

The **BARRED OWL**

Newsletter of the Baton Rouge Audubon Society

Volume XLVIII, Number 1

1st Quarter, 2021

BugLady's Honey Island Swamp Adventure

by Linda Barber Auld

The very first documented nationwide butterfly survey of North America, fashioned after the Audubon bird count but focused on butterflies, began in 1975. The First Annual Xerces Society Fourth of July Butterfly Count had begun! Frank Fischer, Jr. (known to everyone as Phil) a birding naturalist at heart, decided to start hunting the Pearl River Wildlife Management Area butterfly population. Phil's hand-written list dated July 4, 1975 was submitted with totals of 149 individuals which included 19 species. These surveys report fluctuations of numbers and species to help us better understand and monitor the environment and its delicate ecosystems. The 45 years of compiled survey data provide information that has been used for many different scientific studies. The process of filing completed forms has changed through the years from submitting hand-written reports to now online posting; however, some things have not changed--the thirst for more nature experiences and the desire to share the knowledge.



A beautiful day at Honey Island . . .

On Saturday, September 12, abiding by the Covid-19 rules of social distancing and caravanning, our group met at the front gate eager to explore the trails to see what we could find. The participants list included my two regular trail buddies, Diane Lafferty of Hattiesburg and Mark Ellermann of Slidell, along with three LA Master Naturalists, Stephanie Gross, Michele Mire and Kelly Guilbeau. This is the ladies' first butterfly count plus their first visit to Honey Island Swamp. Also joining us are Laine Farber, *The Nature Nerd*, with her friend, Vincent Ngo. We began searching the flowers mingled in the tall grass to spot skippers. Luckily, no mowing had been done so the *Verbena ridgida*, *bidens*, and morning glory vines growing along the roadsides and in the open meadow were inviting 15 species of hungry butterflies to sip a nectar snack. The population of Ocola, also called the Longwing Skipper, explodes this time of year and they can be seen in great numbers. "What are these called?" asked Michele. "That's a Clouded Skipper and this one is a Whirlabout! Their caterpillars both

eat grasses," I replied. A Gulf Fritillary was catching some sun while perched atop the Johnson grass stalk. The males are bright orange but the females are more dull orange and they are always busy tasting leaves to find their passion flower vine caterpillar host. As we walked further I spied a Pearl Crescent flitting about the ditch where a patch of water primrose, *ludwigia*, was covered in yellow flowers. As we walked along the tree line I noticed the rough leaf dogwood was laden with berries for the birds to eat. Mark chased down a rough green snake and held it so we all could take photos plus *ooh* and *aah* over it. Across the meadow a couple of Cloudless Sulphur butterflies were swirling around the *Cassia obtusifolia* plants growing at the base of the levee. We

(Continued on page 6)

Great Back Yard Bird Count

If you missed the Great Christmas Bird Count, you could still do your part in helping scientists from around the world collect data on birds, and you don't even have to leave your yard.

All you need is a pair of binoculars and a comfortable place to sit.

The Great Backyard Bird Count will take place February 12 through 15. It's a fun, free, and easy event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of bird populations.

Participants are asked to count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or longer) on one or more days of the four-day event and report their sightings online at birdcount.org. You can participate from your backyard, or wherever you may happen to be.

Using eBird, a computer or phone App, it is one of the world's largest nature databases with more than 100 million bird sightings contributed each year and used by professionals for science and conservation by citizen scientists.



Purple Finch and Chipping Sparrow

The count can help conservationists detect long-term trends in bird populations. Some species, including several winter finches, explode in populations in certain years (known as irruption). Other species change migration paths or dates due to weather.

Wild Birds Unlimited Nature Shop, is a sponsor of the bird count. Baton Rouge WBU co-owner Gina Periou said having the national chain sponsor the GBBC makes sense, since the goal of the retail store is to promote backyard birding by offering supplies for feeding and observing birds, including feeders, baths and binoculars.

"We can certainly help someone enhance their backyard area to bring the birds in for counting," she said.

Katie Percy, avian biologist with Audubon Louisiana and programs chair for BRAS, said that data collected from all counts, Christmas Bird Count, Great Backyard Bird Count, and Breeding Bird Survey, is also crucial for scientists to use to compile data to influence public policy for protecting birds and their habitat.

"Data from these studies are what scientists have largely been what scientists have used to help project how each species range has shifted as a result of climate change and other human impacts," Percy said.



Yellow Rumped Warbler
on mealworm feeder

Our 20/21 election of officers was conducted via email + google form in December 2020.

Our new slate of Officers is as follows:

President: Jane Patterson
Vice President: Debbie Taylor
Secretary: Donna Lafleur
Treasurer: Mark Pethke

Other Board Members:

Conservation: Richard Condrey
Field trips: Dan Mooney
Education: Jane Patterson
Sanctuary: Dave Patton
Membership: Heather Wilson
Programs: Katie Percy
At large: Erik Johnson,
Casey Wright, Marie Varnes

We all want to thank Kimberly Lanka for her tenure as Treasurer and hope that she can now spend all her free time birding!

Winter Hummingbirds 2020

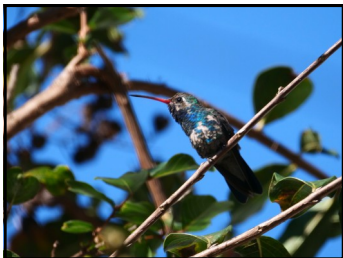
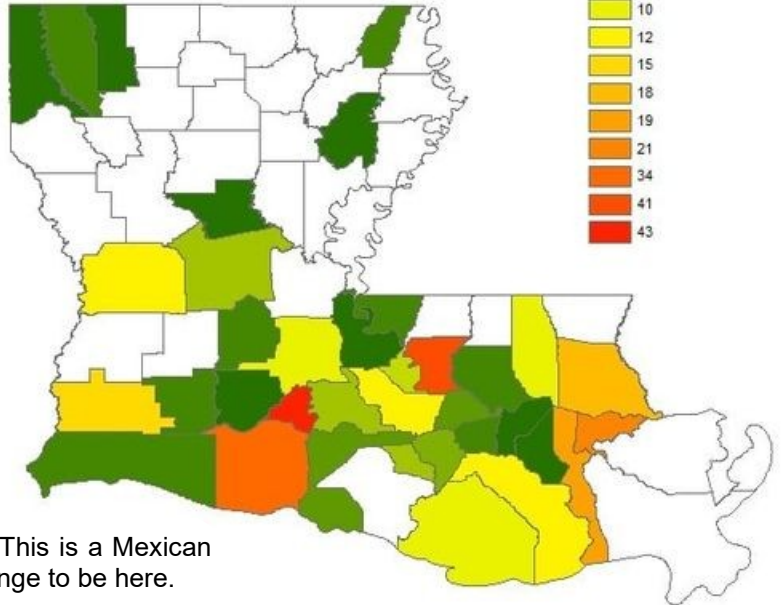
Well, there have been many less than stellar things about 2020, but one positive note is that this is shaping up to be a banner year for winter hummingbirds in Louisiana!

Per Erik Johnson (the Keeper of the List) as of November 25, 2020, there were 307 reports of western and wintering hummingbirds in Louisiana. Remarkably, 35 parishes have reported in, with Lafayette in the lead (43 birds from 20 yards).

Species breakdown:

- 243 Rufous/Allen's (57 confirmed Rufous, 1 confirmed Allen's)
- 27 Black-chinned
- 14 Buff-bellied
- 9 Ruby-throated (these count as "wintering" if present after Nov 15)
- 5 Calliope
- 5 Archilochus sp. (BC/RT)
- 3 Broad-tailed
- 1 Broad-billed

However it's now a month later and we know those numbers are going up! Broad-billed Hummingbirds are very scarce in Louisiana and many years we go without any reports at all. But as of Dec 15th there were 3 reports of Broad-billed hummingbirds in the state, including a first record for Tangipahoa parish. This is a Mexican species of hummingbird, so it's far out of its normal range to be here.



So keep at least one feeder up and keep it clean (change nectar at least once a week) and keep an eye out. For more information about our wintering hummingbirds, you can view a presentation that I gave recently on our new YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-egC8PGjqw&t=24s>

[PHOTO: Immature male Broad-billed Hummingbird at the home of Gail Superbielle in Baton Rouge October 2020]

Email List Change

Update from Jane Patterson

Baton Rouge Audubon Society is converting from Mailchimp as our email management platform to groups.io. If you are a member of our email list, you should have received an email about this conversion. We have found Mailchimp a bit unwieldy and I personally have found that gmail which I use for personal email tends to stick Mailchimp messages into a Promotions folder no matter what I do so I don't see the messages. Hopefully using groups.io will change that and people will miss fewer messages from us!

To be added to the email list, simply send an email with only your name in the body of the email to

subscribe+braudubon@groups.io

If you have any questions, please email me at president@braudubon.org

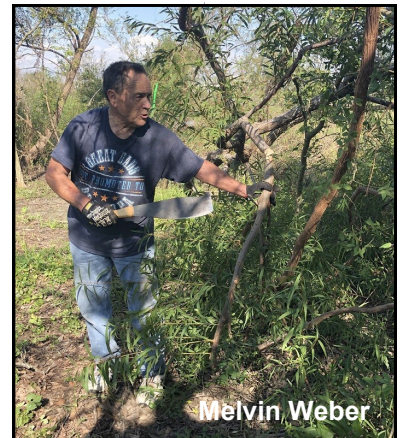
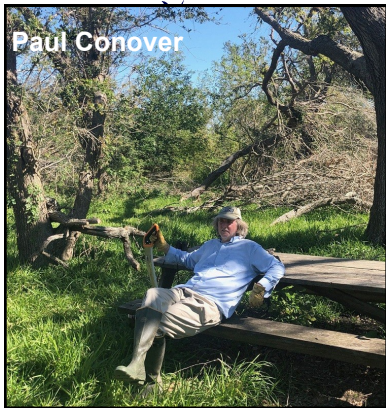
BRAS Now Has A YouTube Channel!

It is our plan to record and publish all of our future programs on this channel so that you can enjoy them whenever you wish. All of our recent programs are already out there! To find it, simply search for "Baton Rouge Audubon Society" in the youtube search bar. Once you're there you can Subscribe to our channel to find it more easily! We hope you enjoy it!



Peveto Woods Sanctuary Work Day 11/14/20

We had great weather and a great turnout to help clear trails of trees and limbs from Hurricane Laura. Lots of chainsaws handled the big stuff, and a crew of clippers worked on cleaning vines from small trees. A couple of beach parties filled bags of trash. Thank you volunteers for making the sanctuary ready for visitors. - *Dave Patton*

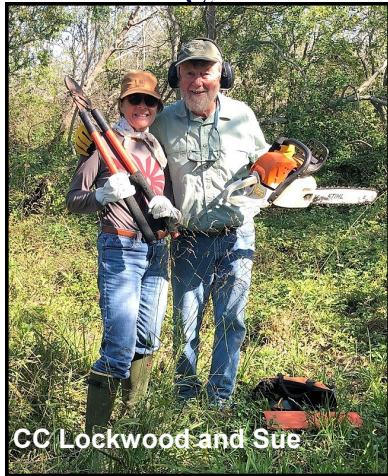


Peveto Woods Sanctuary Work Day 11/14/20



Charlotte Chehotsky

Chenier Cleanup



CC Lockwood and Sue



Ken Eyster



David Booth



Ian Booth



Dale Hamilton, Ken Eyster, and Chet St Romain



James Smithers

BugLady's Honey Island Swamp Adventure

(Continued from page 1)

watched the Cloudless Sulphur lay several eggs down in the leaf folds and upon closer inspection counted three tiny caterpillars that appeared to be freshly hatched.

With lots more territory to cover we drove to the next stop at the boat ramp. On one side of old Hwy.11 is a circular parking lot rimmed with a variety of blooming wildflowers. A beautiful Lacewing Roadside Skipper was posed on a St. John's-wort (*Hypericum*) flower. While attempting a photo, Mark called out, "Linda, it's a Pearly Eye!" Due to its sporadic flights, we weren't able to see it long enough to confirm if it was a Northern, Southern, or Creole so listed it under "Unidentified Pearly Eye species". Nearby along the trail a pretty aquatic milkweed (*Asclepias perennis*) was in bloom alongside striking cardinal flowers (*Lobelia cardinalis*). In the trail's high grass, Mark caught another rough green snake but a baby one this time that Laine asked permission to briefly hold before returning it where he'd found it. As we walked further, we heard the red-bellied woodpecker calling as we watched a pair of Carolina Satyrs bobbing along the weedy assortment and toads hopping over to a hiding spot under a fallen log.

The next stop was the trail lined with willow trees where we usually see Viceroy butterflies. Today we discovered an exciting patch of blooming *pluchea* (also called Stinkweed, Marsh fleabane or Shrubby Camphorweed) that was the pollinator central jackpot! Bees, wasps, flies, butterflies and skippers were all taking turns fueling up on the pink flowers. Lacewing Roadside joined by Yehl, Little Glassywing, and Tawny-Edge skippers were probing for nectar next to colorful syrphid flies that mimic wasps. Across the road in the open meadow Mark caught a pretty ribbon snake and showed it to us then released it.

Update On Our New SANCTUARY

We have decided on a name! The new property will be known as the Baton Rouge Audubon Amite River Wildlife Sanctuary.

We are working to understand the boundaries of our property since it was subdivided from a larger tract. We are going to have to do quite a bit of trail cutting to mark the borders, so if anyone wants to volunteer to help with that, please let me know!

Until we can get clear boundaries marked and get proper insurance in place we don't want to open up to visitors.

Stay tuned as we make progress!

Stephanie, a mycologist, helped us identify many of the mysterious mushrooms sprouted from all of the recent rains. A number of large painted lubber grasshoppers were jumping around and eating assorted plants. The beautiful white buttonbush flowers were attracting an array of bees and wasps.

Next was the Nature Trail area where we discovered a large stand of *desmodium* also known as tick-trefoil, tick clover, or beggar's lice because its seeds stick to your clothes. It is also the host for Long-tailed Skipper caterpillars! During butterfly counts, not only do we count the adult butterflies we see flying around but we also document the immature stages. I showed everyone how to look for the sewn-leaf shelters the caterpillars create as their safe haven. Some of the caterpillars are tiny and some are larger. As they look up at us, their little faces with an orange dot on each cheek are just adorable. Some shelters were empty or filled by the next resident--a spider! Yes, the food chain has been in action. Next I spied sewn leaves atop a tiny oak tree with tender leaves and when I opened it up, I saw a fat Horace Duskywing caterpillar. Both Common Checkered and Tropical Checkered Skippers were maneuvering around the *Sida rhombifolia*, their caterpillar host, when Kelly asked, "How do you tell the difference?" Diane pulled out what she calls her 'cheat sheet' reference guide that showcases her excellent skipper pictures. "A picture is worth a thousand words!" she explained. "Look at the pictures side by side and you can see that the Tropical Checkered Skippers have a large round white spot in the top side of the forewing that the Common Checkered does not have. They can be confusing!"

We crossed Highway 11 again and stopped at the corner we call 'the skipper patch' where we usually see a collection of insects on the *verbena*, *bidens*, and morning glory flower mixture. We waded in the tall grass to view another pollinator bonanza as we attempted to count the wildly active medley of critters flitting about the area. Five Long-tailed Skippers happily zipped about and visited the blossoms as their green wings shimmered in the sunlight. Kelly was surprised to discover almost a dozen wild hog skulls under the oak tree. As she picked up one, a black dung beetle began lumbering around the ground. Kelly then allowed me to take a picture of her holding the skull next to her head for a size comparison as she pretended to send it a kiss! Priceless! Wild hogs are regularly hunted at Honey Island because they are so numerous and very destructive to the environment. Finally, the first swallowtail of the day is sighted and it's a dark phase female Tiger!

Next we headed for the shooting range to hopefully see a Giant Swallowtail. The trifoliolate orange (*Citrus trifoliata* or *Poncirus trifoliata*) growing around that area attracts fe-

(Continued on page 7)

Honey Island Swamp Adventure

(Continued from page 6)

males to lay their eggs. BINGO! Diane spotted a male puddling on the wet spots of the rocky parking lot. It's tradition that our counting group takes a photo at the base of the giant Live Oak that we've named, "The Yoda Tree" because it just looks like a place where Yoda would live.

The last stop is the railroad track across Interstate 59 where several new species for the day can usually be added to the list due to the ravine smorgasbord packed with butterfly nectar and caterpillar host plants. As soon as we pulled up, we could see activity buzzing! At least two dozen Ocola mixed with Clouded, Fiery and Whirlabout Skippers plus a Buckeye were collecting nectar on the bidens flowers. Diane called out, "Monarch!" We climbed down the steep incline to take a closer look and also found a Viceroy. The three main species of Sulphur butterflies (Cloudless, Sleepy Orange and Little Yellow) were searching for cassia plants to lay their eggs. A Sleepy Orange was investigating the stand of sicklepod (*Cassia obtusifolia*) and next to it we found a massive passion flower vine (*Passiflora incarnata*) sporting beautiful blooms all along the stems. At least a dozen bright orange Gulf Fritillary caterpillars in varying sizes were consuming the leaves. These caterpillars' barbs make predators think they could sting, but they don't.

The last Honey Island treasure hunt for year 2020 yielded 211 individuals

and 28 species. Words cannot adequately describe the raw beauty of the Louisiana swamp. You must explore and experience it yourself. Each visit is an adventure because you never know what you will find. Something beautiful and interesting always crosses our path. Stay curious!

Count results: Giant Swallowtail-2, Tiger Swallowtail-2, Common Buckeye-5, Gulf Fritillary-10, Monarch-1, Pearl Crescent-17, Red Admiral-2, Red-spotted Purple-2, Viceroy-1, Cloudless Sulphur-14, Little Sulphur-7, Sleepy Orange-2, Carolina Satyr-49, Unidentified Pearly-Eye-2, Clouded Skipper-8, Common Checkered Skipper-7, Dun Skipper-6, Fiery Skipper-5, Horace Duskywing-2, Lacewing Roadside-5, Little Glasswing-1, Long-tailed Skipper-8, Ocola-37, Southern Broken Dash-2, Tawny-edge Skipper-1, Tropical Checkered-5, Whirlabout-7, Yehl-1.

Total: 211 individuals/28 species



Do we have your email address?

Keep up to date with all of Baton Rouge Audubon Society's events and programs by joining our email list! We won't inundate you with spam, we promise! To be added to the email list, simply send an email with only your name in the body of the email to subscribe+braudubon@groups.io

AND If you would prefer to receive the BRAS "Barred Owl" newsletter in electronic form **ONLY** (rather than the printed version thereby lessening your carbon footprint) please email our Membership chair and let her know! Drop her a line at membership@braudubon.org

Also please follow us on Facebook at
www.facebook.com/BRAudubon

Baton Rouge Audubon

Officers

President

Jane Patterson
president@braudubon.org

Vice-President

Debbie Taylor
vice-president@braudubon.org

Treasurer

Mark Pethke
treasurer@braudubon.org

Secretary

Donna LaFleur
secretary@braudubon.org

Committee Chairs

Conservation

Richard Condrey
conservation@braudubon.org

Education

Jane Patterson
education@braudubon.org

Fieldtrips

Daniel Mooney
fieldtrips@braudubon.org

Hospitality

Debbie Taylor (see VP above)

Membership

Heather Wilson 985/768-9285
membership@braudubon.org

Newsletter

Steve Mumford
newsletter@braudubon.org

Programs

Katie Percy
programs@braudubon.org

Sanctuaries

Dave Patton
sanctuary@braudubon.org

Webmaster

Daniel Patterson
webmaster@braudubon.org

At Large Members...

Erik Johnson
Marie Varnes
Casey Wright

The Barred Owl

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

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

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

Baton Rouge Chapter of the National Audubon Society

Baton Rouge Audubon Society

P.O. Box 67016

Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70896

"Address Service Requested"

Join online at www.braudubon.org/join.php

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Baton Rouge, LA
Permit No. 29

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) and you automatically become a member of both NAS and BRAS. You will receive the quarterly award-winning *Audubon* magazine as well as the quarterly BRAS newsletter, *The Barred Owl*.

BRAS Only Membership

If you want all of your dues to support local conservation and education, join BRAS only. You will NOT receive the *Audubon* magazine. You WILL receive *The Barred Owl* and a free sanctuary patch. You may join on-line at any level by visiting our website www.braudubon.org, or send this form with your check to: BRAS, P.O. Box 67016, BR LA 70896.

Patches!

Extra sanctuary patches or patches for NAS members are \$10 each and can be ordered by using the form to the right. If you are joining BRAS and want a **free** patch, you must put "1" in the blank.

Baton Rouge Audubon Society (BRAS)

Please enroll me as a member of BRAS! Enclosed is my check for:

- \$25 Individual Membership
- \$30 Family Membership
- \$50 Wood Thrush Membership
- \$100 Rose-breasted Grosbeak Membership
- \$250 Louisiana Waterthrush Membership
- \$500 Painted Bunting Membership
- \$1000 Cerulean Warbler Membership
- \$ _____ Additional Contribution
- \$ _____ Total remitted with form

#____ of patches (indicate 1 which is **free** with BRAS membership. Additional patches are \$10 each; NAS member patches @ \$10 each; no patch will be sent if there is no indication.)

- Electronic version of newsletter **only** (do not mail)
- Add me to the BRAS email list (to be informed of field trips, etc.)

Name: _____ Ph: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

E-mail: _____

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