



L.O.S. News

Newsletter of the Louisiana
Ornithological Society

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LOS FALL MEETING

Hackberry, Louisiana
9 - 10 October, 2026

The wait is over! For those of you who made plans to meet author and birder Kenn Kaufman at the Winter Meeting, you finally get your chance! We hope you can make your way once again to Cameron Parish for our annual Fall Meeting. We have lots of fun planned, and we look forward to seeing you there.

Events for Friday, 9 October 2026:

Hackberry Community Center

986 Main Street, Hackberry, LA 70645 (337) 762-9313

6:00 PM. Registration. Sandwiches provided by Cameron Parish Tourist Commission and Brown's Grocery. Door prizes.

6:30 PM. Welcome Members and Field Trip announcements.

6:45 - 7:30 PM. Social. In lieu of a program, we will focus on visiting and socializing Friday night. Get to know someone new, catch up with old friends, trade phone numbers. Nudge someone into being a field lead or into putting on the mantle of leadership! Talk about someone to nominate for an LOS Award. LOS needs help with all of it.

Business meeting and elections are Friday night.

Events for Saturday, 10 October 2026:

Field trips: Field trip registrations will be made Friday night at the meeting. Please be sure to give your cell phone number and your eBird user name to your trip leader. Remember to top-off your fuel tank before any field trip outing! Access to any Louisiana Wildlife Management area requires a lifetime, Senior or Louisiana Sportsman's license. Yearly license is \$20 or a 5-day license is \$5. <https://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/page/wmas-refuges-and-conservation-areas>

Header photo of Hooded Merganser courtesy Van Remsen.



LOS PUBLICATIONS**LOS News**Editor: **John K. Dillon**183 Dance Rd., Athens, LA 71003;
318-243-2284; merlin183@yahoo.com**Issue submission deadlines:****Spring: 10 February****Fall: 1 August****Winter: 1 November****Journal of Louisiana Ornithology**Editor: **Robert C. Dobbs**105 Beechwood Dr.,
Lafayette, LA 70503
rcdobbs@gmail.com**LBRC Newsletter**

Editor: temporarily open.

LOS WEBSITELOS Webmaster: **Paul E. Conover**zoiseaux@lusfiber.net

The LOS website currently has space for photographs, field notes, identification discussions, and general messages regarding the birding activities of LOS members. Fine quality photographs are solicited for the BIRDS OF LOUISIANA webpage. For information regarding graphical submissions, please send an email.

LBRC WEBSITELBRC Webmaster: **Rob Dobbs**rcdobbs@gmail.com**LOS FACEBOOK**Group name: LOS - Louisiana
Ornithological Society

Facebook Administrators:

John Dillon, Cheryl Huner, & David Booth

(emails on previous page)

LOS Committee ChairsAwards: **James Smithers**jamesmithers.js@gmail.comConservation: **Elise Read**readelise@gmail.comEducation: **Jane Patterson**seejanebird@gmail.comField Trip Series: **Melissa Weaver**melissaweaverbird@gmail.comLBRC: **Rob Dobbs**rcdobbs@gmail.comMembership: **Sarah Williams**sewbirdlos@gmail.com

Hospitality: Open position!

Please volunteer!**Events for Saturday, 10 October 2026:****Hackberry Community Center**

986 Main Street, Hackberry, LA 70645 (337) 762-9313

Field Trips: Please see pages 7 and 8 of this newsletter.**6:00 - 6:30 PM. Registration. \$25.****6:30 - 7:00 PM. Dinner. \$20 per person and only available through pre-registration** (separate from registration fee).

Menu is your choice of Sausage Jambalaya or Chicken Fettuccine, Cajun Corn, Green Beans, Garlic Toast and Banana Pudding with iced tea or water. If you desire a special diet meal you are welcome to bring your own. You may also BYOB.

Deadline for dinner reservation is 30 September.**7:00 - 8:00 PM. Program:****"The Birds that Audubon****Missed: Louisiana****Edition" by Kenn****Kaufman.**

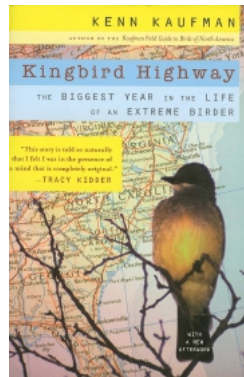
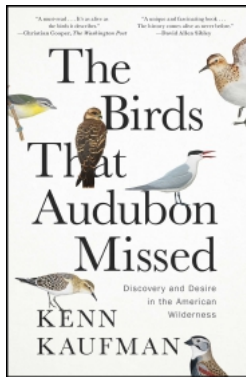
Two centuries ago, a handful of European-American naturalists trekked around eastern North America, competing to find the last few bird species that were still



unknown to science. What was that experience like? When Kenn Kaufman delved into that period in ornithological history, as research for his newest book, he found surprising parallels to birding in our own time. And for John James Audubon, the best-known name of that era, time spent in Louisiana was essential to his success. In this program, Kenn will celebrate discovery and rediscovery, the lure of the unknown, and the endless power of birds to delight and amaze us.

Kenn Kaufman burst onto the birding scene as a teenager in the 1970s, hitch-hiking all over North America in pursuit of birds, an adventure later chronicled in his cult-classic book, *Kingbird Highway*. After several years as a professional bird tour leader, he transitioned to a career as a writer, editor, and illustrator. Most of his energy currently goes into book projects and painting bird portraits. His 14 books include his latest, *The Birds that Audubon Missed*, published in May 2024. Kenn is a field editor for The National Audubon Society, a Fellow of the American Ornithological Society, and the only person to have received the ABA's lifetime achievement award twice.

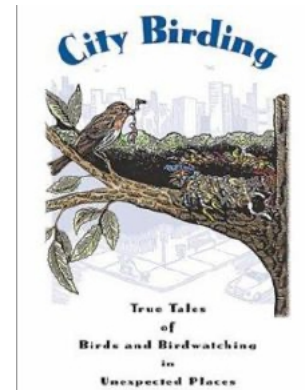
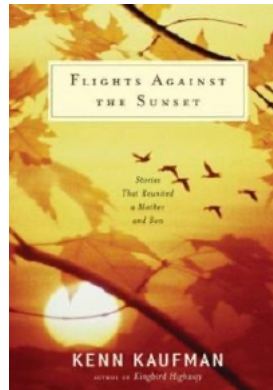
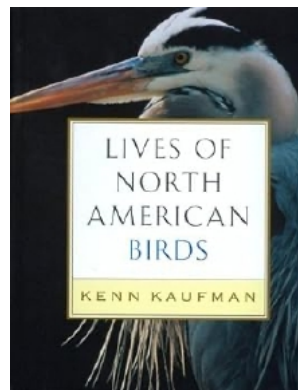




You may know these.



Or these.



Or maybe these.



Your LOS President's Message

I know I say this every newsletter, but somehow fall migration is already here. It feels like just yesterday we were wrapping up spring migration, and now the first shorebirds are already making their way back through Louisiana. Before long, every patch of exposed shoreline has the potential to hold something interesting. It's a reminder that, even though the calendar still says summer, the birds are already on the move.



I've always had a soft spot for fall migration. Spring gets all the attention, but fall rewards patience. Instead of one big wave, we get months of movement. One weekend you're sorting through shorebirds, the next you're watching the first waves of warblers arrive, and before you know it, sparrows are keeping you honest. Every trip into the field feels a little different, and that's part of what keeps me coming back.

I'm also excited about our upcoming Fall Meeting. We are incredibly fortunate to welcome Kenn Kaufman as our keynote speaker. I'm sure many of you have spent countless hours with Kenn's field guides, but it was his book *Kingbird Highway* that really left a lasting impression on me. Reading about his journey as a young birder chasing birds across the country reminded me that birding is as much about curiosity, passion, and the people you meet along the way as it is about the birds themselves. That book has inspired me in my own birding journey, so having the opportunity to hear Kenn speak is something I'm especially looking forward to. I hope you'll make plans to join us. I have no doubt it will be a weekend to remember.

Speaking of the Fall Meeting, don't forget to check out the field trips and other events listed throughout this newsletter. Whether you're a longtime member or attending your first LOS event, I encourage you to come out and join us. Some of the best parts of these weekends aren't just the birds, they're the conversations in passing, sharing with others what you've seen, and getting to spend time with people who understand why finding one exciting bird can make the whole weekend.



As always, thank you for making the Louisiana Ornithological Society what it is. This organization only works because of the people who volunteer, lead trips, organize meetings, and show up with a willingness to share their time and knowledge. If you have an idea for a field trip, a program, or another way to get involved, we'd love to hear it. The best ideas usually start with someone simply saying, "What if...?"

This will be my last President's Message. It's truly been a pleasure leading this organization alongside my exceptional board members. You'll still be seeing plenty of me, and I look forward to being an attendee to future LOS meetings. For now, get out there and start dusting off your shorebird identification skills. I'll see you in October.

Happy birding,

James Smithers

LOS President



Please, please extend your warmest thanks to James for his service to LOS as President, as well as David Booth who will be ending his service as Past-President and Harriett Pooler is stepping down from the LOS Board due to term limits. If you would like to serve LOS like these fine folks, please let us know!



2026 Fall Meeting Lodging Details

The LOS room block at the MainStay Suites in Hackberry for the Fall Meeting is **sold out**. Rooms may still be available there at standard rates, or through AAA, AARP, senior, or other discounts. The direct line to the hotel to inquire is 337-762-3128 or 337-205-5486. Given the hotel's agreement with local LNG companies, LOS is unable to garner any more rooms in our room block.

For your convenience, LOS has made a second block of 25 rooms (10 single king, 15 double queen) at the **DoubleTree by Hilton Sulphur/Lake Charles**, 330 Arena Road in Sulphur, Louisiana, about 25 minutes north of Hackberry at I-10 exit 20. These rooms are available for \$139.00 per night plus taxes, and may be reserved by calling the hotel directly at **337-527-0858 (dial 0 for front desk)** and asking for the Louisiana Ornithological Society rate. If you'd like to come a day early or stay a day later, this rate is also good Thursday night and Sunday night. This block has a cutoff date of **September 25, 2026**. There are also several nice hotels available near Lake Charles as well as home rental options on VRBO and AirBNB in Cameron and Holly Beach.



Please also check out LOS's "Eat Like a Birder" Louisiana food guide on our website. The direct link for the Cameron Parish area is http://www.losbird.org/Food_Cameron.php and is conveniently divided into the West side and East side. The link to all other LOS-recommended restaurants, dives, food trucks, diners, cafes, bistros, gas station fare, and holes in the wall may be found here: <http://www.losbird.org/Eat Like a Birder.php>

The LOS Field Trip Series

LOS Members can sign-up for trips by sending an email request to: melissaweaverbird@gmail.com. Trip registrations will be on a first-received email basis; *Melissa will confirm your registration, so if you don't hear back then check the spelling of her email address.* The trip leader will contact you before the trip to review details. If you register and are a no-show then you will not be allowed to register in the future. Please make sure you cancel at least 24 hours in advance so that your space may be filled by someone on the Wait List. Also, please do not bring unregistered guests. Access to any Louisiana Wildlife Management Area (WMA) requires a Lifetime, Senior, or Louisiana Sportsman's license. People 17 and under do not require a permit. The yearly license is \$20, or a five-day license is \$5: <https://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/page/wmas-refuges-and-conservation-areas>. Watch the LOS Website for additional offerings, changes to listed trips, or pop-up trips. If you would like to lead a LOS field trip, or suggest a destination for a field trip, then email Melissa.

September 2026



Fall Flycatchers with Matt Conn, Erik Johnson, and Olivia Butler. Saturday, 5 September. Join Matt, Erik, and Olivia on Matt's Environmental Reclamation Property in Iberia Parish for a half-day trip. Please meet at 6:30am at Dago's Grocery and Gas Station, 3902 Darnall Road, New Iberia, to caravan to the location. The property is 76 acres that includes habitat for wading birds, forest passerines, and many resident species. Emphasis will be on finding, observing, and learning to identify Empidonax genus Flycatchers. **Maximum of 12 participants. Sign-up begins Sunday, 23 August at 8:00am by emailing Melissa Weaver at melissaweaverbird@gmail.com.**



Fall migrants in SWLA with James Smithers and Seth Blich. Saturday, 12 September, 2026. Please meet in the parking lot of Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuge Visitors Center no later than 6:45am. We will be birding the east side of Cameron parish in hopes of finding Empidonax flycatchers and September migrant warblers including Mourning and Canada Warblers. We will make our way to the coast and bird several spots including Oak Grove Sanctuary, Willow Island, and Hollister Chenier (pending permission). Bugs can be unpredictable in September so please dress with long pants and have a long sleeved shirt available. It would also be good to bring a bug net to wear over your head in case it is buggy. Lunch options on the east side include Anchors Up Grill and Darla K Food Mart. I will have water available for the group. If the east side is not producing birds for us we may venture to the west side of Cameron Parish. The toll to take the ferry over is \$1.00 if we decide to go that route. **Maximum of 10 participants. Sign-up begins Sunday, 30 August at 8:00am by emailing Melissa Weaver at melissaweaverbird@gmail.com.**

October 2026



LOS Fall Meeting Field Trips. 10 October, 2026.

East side-only trip with LOS President James Smithers. Please meet in the parking lot of the Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuge Visitor's Center (about 2 miles north of Pintail Wildlife Drive) at 7:15AM. We will bird several good spots like Cameron Prairie NWR, Rockefeller Refuge, Willow Island, Broussard Beach and Rutherford Beach/Road, cross the ferry (westbound fee is \$1.00 per vehicle), and bird a few locations on the West side like Holly Beach area and Peveto Woods. **Maximum of 15 participants. Sign-up will be during the Friday night meeting.**



West side-only trip - Trip Leader is LOS Vice-President Paul Schaub. Please meet in the parking lot of the MainStay Suites Hackberry Sportsman's Lodge by no later than 6:45AM. We will bird several locations all on the west side of Calcasieu Ship Channel, including as much of the Sabine NWR (Blue Goose Trail, Wetland Walkway, etc.) as may be open, Peveto Woods, the Holly Beach area, Deep Bayou Road, and other locations. Bathrooms available along the route. **Maximum of 15 participants. Sign-up will be during the Friday night meeting.**

 **Looking for Rails in Rice Country with David Booth and Kathy Rhodes.** Friday, October 23, 2026. We will attend the cutting of private rice fields in Jefferson Davis Parish looking for rails, especially the Yellow Rail, LeConte's Sparrow and uncommon species. Rice cutting does not begin until 10am at the earliest as the rice has to be dry. The exact location will not be disclosed until the morning of the event. Be prepared with boots, hats, bug spray, snacks, water, and anything else you may need in the field. In case of rain, October 24th is reserved as a backup date. . A signed liability waiver is required. **Maximum of 20 participants. Sign-up begins Friday, 9 October at 8:00am by emailing Melissa Weaver at melissaweaverbird@gmail.com.**

November 2026

 **Piney Woods Birding in Kisatchie National Forest with Diana Alvarez and Cheryl Huner.** Monday, 2 November, 2026. This field trip takes us into the heart of Kisatchie National Forest in Vernon Parish and its piney woods to find wintering sparrows, woodpeckers, nuthatches, owls, and whatever else is there. Please meet at 7:30am at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1117 Rose Lee Lane in Leesville to carpool for this half-day of birding. Bring birding necessities including water and snacks. **Maximum of 8 participants. Sign-up begins Monday, 19 October at 8:00am by emailing Melissa Weaver at melissaweaverbird@gmail.com.**

 **Red River National Wildlife Refuge: Yates Tract with Caleb Persia.** Saturday, 7 November. The Red River National Wildlife Refuge - Yates Tract in Red River Parish is a rice farm with well managed moist-soil units offering great views of wintering shorebirds and waterfowl. Bring your boots and a scope if you have one! No bathrooms or water are present on site so come prepared. Please meet in the front parking lot at 8:00am: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/MbLjFmPFDXMPDdJ38> **Maximum of 12 participants. Sign-up begins Saturday, 19 September at 8:00am by emailing Melissa Weaver at melissaweaverbird@gmail.com.**

 **Kennedy Rice Farm with Arthur Liles.** Sunday, November 8. Kennedy Rice Farm has 20,000+ acres that contains rice fields and reservoirs and is located on LA HWY 15, 9.4 miles south of US 165/ LA15 junction in Monroe, LA. Please meet by 8:00am at second driveway on the right past grain bins. Potential great views of waterfowl, raptors, and shorebirds. Bring boots and a scope if you have one as well as water and snacks. **Maximum participants: 12. Sign-up begins Monday, 19 October at 8:00am by emailing Melissa Weaver at melissaweaverbird@gmail.com.**

Please thank our field trip leaders and LOS Board Members and officers who develop our LOS field trips!! We love offering field trips to our members, and what's a birding club if you don't go birding??

Continued LOS News Series!

The History of LOS Involvement in Youth Birding!

The Minden High School Nature Club - by John Dillon

Most of you know me as a birder and as LOS News Editor and former LOS President. Or as one of the grumpy Facebook Administrators who removes your post from the LOS Facebook page. But I am an educator first and always will be. This is my 23rd year in public education, my 21st at Minden High School in Webster Parish. And an immeasurable part of what makes me the happiest as a teacher is the assistance offered annually by LOS and other similar organizations.

Each year, LOS donates \$250 to the Minden High School Nature Club that I founded 20 years ago this year. Along with similar donations from Baton Rouge Audubon, Orleans Audubon, the Shreveport Bird Studygroup, and others, and especially along with donations from caring individuals, many of whom are members of those groups, dozens of students every year are able to learn from my favorite teacher of all time: Mother Nature. I hope you'll enjoy reading about what these kids have done just a fraction as much as I've enjoyed watching them do it for 20 years.

Toward the end of my first year teaching in Webster Parish, I was driving by another high school and mourned its lack of landscaping, noticing that the only natural features were grass and a nearby pine plantation. No shrubs, no flowers, no shade trees. I thought, "That's so sad. Somebody ought to take those kids hiking in the woods." Then I thought, "Well, I could do that." And by the beginning of my second school year here, I had been given permission to start the Minden High School Nature Club. We had about 20 members that year in a high school of over 800 students. It's grown to have around 50 members every year with a student population of below 700 now.

The Nature Club is not strictly a birding club. In fact, we usually have at least one member a year who's afraid of birds, although that just encourages me to make bird noises around them. But because of my connections to birders and bird biologists in and out of state, we do an awful lot of bird-related activities every year.

Our first event of the year for 20 years now is always a back-to-school party and night hike at Caney Lakes Recreation Area, part of Kisatchie National Forest, on the north side of Minden. I get all the kids pizza, drinks, and snacks, we talk about the club's events for the year, and then a few chaperones help out as I take the kids on a night hike with no flashlights allowed. It takes a while for them to get the nervous giggles out of their systems while we're walking single file down a trail in total darkness, especially when they realize I've left them and walked way faster than they had imagined I'd go. But when I get them settled down, I tell them about the five regularly occurring owl species in the state. And then I call in Barred Owls and Eastern Screech-Owls. By then your natural night vision has kicked in as much as it's going to, and even in the dim light under 110-foot pine trees, I can see their jaws drop open in awe as they forget that cell phones and TikTok exist or that some of them had told me a few days before that they didn't like nature and just joined because a friend made them. And the next thing they ask is, "Mr. Dillon, when is the next event?"

For most of these 20 years, I have relied on local Master Falconer Francie Forrester and her magical Harris's Hawks, Nova and Tirza, to mesmerize the kids. We take up to eight kids on a falconry hunt for squirrels or



sometimes rabbit in a spot staked out by Francie, who is always more spry than I am despite her being longer in the tooth. Nova and Tirza are no longer spring chickens, either. Nova is now 30 years old and getting a bit peevish. Tirza is still in her prime in her early twenties. And even if we strike out on squirrels for the day, Francie indulges me when I ask if we can fly one of the birds to each kid for photos. There's nothing I can teach in any of my classes that reproduces the complete joy on their faces when a Harris's Hawk is sitting on their hand.



We also go on an annual four-day trip to Petit Jean State Park in Arkansas's Ouachita Mountains. For many years, we did a four-day trip to Cameron Parish, but the logistics of driving an hour between locations has finally worn me down. We've done four-day trips to Baton Rouge and Hot Springs National Park, as well, and received guided tours of the LSU MNS a couple times. Last year, we took some of the kids to New Orleans for the first time, with the highlight being a late-night vampire walking tour of the French Quarter. Then there are smaller events like attending a "Star Party" at the Worley Observatory in Shreveport hosted by the Shreveport Astronomical Society or taking a trip to Briarwood Caroline Dormon Nature Preserve followed by the Natchitoches Christmas Festival and fireworks. During our trips to the Caldwell Zoo in Tyler, Texas, we've paid for special access to go inside the penguin exhibit and the Louisiana Black Bear exhibit. We've gone fishing, gone canoeing, done two rail drags at Yates Tract (and snagged two Yellow Rails!), gone bird banding with Erik Johnson and crew and even the late Jim Ingold, learned about wildlife photography, and had several other adventures.

For our 20th anniversary year, I've added a few new events. We'll be volunteering with the Shreveport Humane Society, going herping with Brad "Bones" Gloriosio in Kisatchie, learning from the members of LA Tech's Wilderness Society about their Eastern Bluebird nest box project, watching fall hummingbird migration at my house and playing with my neighbor's horses, and making a four-day trip to Lafayette for hummingbird banding, a visit to the National Wetlands Research Center, indoor rock climbing, and a special trip to see some five-foot tall white birds nearby. And in addition to that and our usual four-day trip to Petit Jean, we're also doing another four-day trip to Hot Springs National Park, Crater of Diamonds State Park, and hiking in the Ouachita Mountains.

So, as you can see, these kids aren't in a birding club, but they get plenty exposure to it. And exposure to bird biologists. Which brings me to my favorite event the club has ever done. In March of 2018, we took 12 club members on the Southwest LA trip and met up with Erik Johnson and his field tech and a few other young bird biologists to help with a rail drag for Erik's Black Rail monitoring project he was doing with Audubon. This involved two passes through elevated salt marsh just a few hundred yards from the Gulf. It also involved walking through and on top of huge clumps of Spartina grass and through small copses of Salt Bush, all at night while pulling a 50-foot weighted drag line, wearing headlamps, carrying nets, and while trying not to breathe in mosquitoes. It was as if Erik had thought long and hard how to prevent teenagers from ever wanting to be a bird biologist! After the first grueling pass, 9 of the 12 students informed me they were not doing the second pass. But the three remaining said, "Mr. Dillon, we want to see you get a Black Rail, and we want to help you do it." Well, we got two Black Rails...at the same time....side by side. We also got five Yellow Rails.

Then I got a phone call from Seabird McKeon, who was at the time a research scientist with the Smithsonian Marine Science Network and a friend on Facebook who had read my post about these kids helping to find Black Rails for banding. Sea was blown away and asked to interview me for his podcast, so I asked if he could also interview my Club President, Janna, and he happily agreed. In November, I took four other kids down for rails, and we had two close calls, but ultimately missed them in two nights of drags. Then I contacted Ted Floyd, editor of the ABA's "Birding Magazine," and asked to write an article about the club's experiences helping with Erik's project, and Ted was completely encouraging, and we published the article "Saving Rails, Serving Kids" in the first issue of "Birding" in 2019. I couldn't have been more proud of the kids.



Now it's been 20 years. Thousands of miles on the road, a few hundred members, dozens of supporters, and only one trip to the ER in an ambulance. Every year, our annual spring Bird-a-thon raises about \$6000 for the club to use for the next year, and it's put to good use. Very good use. A former student who now lives in Oregon and is now 36 texted yesterday about Wild Turkeys roosting in her yard. A young mom and nurse, now 34, sent me a video once when she was an undergrad of her calling to a Barred Owl. A young officer in the Army texted me a couple weeks ago to ask the name of the location where I took him rock climbing in Arkansas so he could go back. A former member who's an offshore rig worker sends me photos of all the birds he sees that land on the rig. These things happen all the time.

So, the club doesn't often make birders. But it does make life-long conservationists. It creates awareness, both of the majesty and miraculousness of nature and of the threats against it. LOS has persisted since 1947 because of a shared bond of its members' love of nature. The MHS Nature Club has persisted for 20 years for the same reason. When LOS or another group or an individual donor sends \$50 or \$500, they are paying for that persistence. They're paying for the creation and cultivation of these kids' love of nature. And when I say that none of this would have been possible without that support, I mean it entirely literally. I myself like to take very little credit. All I really do is think of ideas for events and pull the logistical strings. The donations do the real work. The kids do the real work. But a quiet sunrise over the Arkansas River seen from the top of Petit Jean Mountain on a cool November morning puts all that work into perspective.

To LOS and to so many of you who have supported us, thank you so much. It's impossible for me to explain what your supports means to me.



Let's welcome our Newest LOS Members!

Jesse Boone, Roswell, GA

Chad, Carrie, Anna & Caroline Cary, Lake Charles, LA

Christopher and Lisa Castle, Lake Charles, LA

Kelli and Nikki Holland, Bossier City, LA

Emily, Matthew, David & Frances Lognion, Lake Charles, LA

Anne Rheams, Abita Springs, LA

Lynn Risser and Dave Kuhne, Fayetteville, AR

Charles Self, Lake Charles, LA

Paul Vetter, Denham Springs, LA

Zachary, Jessica, and Alexander Veuleman, Natchitoches, LA

Jill and Cole Walker, Sulphur, LA

Jack Williams, Chicago, IL

Dawn Young, Houston, TX

**We're so thankful for you!
Come join us at Fall Meeting or
on a field trip!**



“Looking for the Next 10”

by Jack Rogers

With the documentation of a Violet-green Swallow in Shreveport in October of 2025, the Louisiana bird list currently sits at 498 species. As we approach the milestone of 500 species (this would make Louisiana only the ~13th state to reach 500), there are a number of species that should be on birders' radars. Consider this a legal documentation of my right to say “I told you so” once any one of these species occurs in the state.

1., 2., and 3. Long-billed Thrasher, Green Jay, and Clay-colored Thrush - I'll lump

my first 3 picks into one portion, as my thinking here is generally the same for this entire selection. These 3 species may be most well-known from Lower Rio Grande Valley birding sites like Estero Llano or Santa Ana, but are quickly expanding north along the Texas coast and into the Edward's Plateau. In June of 2026, a Green Jay was documented attending a feeder near Beaumont, Texas – only about 9 miles from the Louisiana border. A Long-billed Thrasher attempted to hybridize with a Brown Thrasher on Rice University's campus in Houston (93 miles from Louisiana) in the summer of 2026. I suspect this species has actually occurred in Louisiana before – but with their similar plumage, indistinguishable voice, and sneaky behavior, it was likely passed off as a Brown Thrasher or never detected at all. Clay-colored Thrushes are rocketing north in the United States; not documented breeding in the United States until 1986, the species now regularly breeds as far north as Corpus Christi, and has been documented about 150 miles away from the Louisiana border in Matagorda County, Texas.



As the climate continues to warm, these tropical and subtropical species will continue to slowly creep north. Woody vegetation encroachment in the former Gulf Coastal Plain means that the grasslands that formerly acted as a barrier to movement for these short-distance dispersers no longer exists. The American admiration of the Live Oak and the constant planting of the species in neighborhoods may act as a superhighway for Green Jays and Clay-colored Thrushes – 2 species that fill the oak-covered neighborhoods of the

LRGV. Unsurprisingly, these three species will likely show up somewhere in southwestern Louisiana; probably a neighborhood with lots of Live Oaks in Lake Charles, for Green Jay and Clay-colored Thrush. Long-billed Thrasher could really show up anywhere; a brush pile in Peveto Woods, a thicket of Yaupon Holly in rice country somewhere. Importantly, a very sharp, checking-every-box-type birder will be the first to document this species in Louisiana!



4. Elegant Tern - So overdue it would be too easy to put at the top of this list. At this point, there must be some kind of voodoo magic that allows Elegant Terns to continue to avoid birders in Louisiana. This Pacific coast species has wandered so far that it has now colonized western Europe, where it has been documented hybridizing with Sandwich Terns in France. Since Florida's first record in 2001, the species has been documented all along every coast in the state. An October 2022 record in Jefferson County, Texas, was a mere 14 miles from Louisiana. The species has almost surely already occurred in Louisiana but escaped proper

documentation or flew under unwitting birders' noses – Erik Johnson's relatively recent documentation of a hybrid Elegant x Sandwich Tern could signal that the species has even attempted to breed in the state before.

When first flipping through a field guide, the differences between Elegant and Royal Terns may appear slight. Elegant has a notably thinner and longer bill, sure, but those plates look nearly identical otherwise! My trick? Elegant Tern is actually much more closely related to Sandwich Tern than to Royal Tern, and are about the same size and shape. In a mixed flock of roosting terns, Elegants are totally dwarfed by Royals, making them fairly easy to pick out with some effort. So, when you go on your Louisiana Elegant Tern hunt, look for flocks of roosting terns on the beach, and flip through them for Sandwich Tern-sized birds, then take a look at that subset's bill color and size. This trick allowed me to refind a Texas Elegant Tern in a flock of ~1,000 terns in less than 5 minutes!



Like any other mega-rarity, proper documentation will be important with Elegant Tern. While separating Elegant from other North American terns is relatively simple, the Old World's Lesser Crested Tern is almost completely identical. While it has never been recorded in the United States, it is probably only a matter of time before one crosses the Atlantic. To separate, a good photo of the rump (white in Elegant, gray in Lesser Crested) is required.

5. Golden-cheeked Warbler* - Another Texas "specialty" bird yet to be documented in Louisiana? You know it! This one is a little bit cheating, as Golden-cheeked Warblers have *technically* been documented in Louisiana; a 2026 study that investigated the migration ecology of Golden-cheeked Warblers documented at least 2 individuals wearing tracking devices stopping in Louisiana during the fall. The paper even noted that 20% of their study population moved across the Gulf of Mexico during migration, as opposed to the species' main migratory route through mainland Mexico along the eastern Sierra Madre Oriental (see Macey et al. 2026 in *Movement Ecology* for more information). So, if so many Golden-cheeked Warblers are theoretically moving through Louisiana, why haven't they been photographed in the state yet? Easy answer! Timing.



While there aren't many vagrant records of Golden-cheeked Warblers to pick through, a pattern is beginning to show. Florida's 2 records – both from Pinellas County – are from late August. New Mexico's lone record was on August 23rd. California's only (and the west coast's only) record is from early September. Alabama's first record, which I learned of this morning, was found on August 3rd, at Dauphin Island. 2 records from the Houston-Galveston area are from August 3rd and 14th. Other non-Edwards Plateau Texas records are mostly from mid-July through mid-late August, with a few early March-mid April records in the LRGV. The problem is clear: Golden-cheeked Warblers migrate when birders simply aren't birding. August is, generally speaking, a dreadful month to be outdoors anywhere south of the Mason-Dixon. It's hot, humid, and buggy. Birders simply don't want to partake in

that – and I don't blame them! And it isn't just Louisiana birders – August is the least eBirded month globally. So let me be the first to tell you that August is, in fact, one of my favorite months for birding. Aside from the potential of discovering a mouth-watering state first Golden-cheeked Warbler, *Empidonax* flycatchers are everywhere, Mourning Warblers and Buff-breasted Sandpipers light up Parish Needs Alerts emails, and chances are you'll have your local patch all to yourself. So, get out there!



6. **Black-capped Petrel** - Now that the “easy” state firsts are out of the way, I’ll start getting into some of the trickier finds or species that are more of a reach to appear inside of state lines. Pelagic bird life in the Gulf of Mexico is one of the last mysteries of US birding. Due to relatively poor pelagic birding coverage, eBird data is relatively sparse. Rising fuel costs, long travel times from shore to “blue water” (areas of deep water where pelagic birds are more likely to be found), and low bird densities tend to scare most birders away from offshore birding trips into the Gulf. Thankfully, some faithful (or perhaps hopelessly addicted) Louisiana birders continue to pull the pelagic birding slot machine lever on a regular basis – notably turning up a state first South Polar Skua in August of 2024.



Pterodroma (“Gadfly” petrels; the genus that Black-capped Petrel belongs to) petrels are not like other pelagic species like storm-petrels, boobies, or shearwaters, which can be found near or inshore with some regularity. *Pterodroma* petrels are as offshore as they come, mostly being recorded at or near the continental shelf. Even Texas, which has regularly run pelagic trips departing from various ports since the mid-90s, has only 3 accepted records (late May 1994, late July 1997, and early November 2016). 2 vessel-based surveys from 2010-11 and 2017-19 scoured the Gulf of Mexico in search of Black-capped Petrels, and recorded 40 individuals during their 558 days at sea and 34,000 miles of surveying (see Jodice et al. 2021 in *Endangered Species Research* for more information). While most of these records were from the eastern portions of the Gulf, one observation (though not submitted to the Louisiana Bird Records Committee for review) was made offshore of Vermillion Parish. It’s only a matter of time before one zips by the bow of a Louisiana pelagic trip!

7. **Redpoll** - Now we’re really starting to get into my reach picks. Talk to anyone that was birding in the 1970s and 1980s and they’ll fill your brain of finch explosion years behind modern birder comprehension. They’ll spin you tales of flocks of Evening Grosbeaks moving through the bayou and Red Crossbills kip-kip-kipping in stands of Longleaf Pine. Are these massive southern irruptions of finches a thing of the past, never to happen again? No, I say. *We’re so due.*



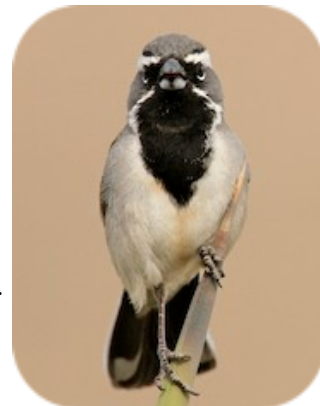
As crazy as it may sound, this traditionally hyper-boreal species does have a fairly good track record of vagrancy. And it’s nearly reached Louisiana in the past! There are 2 modern records from the Texas pineywoods, 2 2002 records from the Texas coast (Cameron and Galveston counties), 1994 and 2013 coastal Alabama records, among scattered records elsewhere from the southeastern United States. As the popularity of birding and backyard bird feeding continues to grow exponentially, and now that every household in the country has at least a few cell phone cameras, it’s only a matter of time before an unsuspecting birder discovers the first record of this species in Louisiana.

8. **Black-throated Sparrow** - For far too long I have underappreciated the vagrancy potential of this species. When I first heard the old guard of Louisiana birders hopefully blasting Black-throated Sparrow tape at a brush pile at Willow Island, I couldn’t help but chuckle to myself. “Seems like a bit of a stretch,” I thought to myself. I went home that night and had to consult eBird, of course, to determine exactly how much of a stretch it was. I was shocked to see just how far away from sagebrush basins and xeric scrub that this species has been found. My eyes widened as I continued to explore the records: Houston, Iowa, Chicago, Michigan, Florida,



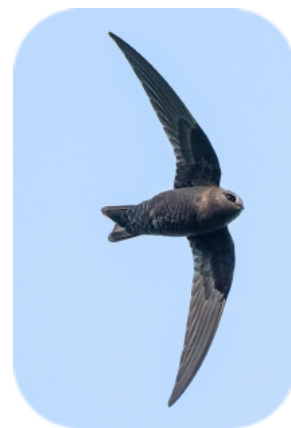
New Brunswick, St. Pierre and Miquelon...St. Pierre and Miquelon?! In 1987?! France technically got a record of Black-throated Sparrow before Louisiana did? In 1987? How many birders could there possibly have been on a St. Pierre and Miquelon in 1987? How has this species not occurred in Louisiana at this point?

The vagrancy pattern of Black-throated Sparrow is, frankly, difficult to decipher. A quick glance at the eBird map for this species shows a true shotgun blast of records east of its core range (though notably, the southeast has very few records). Timing seems variable as well, with notable records occurring in both migratory periods, as well as winter and summer (the St. Pierre and Miquelon record is from early June). Where will one turn up in Louisiana? For the sake of the previously mentioned old guard, I hope in a brush pile at Willow Island. In truth? Who knows?



9. Northern Shrike - This may seem like a wild reach, but give me a chance here. Northern Shrike regularly gets fairly close to Louisiana, regularly occurring as far south as southern Kansas. Much like other birds of the great white North, it's a moderately irruptive species. A good irruption south and east could easily force a Northern Shrike into the Shreveport area. The species has been documented as far south as just outside of Austin, Texas, and one overwintered at Red Slough WMA, Oklahoma during the winter of 2022-2023. As the shrike flies, this is only about 65 miles northwest of the Louisiana state line, and a Northern Shrike could easily follow the Red River corridor into Sportsman's Paradise. Seems to me like Shreveport birders have a new activity once they are bored in the depths of the coming winter: check every single shrike they see!

10. Black Swift - If you want to talk enigmatic birds, Black Swift is as mysterious as it gets in the US. Although first described from Hispaniola in 1760, the first US specimen wouldn't be collected for another nearly 100 years, in 1857. It took an additional 44 years to find the first ever nesting record for the species, on a cliff overlooking the ocean in California. Finally, in 1919, an inland nest was found for the first time, enlightening western knowledge: Black Swifts want to nest behind *waterfalls*...how insane is that? To this day, we still know almost nothing about the species. Scientists weren't even able to describe the migratory patterns and winter range of US-nesting Black Swifts until 2012. Even glimpsing a Black Swift in its core range is often a thing of luck, as the species is well-known for foraging at altitudes of nearly 14,000 feet above sea level.



Surprisingly, this elusive species does have a handful of vagrant records. The nearest to us is an April 2007 record from Fort Morgan, Alabama. Florida's lone record, October 2024 near Orlando, was Hurricane related and possibly from the Caribbean population. Other notable records include Cape May, New Jersey in late August of 2011, as well as late May 2006 and mid-May 2009 at 2 separate lake watching sites in Ontario. Hardly enough information to surmise any sort of pattern, but at least there's something! Maybe one for the loyal Lake Ponchartrain morning flight crew to pray for?

** editor's note - On 3 August, the day before Jack sent in the article, a Golden-cheeked Warbler was found and photographed in Alabama at Fort Morgan. I'm not saying the bird was in Louisiana. But I am saying that Louisiana is between Texas and Alabama.*

In the news...

Louisiana Bans Mass Balloon Releases by Mark Pethke, LOS Treasurer

Environmental groups statewide cheered the passage of HB 851 prohibiting the mass release of balloons outdoors. The bill became law without the Governor's signature as Act 196 of the 2026 Session of the Louisiana Legislature, effective August 1, 2026. It successfully passed the full Senate 32–2, following earlier passage in the House by a vote of 88–6. The new law bans the intentional outdoor release of twelve or more lighter than air balloons by persons over the age of sixteen unless the release was for a valid scientific or educational purpose, was a weather balloon, or was a hot air balloon that is recovered after launch, and provides civil penalties for violators. It was sponsored by Rep. John Illg, (R) Harahan, a board member for Keep Louisiana Beautiful, an agency housed in the office of Lt. Gov. Billy Nungesser that focuses on litter prevention and beautification. Designed to address a particularly noxious form of pollution not covered by existing anti-litter laws, the bill was backed by the Lt. Governor's office, the Louisiana Wildlife Federation, the Louisiana Cattlemen's Association, the Louisiana Retailer's Association, and of course, LOS.

Unlike a similar bill last year that passed both houses of the legislature by wide margins but was ultimately vetoed by Governor Jeff Landry, this year's legislation contains an exception for balloons made of biodegradable or photo-biodegradable materials. Even balloons marketed as biodegradable or eco-friendly can still take years to disintegrate, and in the interim threaten wildlife with harm just like standard balloons, but this clause was evidently included to ease passage of the bill. Current publicity campaigns about the law by state and environmental agencies stress that balloon releases are banned, not the exceptions, which is encouraging as a way of educating the general public, but LOS and other conservation groups are concerned that current groups who advocate balloon releases as a celebratory gesture will simply source balloons from allegedly environmentally friendly sources and continue the practice. We ask our members to keep an eye on local practices and let us know if balloon releases under the exceptions continue. Getting balloon releases included in the state's anti-litter laws was not easy, but LOS is prepared to advocate amending this hard-won law in the future if necessary to make this victory for wildlife complete.



CONGRATULATIONS!!

Join us in extending our congratulations to Olivia Butler of LSU's Department of Natural Resources who is the 2026 recipient of the LOS Cardiff-Dittmann Scholarship!!

Olivia hails from Maryland and fell in love with birds, birding, and ornithology as an undergraduate student there. Currently in the LSU RNR Department, she is working with Dr. Erik Johnson and has also volunteered as a technician with Audubon Delta for geolocator programs. She is also a recent LOS research grant recipient!

Olivia wants the LOS membership to know that she is an advocate for our native and imperiled bird species, and personally wanted to big thank you for supporting her efforts in uncovering more about the migration of our beloved Louisiana bird species!

The scholarship committee was very pleased with the following personal anecdote she provided in her application: It has been incredibly rewarding to see young children, to older adults', eyes light up and get excited about seeing these species up close. It usually will spark a conversation regarding their inherent value and conservation importance. It is really special to be able to combine this intensive scientific monitoring and data collection with the public. I recently had a girl around my age and also a grad student, approach me while weighing purple martin chicks at Moncus Park in Lafayette. She inquired as to what I was doing, and after chatting a bit she said that she's always wanted to learn about birds and how to identify more than a Northern Cardinal.

That attitude of community education is exactly why this scholarship exists! Olivia, congratulations, and we wish you great success!





So what if you wanted to know more about the LOS Cardiff-Dittmann Scholarship? LOS began this program in 2024 to honor the legacies of life partners and ornithologists Donna L. Dittmann and Steven W. Cardiff who worked and taught at the LSU Museum of Natural Science, served for many years on the Louisiana Bird Records Committee, founded the Yellow Rails and Rice Festival, and served LOS wholeheartedly.

In the spirit of their service and commitment to Louisiana birding and education, LOS asks of applicants, "As a student of Ornithology, how do you intend to use your knowledge and education to promote birding, bird conservation, and ornithology among the public? And why do you feel such service is needed?"

If you would like to contribute to LOS's commitment to carrying on the standards of service set by Steve and Donna, please send your donation to the scholarship fund to LOS Treasurer Mark Pethke via check (5655 Hickory Ridge Blvd, Baton Rouge, 70817) or via Venmo at @mpethke. You can also use the "Donate" function via PayPal at the LOS website at www.losbird.org

LOS Research Grant Funding

The deadline for applying for an LOS grant is January 15 of each year. Thanks to those who submitted grant funding applications this year. The LOS board will let you know results sometime soon after the spring meeting. All proposals must be based on Louisiana Birds and the study should be a situation unique to Louisiana. Priority is given to studies addressing current problems and issues in Louisiana ornithology or bird conservation in Louisiana habitats. Further Details can be found on the LOS website <http://losbird.org/bulletin/grant.htm>. Email your grant to Lawrence Datnoff, LOS Secretary, at ldatnoff@gmail.com.



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Don't forget to visit LOS Sales online!

From left to right: 75th anniversary cloth patch, oval decal, and of course, bird checklists for Louisiana! All sold out of LOS IBWO mugs!! And don't forget magnetic car decals!





Mark Pethke
Louisiana Ornithological Society
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Name(s) _____

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Number registering for meeting @ \$25.00 per person = \$_____

Number registering for meeting @ \$5.00 per student = \$_____

Number registering for Sat. dinner @ \$20.00 per person = \$_____

(See p. 3 for menu info)

Meeting total = \$_____

Additional donation = \$_____

Dues enclosed = \$_____

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