

The **BARRED OWL**

Newsletter of the Baton Rouge Audubon Society

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The Louisiana Big Sit! Summary 2019

by Erik Johnson

An “early fall” (for Louisiana) cold front passed through the region the night before the Big Sit! weekend, bringing north winds, and birds to south Louisiana. As excitement grew to finally get a taste of fall, birders came together to count birds.

The Big Sit! is a zero-mileage, non-competitive, family friendly tailgate party to celebrate the birds of your community. It was initially developed by the New Haven Bird Club of Connecticut, and since 2003 has been hosted and advertised by Bird Watcher’s Digest each year, which draws international participation.

Baton Rouge Audubon Society’s Dan and Laurie Mooney have been conducting a Big Sit! since its conception, first when they lived in Knoxville, TN, and now for many years at the Plaquemine Lock State Historic Site. At Audubon Louisiana, we loved the idea so much that we decided to try to generate a crowd of Big Sit! events across the state. Between our staff and volunteers at Baton Rouge Audubon Society, Orleans Audubon Society and Gulf Coast Bird Club, we pulled together six Big Sit! locations in Louisiana this year.

Louisiana’s public spaces offer a tremendous variety of habitats (and birds) to explore. To highlight this, each of the Big Sit! events took place at unique public space – city parks (New Orleans City Park and Baton Rouge City Park Lake), a parish park (Prien Lake Park in Lake Charles), state parks (Grand Isle State Park and Plaquemine Lock State Historic Site), and a public beach (Holly Beach).

How many species do you think you could find at a single spot within 24 hours? Remember, you can’t move from a 17-ft diameter circle. How do you think you could do in your own backyard? Is 30 possible? More? How do you think the collective of six Big Sit! sites did? Can you guess what six species were seen at all of the six sites?

The Big Sit! tally across all six sites was 139 species, with each site tallying between 39 and 70 species.

(continued on Page Five)



PLANTS FOR BIRDS

On September 22nd, a few hundred plant and bird enthusiasts gathered at White Oak Estates and Gardens in Baton Rouge for the second annual Plants for Birds event. This event was inspired by National Audubon's Plants for Birds movement and aims to educate gardeners and homeowners about the value of gardening with native plants in our yards to support birds and other wildlife.



Dona Weifenbach, Acadiana Native Plant Project speaking about plant propagation

The event was opened by Baton Rouge Audubon Society president Jane Patterson who gave a brief synopsis of the agenda for the day and an overview of the reason for the event. Then we welcomed Wendy Rihner, professor from Delgado Community College of New Orleans who also acts as the Education chairperson for the Orleans Audubon Society. Wendy talked at length about which native plants you can choose for your yard as well as some of the birds that will benefit from those choices. During the extended break, we were treated to delicious jambalaya and hummingbird punch prepared by Chef John Folse's

staff. We also had plenty of time to peruse the plant sales offered by Clegg's Nursery and Harb's Oasis nurseries of Baton Rouge. What great choices they had to offer! I heard that one woman traveled from Lake Charles and filled up her car with new plants!



Katherine Gividen receives expert gardening advice from Ken Bosso with BR Master Gardeners

Experts were on hand from Capital Area Native Plant Society, Master Gardeners of Baton Rouge and Audubon Louisiana to offer one on one advice and suggestions to the attendees. Landscape designer Bill Fontenot was also featured. Bill was there to describe the plants he had recommended to White Oak for their native plant border as well as to sell copies of his excellent book: Native Gardening in the South.

After the break, we resumed our program with Dona Weifenbach from the Acadiana Native Plant Project. Dona told us a bit about the project in Lafayette and Arnaudville and described their facilities and regular events. She then elaborated on propagation of some of the na-

tive plants that provide particular value to pollinators and other wildlife and offered pointers for growing our own, or offered suggestions about where to obtain plants.



Chef John Folse's staff served up delicious jambalaya

Many, many thanks to all of our volunteers who made the day possible. Also, much appreciation to Audubon Louisiana for the sponsorship and to Chef Folse and the folks at White Oak Estates and Gardens for their hospitality. All in all, a very successful day and I think people went away with ideas about how they can improve their landscape with birds and wildlife in mind!



White Oak Estate and Gardens

BRAS Presentation Schedule

November 14: Krista Adams is an great supporter of Purple Martins and will talk about the work she's done in her home area of Livingston Parish as well as offer advice about how you can attract martins to your yard.

December 12: It's time again for our holiday get together! Please join us at 6:30 pm on Dec 12 at the Bluebonnet Swamp Education Building (the same place we do our programs) for a potluck supper. You may bring any type of dish. We generally have in the neighborhood of 30ish people, so you can plan accordingly. Drinks and ice will be provided.

After dinner we will enjoy a presentation by Joelle Finley and Ken Harris of their birding adventure in Madagascar! They said the trip was fabulous, so I'm sure we will all be drooling with envy.

ALSO, if you have plants or seeds that you are able to share, please bring those as well. We will have some Butterfly Pea Vine seeds and some native Hibiscus/Mallow seeds for sure.

For those of you who are interested in participating in the Christmas Bird Count, we will have a short orientation and presentation about the Christmas Bird Count. Our count will be on January 4, 2020 this year. We're not sure if the Area Packets will be ready, but we will update the group with all the information we

have at the time and let you know when the remaining information will be circulated. **EVEN IF YOU'RE NOT AN EXPERIENCED BIRDER, YOU CAN HELP!** All groups need spotters!

Jan 9, 2020: Kelby Ouchley will join us in January to present "*Flora & Fauna of the Civil War* (with an emphasis on avifauna)." Mr. Ouchley worked as a biologist, federal game warden, and manager of National Wildlife Refuges for 30 years, mostly in Louisiana. Since retiring he has continued his efforts to promote conservation ethics and education. Mr. Ouchley has published six books, writes and narrates a weekly natural history radio program, and is an active blogger. You can catch-up on Mr. Ouchley's writings and radio programs by visiting bayou-diversity.com.

Feb 13th: John Flores, an award-winning outdoor writer and photographer, will join us in February to discuss his recent book *Louisiana Birding: Stories on Strategy, Stewardship, and Serendipity*.

Mar 12th: and April 9th: TBD

*Presentations will be held at BREC's Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center's *Education Building* 10533 N. Glenstone Place, Baton Rouge, LA 70810. Attendance is free for all BRAS Members, \$3 at the door for non-BRAS Members and \$2.50 for non-BRAS seniors (price of admission at the Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center).*

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 e-list, simply send a request to president@braudubon.org and ask!

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

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Daniel Mooney
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membership@braudubon.org

Newsletter

Steve Mumford
newsletter@braudubon.org

Programs

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programs@braudubon.org

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sanctuary@braudubon.org

Webmaster

Daniel Patterson
webmaster@braudubon.org

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

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

The Art of Pishing



I have a challenge for you. Go to the closest woods near where you live, maybe the park down the street. Get pretty close to the shrubby edges, within 5 or 6 feet. Now, take a deep breath and make this sound "psshEE-psshEE-psshEE" over and over until you run out of breath. Now do it again. One more time. Anything happening? Did birds suddenly appear to check you out? I bet they did! Making this noise with your mouth is called "pishing" and it loosely approximates the fussing sound of a titmouse or a wren. Basically, you're fooling the birds into think-

ing that an actual titmouse or wren is fussing over something, like a predator, and they are coming in to see what's going on. They're not coming in to help, mind you, they are simply curious and are coming to see what the fuss is about. They may even add their own fussy voices to yours and that might even increase the number of bird that show up! Be quick with your binoculars if you want to view them under these circumstances though...birds know **exactly** where the sound is coming from, so when they pop up and see you there making fussy

noises, it's very likely they'll back off quickly. Just keep pishing...they will probably stick around long enough for you to get a look at them.

It's easy these days to rely on electronic tools to do the work for us. Playing a recording of a fussing titmouse might have a similar effect as pishing...but it's just not quite as easy. This is a tool you can use easily every time you go out birding. And just think, when it works, you can really impress your friends and family with your ability to talk to birds!

So go forth and pish!

PHOTOS: the Louisiana Winter Triad. Pishing in fall and winter in LA will invariably bring in this three species: Yellow-rumped Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler and Ruby-crowned Kinglet



Fall and Winter Bird Magnet : The Sugarberry Tree



by Jane Patterson

This fall I've been trying to pay special attention to the plants that birds are using. I have to say that the Sugarberry tree (*Celtis laevigata*) or Southern Hackberry is one of the winners. In August, some of our earlier migrating warblers, Yellow Warblers were swarming in these trees. At this point, the fruit aren't ripe, so that's not what they're going for. The hackberry family is host to several species of butterfly, including the Hackberry Emperor, the Mourning Cloak and the Question Mark butterflies. Undoubtedly, these warblers were finding tasty caterpillars among the leaves. Later this fall, I've seen Tennessee, Magnolia, Northern Parula, and American Red-

start warblers at the very least, working over the leaves looking for goodies. Now, in October, the migrating thrushes are feasting on the berries. Our own nature dude, Bill Fontenot, reported that the fruit of this tree is a favorite of our avifauna. According to Bill: Within the ecosystems in which they occur, hackberries are major players in providing winter calories for wild birds and mammals. Here in Louisiana, for example, we conducted a 5-year statewide bird frugivory survey in the latter half of the 1990s. Regarding diversity of bird species utilizing the fruits, hackberry ranked numero uno of the 50 species of berry-producing plants observed, serving 27 different bird species. The Southern hackberry has been nicknamed "sugarberry" due to the sweetness of its berries. Actually, the berries hold very little pulp. Each berry is enclosed in a rather thick, sweet-tasting husk, underlain by a thin, orange-colored, insipidly-sweet, slimy layer of pulp surrounding a large seed. Given the miniscule amount of pulp involved in each berry, it follows that birds need to eat lots of hackberries in order to obtain nutritional benefit – mammals, even more. And eat them they do, in vast quantities. Lydia and I have seen both raccoons and fox squirrels as well as birds such as yellow-breasted chats eating un-ripened hackberries as early as August.

For more descriptive info on the value of the Sugarberry, see:
<http://thenaturedude.blogspot.com/2010/12/hackberry-fest.html>
<http://thenaturedude.blogspot.com/2012/01/queen-sugarberry.html>

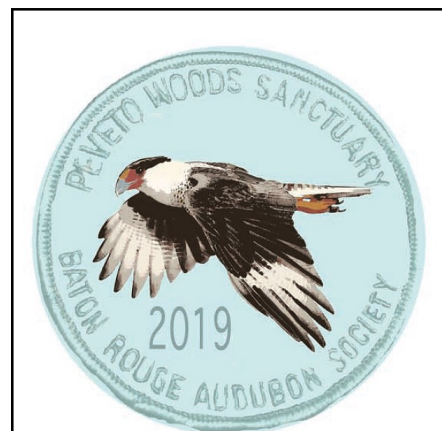
The Big Sit

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A total of 110 people contributed to this effort throughout the day, taking some time to enjoy Louisiana's bird life.

The species recorded at each of the sites were Killdeer, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, White Ibis, Northern Mockingbird, and Northern Cardinal. Even more remarkably, 51 species were recorded at only a single site – birds like Common Nighthawk, American Avocet, American Oystercatcher, Black Skimmer, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Crested Caracara, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Lark Sparrow, Golden-winged Warbler, Pine Warbler, and Painted Bunting were among those treats.

For a full accounting of the bird species seen at each location, please visit:
<https://la.audubon.org/press-release/louisiana-big-sit-summary-2019>



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Baton Rouge Audubon Society

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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 using the form to the right. If you are joining BRAS and want a **free** patch, you must put "1" in the blank.

Baton Rouge Audubon Society (BRAS)

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

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

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

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

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