Driscoll

Starting February 27th, Audubon Louisiana emerged as a fully fledged state program of the National Audubon Society's Mississippi Flyway under the leadership of Executive Director and Vice President Dr. Doug Meffert. Doug joins Dr. Paul Kemp, Vice President and Director of Audubon's Louisiana Coastal Initiative, and the other talented staff in Louisiana. Doug has a long history in the state, most recently as Director of Project Development and Associate Professor at Tulane University's Payson Center for International Development, including developing international best practice exchanges for conserving and creating important bird flyway habitats in the Yangtze River Delta, and as the Executive Director of RiverSphere, an initiative to develop a new campus for the university oriented to water resources and renewable energy. Prior to those posts, he was Deputy Director for the Center for Bioenvironmental Research, a joint project of Tulane and Xavier Universities. His broad responsibilities have included extensive fundraising for both operations and capital projects and management of diverse staff and contractors. Doug has served as Tulane's representative on a range of coastal research and policy committees, including the Framework Development Team for Louisiana's 2012 Coastal Master Plan, and the Deepwater Horizon Science and Engineering Review Team. As a teacher, Doug focuses on sustainable development and climate

change. He has run his own consulting firm specializing in urban park habitat creation for birding and other recreational services, coastal adaptation, disaster recovery and emergency preparedness. A Loeb Fellow at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design as well as a Lincoln Fellow at the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, Doug holds MBA



and bachelor of engineering degrees from Tulane, and a Ph.D. in environmental science and engineering from UCLA. He is widely published and has been a sought-after international speaker. Dr. Meffert will join a strong Louisiana team focused on large scale coastal and gulf restoration as part of the Mississippi River Delta Restoration initiative and the protection of many globally significant Important Bird Areas. Doug is eager to be an active member of the Baton Rouge Audubon Society and enhance the already strong collaborations between BRAS and Audubon Louisiana on our Important Bird Areas and other important programs.

Peveto Woods Sanctuary Work Day

Saturday, March 24

Spring is here and migration has begun. Peveto Woods Sanctuary is benefiting from the generous rains of winter and early spring. Hopefully the drought of last summer will not be repeated, and we can look forward to green trees and a lush understory. Our first work day is scheduled for Saturday, March 24th, to do a little cleaning, small projects, and the first trail cutting of the sanctuary. Anyone interested in helping is invited to join us. Migration will be well underway by then, and there is the possibility of migrants entertaining us while we work. I have a camp rented in Little Florida for Friday and Saturday night, so if you wish come down early and/or stay late, you will have a place to roll out your sleeping bag.

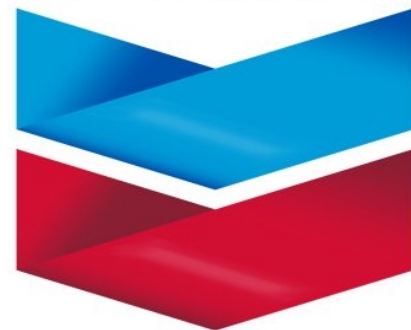
If you have questions or wish to join us, please send me an e-mail, or phone call.

Thanks,
Dave Patton
Sanctuary Chairman
Baton Rouge Audubon Society
cell 337 298-8447, wdpatton@cox.net



Baton Rouge Audubon thanks

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our education programs!



Bald Eagles Nesting in Baton Rouge

by Jane Patterson

For the past few years, we've been seeing Bald Eagles on a regular basis around the downtown lakes and the river near Baton Rouge. I had speculated to several people that they might be nesting in this area since we were seeing them in the winter and early spring when they are known to nest in Louisiana. There were rumors of nests in the area -- some folks recalled seeing a nest in years past near the Plaquemine ferry. But all the speculating and discussing led to nothing until just a bit over a month ago. The manager of BREC's Farr Park just south of LSU was startled to see a Bald Eagle bathing in a puddle on the property. Shortly after they discovered that a pair of eagles had nested in a pecan tree in the middle of their cross-country equine course! Everyone was very excited but wanted to proceed cautiously to afford the eagle pair with as much privacy and protection as they'd need to be successful. The discovery was kept under wraps for a few weeks, then announced to the birding community with a request that we help steward the eagles in their nesting process. Last week, the announce-

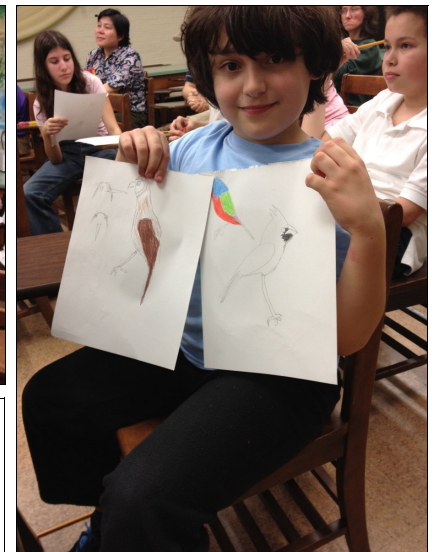
ment of the nest was made public. Unfortunately, reports from many nest watchers seem to indicate that the pair of eagles was not successful in rearing young this year. The adults are absent from the nest for long periods, which they would not do if there were eggs or chicks to guard, until the chicks were large and clearly visible. More speculation: perhaps this is a young pair of eagles who are inexperienced and haven't quite figured out the whole family thing. The good news is that it is very likely that this pair will return next fall to this nest to try again. If you'd like to visit the site, an unobstructed view and the best

vantage point year-round is available from the levee (marker #190). This location can be accessed by walking/biking down the bike trail head (path leading from the RV parking area to the bike path on the levee). It will lead you to the entrance of Farr Park where you can cross River Road and travel up to and southward along the levee. The distance between the levee viewing point and the nest is approximately 1,000 feet but the nest is easily visible with a scope.

For those that have been following the Ramah eagles, this experienced pair raised one chick this year, and it fledged even earlier than its twin brethren from last year; it first left the nest at the end of February. This nest is a mere 20 miles of Baton Rouge, but there are rumors of other nests even closer...Devil Swamp just north of Baton Rouge, Spanish Lake to the southeast, "somewhere in Livingston parish". We'll see. It's heartening to realize that the recovery of this species so recently endangered is so readily exemplified by our frequent sightings in the middle of downtown Baton Rouge. The sightings may become commonplace but the thrill remains!



KIDS WHO BIRD



Dan Lane, research associate with the LSU Museum of Natural Science, came to instruct the KidsWhoBird club on the finer points of bird illustration.

The kids really got the hang of it!



Upcoming Birding Events

Orleans Audubon Society & CRESCENT BIRD CLUB

Bring binoculars, field guides, bug spray, rain gear, sunscreen and refreshments. Boots and walkie talkies may be useful. Snacks and drinks are recommended. A Wild Louisiana Stamp is required for field trips to LA Wildlife Management Areas. The stamp can be purchased at Walmart, Puglia's Sporting Goods, 1925 Veterans Blvd., 504-837-0291 or directly from the LA Wildlife and Fisheries. For in-depth trip information, see <http://www.jjaudubon.net>.

Birding Trips:

Saturday, April 14

Jean Lafitte National Park,
Led by Wendy Rihner

Saturday, May 5

Big Branch National Wildlife
Refuge, Led by Ed Wallace

Saturday, May 12

Bonnet Carre Spillway,
Led by Chris Brantley

Saturday, May 19

Bogue Chitto National Wildlife Refuge
and Honey Island Swamp, Led by Glenn
Ousset

Programs:

Tuesday, March 20

*"Plants of the Lewis and
Clark Expedition"*

by Wendy Rihner,
Community Church Unitarian
Universalist, 6:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 17

*"Restoration of the Delta and
Its Importance to Birds"*

by David Muth, Community Church Uni-
tarian Universalist, 6:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 15

Banquet

"Galapagos—Wildlife Up Close"

by John Sevenair,
Five Happiness Restaurant,
6:30 p.m.

Bayou Teche Black Bear and Birding Festival

April 20-22, 2012

Location: Franklin, La.

Website: BayouTecheBearFest.org

Bayou Teche Black Bear and Birding Festival is headquartered in downtown Franklin, Louisiana. Organized birding trips, led by knowledgeable biologists from the LSU Chapter of the Wildlife Society, the US Fish and Wildlife Service and other amateur birders, will take birders into the Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge, the Atchafalaya Basin, and numerous other private land holdings in and around St. Mary Parish. The primary focus of the festival is educating the public about the Louisiana black bear and birding opportunities on the Cajun Coast. Traditional events like the Running of the Bears 5K Run/Walk sponsored by the Teche Action Clinic.

The Great Louisiana Bird Fest

April 13-15, 2012

Location: Mandeville/Northshore

Website: northlakenature.org

Main Contact Phone: 985.626.1238

Northlake Nature Center

P O Box 8511

Mandeville LA 70470

The Great Louisiana BirdFest is an annual event of the Northlake Nature Center. It is held each year in the spring when many species are migrating north through Louisiana from Mexico and South America. Our location in southern Louisiana makes this an excellent time of year for birding. The weather is typically warm but not yet hot and the trees are usually leafing out, but still thin enough for improved visibility.

The Grand Isle Migratory Bird Celebration!

April 20-22 Grand Isle Louisiana

See songbirds in oak-hackberry woods, shorebirds and waders on beaches and in the marshes and raptors overhead. Grand Isle is an essential stop for songbirds during their spring and fall migrations across the Gulf of Mexico and is one of the best places in the world to see and study birds up close.

The Grand Isle Sanctuary Group invites you to join our Spring Celebration.

- *Birdwatching tours
- *Rich island history
- *Bird art and bird crafts
- *Binoculars and field guides
- *Fun for families with children

*Free videos

*Free colorful bird publications

*T-shirts, posters, and hats

*Bird games and prizes

For more information, visit:

<http://grandisle.btneq.org/>

Spring Louisiana Ornithological Society Meeting

April 27- 28 Cameron Parish, LA

www.losbird.org

Friday night Program:

*Working Wetlands - A Bonanza for Birds
and Birders but Still A Concern for
Crawfish Farmers*

Jay V. Huner, Michael J. Musumeche
and Clinton Jeske

Saturday night program:

Bird Paradise: The Louisiana Coast

Can We Save It? Our State Master Plan
and What it Could Mean for Birds

David Muth, Louisiana State Director,
Mississippi River Delta Restoration Co-
alition, National Wildlife Federation

Neotropical Songbird Day

May 12, 2012 7am - noon

Sherburne Wildlife Mgt Area

Visit the Atchafalaya basin during the peak of our songbird population's breeding season. Experienced guides will be on hand, and the day includes a bird banding demonstration by the LA Dept of Wildlife and Fisheries. Visit Baton Rouge Audubon website at www.braudubon.org for more information.

**BRAS wishes to acknowledge
Downtown Kiwanis Club**

**of Baton Rouge
for their support of our
Education Programs**



Thank you so much!

Baton Rouge Chapter of the National Audubon Society

Baton Rouge Audubon Society

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Keep Your Membership Current!

If your membership expires, you will no longer receive *The Barred Owl*. Well, eventually we 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.

If you would prefer to receive the newsletter in electronic form only rather than a printed version, please email our Membership chair and let her know! Membership@braudubon.org

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.)
- Electronic version **only** of newsletter (do not mail)

Name: _____ Ph: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

E-mail: _____

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