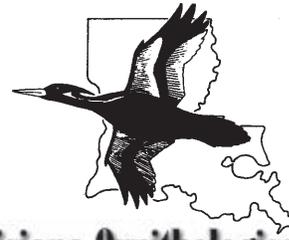


LOS NEWS



NEWSLETTER OF THE **Louisiana Ornithological Society**

2003 LOS FALL MEETING

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Cameron, Louisiana

October 24 – 26, 2003

The LOS will hold its 2003 Fall Meeting on October 24-26 with Friday and Saturday evening activities at the Knights of Columbus Hall (behind Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Church) in Cameron. Registration will begin at 6:00 pm on Friday. In addition to the Registration Table, Hospitality and Sales Tables will be set up. So come register, have a coke and buy a book or a Sanctuary patch. The meeting will begin at 7:00 pm. Please complete the attached Registration Form and return it to Marianna Tanner Primeaux with your check so that we can plan the appropriate number of meals and the seating set-up.

For those new to Cameron Parish and those who would like to bird with a group, we'll have a field trip Saturday morning to several different habitats within Cameron Parish. We will meet in the parking lot of the Cameron Motel (near the restaurant) at 6:30 am. We will carpool as much as possible. We will take the ferry to the west side of the Calcasieu Ship Channel and go directly to the Sanctuary. After an hour or two here (depends on the birds), we will go to the Secret Place. We will work our way back stopping to bird the beach, marshes and the town of Cameron. We should return to the Cameron Motel about 5:00pm. Birders can join and leave the field trip at any time.

Registration for the Saturday evening meeting begins at 6:00pm. The buffet will be served from 6:30 - 8:00pm. **No food will be served after 8:00pm.** The business meeting will begin at 7:30pm, followed by the presentation and drawing for prizes. Donations will be accepted for the Cameron Bird Observation Tower Fund. Bring your checkbook! (See Tower Fund in this issue or <http://losbird.org/bulletin/tower.htm>)

Friday night presentation: The Double-Crested Cormorant in Northern Lake Michigan by Beth Leuck

The Double-crested Cormorant population increased dramatically during the 1990's. To assess their effect on the fish population of

northern Lake Michigan, a team of researchers spent the past four years counting individuals in breeding colonies, collecting regurgitated fish from the colonies and analyzing the stomach contents of adult birds. Beth will share the results of the study and let us know if the cormorants are targeting out game fish.

Dr. Beth Leuck earned her B.S. degree in zoology from Michigan State University and an M.S. and Ph.D. from the University of Oklahoma. She worked on space use by birds in a free-flight aviary at the Oklahoma City Zoo for her masters and then switched to the behavior of non-flying reptiles (all-female whiptail lizards) for her Ph.D. She has been a member of the biology department of Centenary College for 22 years and has taught courses at the Central Michigan University Biological Station on Beaver Island, MI, for 18 years. In 1999 the station was awarded a grant by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to study breeding double-crested cormorants. She also monitors breeding piping plover pairs on Beaver Island and the surrounding islands as a member of the Great Lakes Piping Plover Monitoring Team. This species is federally listed as endangered in the Great Lakes.

Saturday Night Presentation: La Grue Blanche: *Grus Americana* in Louisiana
by Gay Gomez

The history of the Whooping Crane (*Grus americana*) in southwest Louisiana is a fascinating one that includes the former presence of both migratory and resident, breeding populations. LOS member Gay Gomez will summarize and illustrate material on these magnificent birds from her article "Whooping Cranes in Southwest Louisiana," which appeared in the Winter 2001 issue of the *Journal of Louisiana Ornithology*. She will also provide a brief update on the Whooping Crane's current status and an overview of recent

continued on page 2

Minutes of LOS Spring Meeting – Cameron, LA

APRIL 25, 2003

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by President Rosemary Seidler. Two door prizes were given out courtesy of the Lighthouse Preservation Society.

Marty Guidry announced that the Cameron jetty observation tower is to be constructed very soon by the Cameron Parish Police Jury. LOS is providing approximately \$4,000 for the materials.

Judith announced that there will be a fund raising project to help defray the cost of the tower. A donation of \$1.00 will get one ticket and \$5.00 will get 6 tickets. The grand prize is a Celestron Nextar 80gt scope and tripod. Other prizes are: Bushnell scope and window mount, Eagle Optics/Wild Birds Unlimited binoculars, avian Aquatics layered waterfall rock, Thayer's Birds of N.A. CD Rom, Fuertes hummingbird print, John O'Neill prints of Aplomado Falcon and Blue-headed Parrots, *Great Texas Birds*, *Birds of the Gulf Coast*, *Bird Watching for Dummies*, *Sibley Guide to Birds*, subscriptions to Bird Watcher's Digest and Birder's World and three memberships to the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. The drawing will be Saturday night of the fall meeting.

Rosemary will meet people at 6:30 a.m. at the Cameron Motel for a field trip of the area.

Kay Radlauer introduced Ted Eubanks, of Fermata Inc. who gave a presentation on the Louisiana Great Gulf Coast Bird Trail which is in the planning stages. The presentation may be viewed online at www.fermatainc.com.

APRIL 26, 2003

President Rosemary Seidler opened the meeting at 7:45 p.m. and expressed her thanks to Ted Eubanks for presenting the program on Friday night. The Louisiana Great Gulf Coast Bird Trail will hopefully become a reality in about 15 months. You can find Ted's presentation at www.fermatainc.com.

She also expressed thanks to Marianna Primeaux and Judy Fruge, Elouise Mullen, Joseph Vallee and Judith O'Neale for their work on the meeting. Special thanks to the Knights of Columbus for the good meal.

Rosemary introduced the Officers and Board Members: Past President Marty Guidry, Secretary/Treasurer Judith O'Neale,

Fall Meeting – continued

conservation efforts.

Gay Gomez is a native New Orleanian who migrated to southwest Louisiana for the superb birding, Cajun culture, immense wetlands, and, not least of all, to assume the post of Assistant Professor of Geography at McNeese State University in Lake Charles. She holds a B.A. and M.A. in History from Tulane University and a Ph.D. in Geography from the University of Texas at Austin. She is author of *A Wetland Biography: Seasons on Louisiana's Chenier Plain* (Univ. of Texas Press, 1998), a regional geography of the marshes and chenier ridges of Cameron and Vermilion parishes. Gay has been a member of LOS since the 1980s and is concluding a term on the organization's Board of Directors. She is also an active member of the North American Crane Working Group and co-founder of the Louisiana Crane Study Group.

Board Member Gay Gomez, JLO editor Jim Ingold and Dennis Demcheck and Kay Radlauer, LOS News editors. Board Members Lee Ellis and Joan Brown and Vice President Karen Fay were unable to attend.

Two door prizes were given out courtesy of the Lighthouse Preservation Society.

Rosemary welcomed guests from Natchez, MS and Kim Capelle from Sweden.

AWARD PRESENTATIONS:

Marty Guidry presented the 1st President's Award to Baton Rouge Audubon Society, which was accepted by their President, Dorothy Prowell.

Marty presented the 2nd President's Award to Judith O'Neale, Secretary/Treasurer of LOS.

The George H. Lowery Jr. Award was presented to Curt Sorrells, Jr. Assisting with the gifts to Curt was Carol Lynn Lowery Loker, daughter of Dr. Lowery. Carol Lynn and her husband, Andy, are from Beaumont.

Marty Guidry read the checklist and a total of 212 birds were seen in Cameron Parish which included thirty warbler species. A Greater Pewee was reported to have been found but was not substantiated; therefore, it was not included on the list.

Cyndi Sellers is the new reporter for the Cameron Pilot and she is also Chairman of Beach District #2 which includes Rutherford Beach. A project to build a bathhouse at the Rutherford Beach is in the works.

Marty Guidry announced that the Cameron jetty observation tower is to be constructed very soon by the Cameron Parish Police Jury. LOS is providing approximately \$4,000 for the materials.

Judith announced that there will be a fund raising project to help defray the cost of the tower. A donation of \$1.00 will get one ticket and \$5.00 will get 6 tickets. The grand prize is a Celestron Nextar 80gt scope and tripod. Other prizes are: Bushnell scope and window mount, Eagle Optics/Wild Birds Unlimited binoculars, avian Aquatics layered waterfall rock, Thayer's Birds of N.A. CD Rom, Fuertes hummingbird print, John O'Neill prints of Aplomado Falcon and Blue-headed Parrots, *Great Texas Birds*, *Birds of the Gulf Coast*, *Bird Watching for Dummies*, *Sibley Guide to Birds*, subscriptions to Bird Watcher's Digest and Birder's World and three memberships to the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. Tickets may be obtained from Judith or printed off the web page and mailed to Judith. The drawing will be Saturday night of the fall meeting.

Dr. Mark Bonta from Delta State University, Cleveland MS, presented an informative program entitled "Thirty-five Years After Monroe, Birds and Birding in Honduras." His program dealt with birds, conservation and geography of Honduras thirty-five years after Burt Monroe's *Distributional Survey* was published in 1968. Very little new information on Honduran birds was generated until the late 1980's. Even today, very few bird tours visit the country. Mark's wife and daughter were with him for the weekend. Information can be found at <http://www.birdinghonduras.com> and his home page is <http://ntweb.deltastate.edu/mbonta/>

Proposed Changes to the LOS Bylaws

The basic premise of these changes is to reflect a split of the Secretary/Treasurer to two positions. Minor changes are also being made to reflect the frequency of the LOS News, the nominations for the George H. Lowery Award, and the LOS website.

These proposed changes will be voted on at the Fall annual meeting. If you would like a copy of the complete bylaws, you can find a copy on the website: losbird.org or email or call Judith at jloneale@aol.com or 337-981-1011

Bylaws of

THE LOUISIANA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

ARTICLE III: OFFICERS

Section 1. The elected officers of the Society shall be a President, a Vice-president, a Secretary, and a Treasurer.

Section 6. *The Secretary shall have the following duties: (1) keep or cause to be kept (as by appointment of a Recording Secretary) records of all proceedings of the board and of the Society; (2) conduct all correspondence of the Society and the Board; (3) keep current the membership list of the Society and make it available to all members with the assistance of the membership committee; (4) mail, or cause to be mailed, all Society publications and all other written material; (5) give members at least thirty (30) days advance notice of all meeting, both regular and Special meetings; (6) place, or cause to be placed, a copy of all Society publication in the Society's archives; (7) any other such related duties as the Board may approve.*

The Treasurer shall have the following duties: (1) take custody of the funds of the Society, both collection and disbursement of same, the latter upon approval of the board; (2) make a financial report to the Society at least annually.

All checks and drafts of the Society, less than or equal to the amount of five hundred dollars (\$500), shall be signed by the Treasurer at the Treasurer's discretion: any and all actions requiring an encumbrance of Society funds in excess of the above amount must have board approval.

ARTICLE V: ELECTIONS

Section 1. The election of the four (4) officers and one (1) Director-at-Large shall take place at the Fall Regular Meeting each year. The officers and Director shall be installed at the close of said meeting.

Section 4. Listed below are some of the Standing Committees that shall be established by the President or by the board, and some of the duties of said Standing Committees:

(1) The **Membership Committee** shall cooperate with the Secretary to keep current the membership list and make it available to the members. It shall conduct membership campaigns and attempt to obtain the continuing membership of those delinquent in paying dues.

(3) The **Selections Committee** shall solicit and review nominations for the George H. Lowery, Jr. Award and any and all other awards, honoraria, and designations of the Society, including Honorary and Complimentary Membership. All selections are subject to Board approval.

(4) The **Finance Committee** shall (a) plan the Society's Annual Budget with the advice and consent of the Board; (b) assist the Treasurer in the preparation of financial reports, including those which may be legally required of a nonprofit organization; (c) recommend and implement programs for obtaining the financial support of the Society; and (d) provide for an annual audit of the Society's records.

(11) The **Newsletter Committee** shall assist its chairman, known as the Editor of the *L.O.S. News*, in publishing the newsletter not less than three (3) times each year.

(12) The **Webmaster** shall handle all postings and updates for the LOS website (losbird.org) with assistance of the LOS Board of Directors.

ELECTION OF NEW LOS OFFICERS AND BOARD MEMBER

The October meeting of the Louisiana Ornithological Society is the official meeting of the Society and the time for election of new officers and one Board Member. Positions to be elected at the October 25, 2003 Meeting are: President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, and the Southwest Louisiana Board Member.

We are seeking volunteers for the positions of Vice - President, Secretary, and Board Member. The Southwest Louisiana Board Member must reside in the general area from Lafayette west to the Texas border and south to the Gulf. If interested and willing please contact Gay Gomez (ggomez@mail.mcneese.edu).



Timber Activity on Sherburne WMA and Swallow-Tailed Kite Use: 2002 Update

by Jennifer Coulson

In 2002 I received a grant from the LOS to assist my doctoral research investigating limiting factors affecting Swallow-tailed Kites nesting in the Atchafalaya River Basin. I studied kite nesting and roosting habits on the Atchafalaya National Wildlife Refuge, Sherburne Wildlife Management Area (WMA), as well as adjacent lands owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, collectively known as the Sherburne Complex. One goal of my investigation is to determine the extent to which the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries' 2001 timber activity in Compartment 8 of the Sherburne Wildlife Management Area affected Swallow-tailed Kite nesting activities on the Sherburne Complex in 2002.

I found six Swallow-tailed Kite nests on the Sherburne Complex. I quantitatively and qualitatively characterized the six nest sites. Kites generally selected stands of several species of tall trees for nesting. Mean forest height around nests was $24.8 \text{ m} \pm 3.4$ Standard Deviations (S.D.). Measurements were taken for the nest tree and six random overstory trees per plot. Mean nest height was $25.1 \text{ m} \pm 1.9$ S.D. Tree species kites used for nesting included: Sweetgum, Baldcypress, Southern Sugar Maple, Water Tupelo, Nuttall Oak, and Eastern Cottonwood. Timber activity had taken place the year before kites nested on two of the plots, and these plots had a comparatively sparse midstory. Nests were 0.8 to 8.8 km from the nearest source of potable water. I measured this variable at nests because Swallow-tailed Kites drink and bathe on the wing, and I believe this may be one reason that they nest near a source of open fresh water (e.g., bayou, river, oxbow).

Short-Term Effects

In early April of 2001, I informed the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) about the location of the nests and nest starts in Compartment 8. As a result, Kenny Ribbeck delayed cutting in all nesting areas and also reduced the extent of cutting planned for some areas. I found evidence that timber activity disturbed nesting and roosting behaviors. For example, on 3 April 2001, I observed one pair "mobbing" the logging truck near the pair's nest start. Also, on 10 April 2001, 6 kites flushed from their roost when the logging truck drove by their roost tree. While my studies in the Pearl River Basin demonstrated that Swallow-tailed Kites are often very tolerant of human activity, automobile traffic, development, and loud noises, some behaviors of individuals in the Atchafalaya River Basin show that not all kites are tolerant of human activity. In support of this idea, certain breeding adults on the Sherburne Complex and others nesting in remote areas will sometimes alarm-call at me and follow me through the woods when I am walking to and from nests.

Timber activity in the short term poses at least some degree of disturbance to nesting kites. Cutting nest trees during the nesting

season would obviously cause nesting failure. Cutting trees adjacent to the nest tree would cause some of the more nervous adults to abandon nest starts and possibly eggs, but they probably would not abandon young.

Long-Term Effects

Concerning the long-term effects of the timber harvest, we wanted to determine whether or not kites would return to nesting territories that had undergone group cuts. In 2001, I located five active nests and one nest start or abandoned nest within Compartment 8. In some cases the group came near to, but did not include the nest tree. Some nest and roost trees had been marked for cutting, but were spared when the timber harvest plan was modified to accommodate the nesting kites. The nests in Compartment 8 experienced very poor nesting success and productivity in 2001: four of the five 2001 active nests in Compartment 8 failed. Two failed due to unknown causes but probably failed due to high winds. Another nest failed when the eggs fell from the nest during high winds. The fourth nest failed when an unknown species of raptor killed and ate the two nestlings. The successful nest fledged one young. I do not know why the 5 pairs

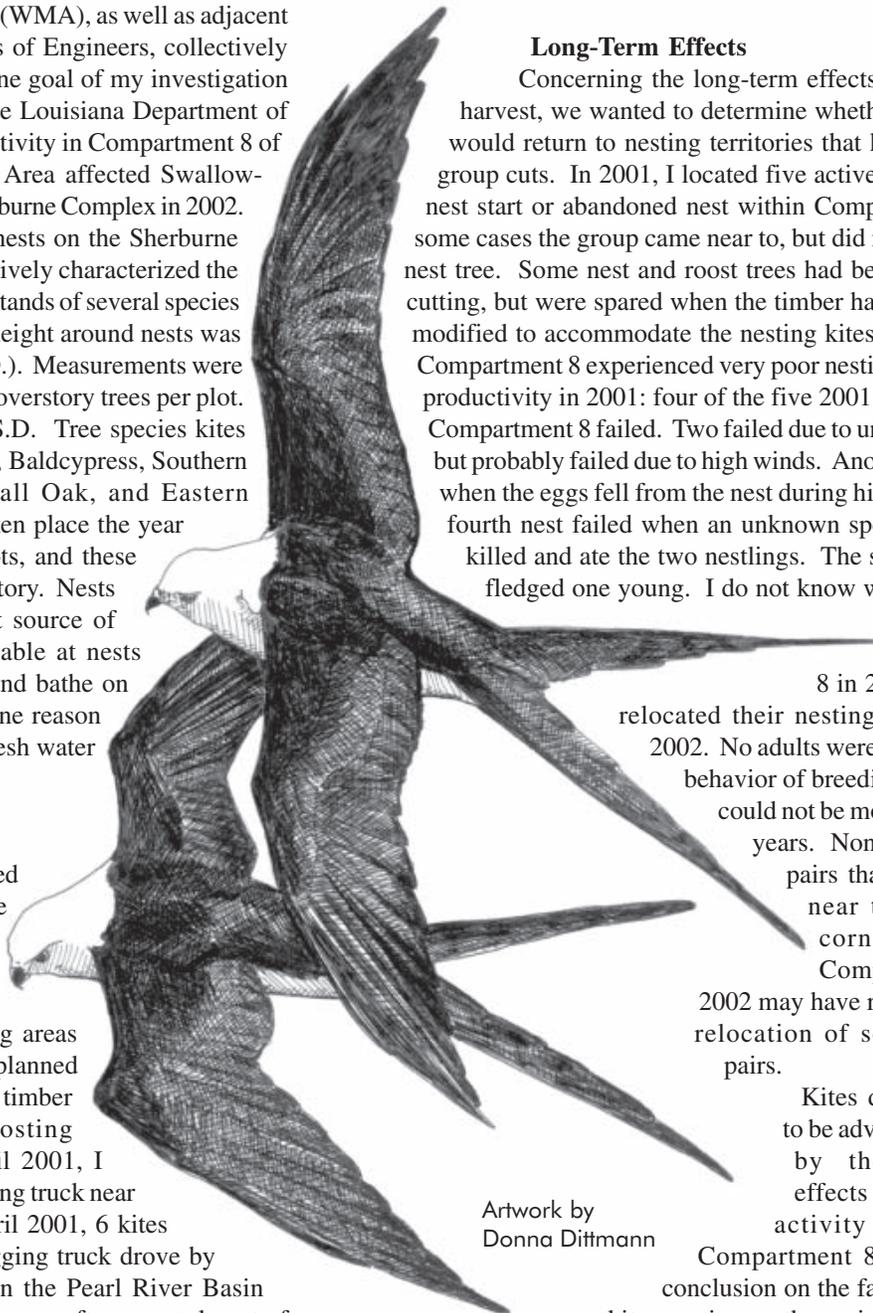
that nested in Compartment 8 in 2001 may have relocated their nesting territories in 2002. No adults were marked so the behavior of breeding individuals could not be monitored across years. Nonetheless, the 3 pairs that nested in or near the northeast corner of Compartment 8 in 2002 may have represented the relocation of some of these pairs.

Kites did not appear to be adversely affected by the long-term effects of the timber activity on Compartment 8. I base this conclusion on the fact that I found kites nesting on the periphery of and in

the midst of the group cuts in Compartment 8 in 2002 and 2003. Perhaps this is not surprising because kites often nest on edges, whether natural or man-made (e.g., bayou and river banks, roadsides, the edges of pine-beetle clearings, and of fields).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The short-term effects of timber activity can disturb kites and



Artwork by
Donna Dittmann

Timber Activity on Sherburne – *continued*

even cause nesting failure. The main threat to kites appears to be timber harvesting during the nesting season near nests, and cutting down of nest trees while nests are active. Therefore, one of the most important changes I would recommend to the LDWF revised Forest Management Plan for its WMAs that have Swallow-tailed Kites on them is to stop all timber harvest by March 15 instead of April 15 because many kites are already incubating eggs. For example, of the 40 active nests I am monitoring in 2003, 50% of pairs were incubating before April 15. If timber activity occurs in areas where kites nest, cutting trees down on nesting territories after March 15 is likely to cause kites to abandon their nest starts. Of 200 nests, the earliest nest incubation date I detected was March 18.

Regarding the date when timber activity can begin again, June 15 is too early to avoid the potential harvest of nest trees during the time when the nests are still active. The latest fledgling date I detected for 200 nests was August 3. However, this nest was truly an outlier, and the young are fledged at most nests by July 25. I recommend August 1 as the date when timber activity can resume wherever Swallow-tailed Kites are nesting.

An important factor to consider in long-term forest management is the rotation schedule. Will enough sufficiently large, mature stands of forest be available to support future breeding populations of Swallow-tailed Kite? At present the nesting habitat is probably not saturated because kite populations are still so small. The current estimate of the U.S. population (i.e., the entire northern subspecies), provided by the Swallow-tailed Working Group is 5,000 individuals. If the U.S. population begins to increase in number, is the amount of habitat sufficient? This may be an increasingly important issue in the Pearl River Basin where a lot of prime nesting habitat is falling to suburban sprawl.

Communication of Findings

On 8 May 2002 I presented an overview of my research and described nesting behavior to the LDWF foresters and biologists at the headquarters of the Dewey W. Wills WMA. On 27 June 2002 I participated in a meeting and site visit to the Sherburne WMA hosted by the LDWF to discuss forest management of the Sherburne Complex, nesting habitat requirements for Swallow-tailed Kites and other Nearctic-Neotropical migratory birds. As a follow-up to this meeting, I submitted written comments on the LDWF forest management plan and the forest management entry schedule for Sherburne.

Acknowledgements

I thank the Louisiana Ornithological Society, Chuck Hunter, Division of Wildlife and Habitat Management/Migratory Birds, USFWS, and Charlotte Parker, Southeast Louisiana Refuges, USFWS, for funding kite research on the Sherburne Complex in 2002, and Tom Coulson, Sherry DeFrancesch, Christie Riehl, and Perry Samrow for their invaluable assistance in the field.

Atchafalaya Basin Birding Project: 2003 Update

By Jay Huner and Bill Fontenot
March 2003

The Louisiana Department of Natural Resources has been funding a project to develop birding and wildflower trails for the Atchafalaya Basin through its Atchafalaya Basin Program, administered by Ms. Sandra Thompson. The project is led by Bill Fontenot, a well-known southern naturalist, and Jay Huner, Director of the University of Louisiana at Lafayette's Crawfish Research Center. To date 260 species of birds - some of them endangered - have been recorded in the Basin since the project began in November 2001. This represents approximately 55% of the state's bird fauna, all from an area representing only 3% of the state's total land mass.

Bottomland hardwood-dependent bird species nest in some of the highest densities ever recorded in annual North American Breeding Bird Surveys especially in the Sherburne Wildlife Management Area along the Whiskey Bay Pilot Channel. The Basin also represents critical breeding habitat for many different species of wading birds such as Little Blue Heron and Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Great Egret and Snowy Egret, Swallow-tailed and Mississippi Kites. Several warbler species including Northern Parula, Yellow-throated, Prothonotary, Swainson's, and Kentucky Warblers nest there in great abundance. Some of the largest flocks of Wood Storks in North America summer here, and the Basin supports a healthy population of Southern Bald Eagles which nest throughout each winter.

Wildflowers can be enjoyed at any season in the Basin, as vast sheets comprised of many species are found on the extensive Basin levee systems. February and March provide visitors, especially those driving across the Basin on I-10, with a spectacular crimson array of flowers and samaras as the swamp maples bloom and fruit over the entire route.

Fontenot and Huner will conclude their two-year project this fall. They will then provide LDNR with suggested birding and wildflower routes for the development of maps to guide visitors to the area and seasonal checklists for the birds that can be found in various areas of the Basin.

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Louisiana Ornithological Society

www.losbird.org

Basin Birding Project Spring 2003 Update *– continued*

Summary taken from report by Bill Fontenot - June 13, 2003

[Jay Huner, UL Lafayette Crawfish Research Center, 1031 W. J. Bernard Road, St. Martinville, Louisiana 70582 - jhuner@louisiana.edu]

This report is based on 350 observer hours and 62 trips between March 1 and May 17, 2003. Twelve new species (AB#) were added to the master bird list bringing the total to 260. The following is a listing of (1) unusual species, (2) extra high numbers, and (3) new species.

1. **American Bittern** - Carloss (1) on 31 March in Area 7 (Atchafalaya Delta WMA).
 2. **Least Bittern** - Carloss (1) on 16 May in Area 7; Bello (1) in Area 6 near Wax Lake Outlet; Cardiff/Dittmann/Fontenot (1) on 18 April in Area 11 near North Farm.
 3. **Cattle Egret** - Cardiff/Dittmann (600-1,000 birds - mega swarm) on numerous occasions in April in Area 12 in Morganza Forebay.
 4. **Mottled Duck** - Rare in Basin away from the coast. Beck (4) on 4 April and (2) on 25 April in Area 4 near Butte Larose; Carloss (2) on 31 March, (27) on 26 April, and (19) on 16 May in Area 7 (Atchafalaya Delta WMA); and numerous individuals by Cardiff/Dittmann (& Fontenot) in April and May in Areas 11 and 12 between Ramah and the Morganza Forebay.
 5. **Greater Scaup** - (AB#256) - Cardiff/Dittmann (1) on 7 May in Area 12 at the Morganza Forebay.
 6. **American Golden Plover** - (AB#252) - Cardiff/Dittmann (1-12) on 3 occasions in April and May in Area 12 between Ramah & Morganza Forebay.
 7. **Semipalmated Sandpiper** - Beck, Carloss, and Cardiff/Dittmann (numerous individuals) in Areas 4, 7, 11 and 12, respectively, in April and May.
 8. **Purple Gallinule** - very rare in this survey - Cardiff/Dittmann (4) in Area 11 on 7 May.
 9. **Clapper Rail** - Carloss (1) in Area 7 on 16 May in Atchafalaya Delta WMA.
 10. **Upland Sandpiper** - (AB#250) - Cardiff/Dittmann (1) in Area 11 on 9 April and (2) in Area 12 on 7 May.
 11. **Whimbrel** - (AB#249) - Musumeche (1) in Area 5 (around Charenton) on 13 April.
 12. **White-rumped Sandpiper** - Beck numerous early May observations in Area 4 and Cardiff/Dittmann in Areas 11 and 12.
 13. **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** - (AB#257) - Cardiff/Dittmann (72) on 7 May in Area 12 at Morganza Forebay.
 14. **Short-billed Dowitcher** - quite rare in Basin - Cardiff/Dittmann on 7 May in Area 11 in South Farm/North Farm area.
 15. **Wilson's Phalarope** - (AB#258) - Cardiff/Dittmann (4) in Area 12 on 7 May.
 16. **Bonaparte's Gull** - Huner (2) in Area 9 on 16 March.
 17. **Least Tern** - Carloss (2) in Area 7 on 26 April and (1) on 16 May; Cardiff/Dittmann (17) in Area 12 on 7 May.
 18. **Common Tern** - Hamilton (1) in Area 8 around Stephenville on 10 May.
 19. **Black Tern** - Cardiff/Dittmann(15) in Area 11 on 7 May and (13) in Area 12 on 7 May.
 20. **Black-billed Cuckoo** - rare migrant - Styring (1) on 27 April in Sherburne WMA and (2) on 4 May in Sherburne WMA.
 21. **Chuck-will's-widow** - (AB#255) - (1) on 6 May in Area 3 at Indian Bayou.
 22. **Common Nighthawk** - (AB#260) - Delahoussaye (4) in Area 4 (Butte Larose) on 3 April; Cardiff/ Dittmann in Area 11 on 7 May.
 23. **Western Kingbird** - Cardiff/ Dittmann (1) in Area 12 on 7 May.
 24. **White-eyed Vireo** - Styring (156) high number in Area 11 in Sherburne WMA on 6 April.
 25. **Yellow-throated Vireo** - Styring (30) high number in Area 11 in Sherburne WMA on 27 April.
 26. **Red-eyed Vireo** - Beck (105) high number in Area 4 at Butte Larose on 4 April.
 27. **Philadelphia Vireo** - Hamilton (2) in Area 9 at Belle River on 3 May.
 28. **Carolina Wren** - Pontiff (122) in Area 3 at Indian Bayou on 17 April.
 29. **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** - Styring (100) high number in Area 11 in Sherburne WMA on 6 April.
 30. **Swainson's Thrush** - Beck (2) in Area 4 on 24 April; Bello (1) in Area 8 on 27 April between Morgan City and Belle River.
 31. **Veery** - Hamilton (1) in Area 8 at Stephenville on 26 April; Styring (2) in Area 11 on 27 April.
 32. **Gray-cheeked Thrush** - Hamilton (1) in Area 8 at Stephenville on 26 April.
 33. **Wood Thrush** - Styring (47) high number in Area 11 in Sherburne WMA on 6 April.
- [Note: Non-breeding Neotropical Thrushes and Warblers have been quite hard to find during this survey. That is why they are mentioned prominently here.]
34. **Blue-winged Warbler** - Patton (1) in Area 11 in Sherburne WMA in April.
 35. **Northern Parula** - Styring (61) high number in Area 11 in Sherburne WMA on 13 April.
 36. **Magnolia Warbler** - numerous sightings from 24 April - 7 May by Beck, Carloss, Hamilton, and Cardiff/Dittmann in Areas 4, 7, 8, and 11.
 37. **Chestnut-sided Warbler** - Hamilton (1) in Area 8 on 29 April; Patton (1) in Area 11 late in April.
 38. **Yellow Warbler** - Hamilton (1) in Area 8 at Belle river on 3 May; Cardiff/Dittmann (1) in Area 12 on 7 May and (1) in Area 11 on 23 April.
 39. **Blackburnian Warbler** - (AB#253) - Styring(1) in Area 11 at Sherburne WMA on 20 April; Patton (1) Area 11 at Sherburne WMA

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Basin Birding Project Spring 2003 Update *- continued*

- in late April; Hamilton (1) in Area 9 on 3 May.
40. **Palm Warbler** - Cardiff/Dittmann/Fontenot (1) in Area 11 near South Farm on 18 April.
 41. **Prothonotary Warbler** - high numbers - Pontiff (150) in Area 3 (Indian Bayou) on 17 April; Beck (149) in Area 4 near Butte Larose on 4 April; Styring (170) in Area 11 in Sherburne WMA on 13 April.
 42. **Swainson's Warbler** - high number - Pontiff (10) in Area 3 (Indian Bayou) on 6 May.
 43. **Kentucky Warbler** - high number - Styring (41) in Area 11 in Sherburne WMA on 13 April.
 44. **Louisiana Waterthrush** - Hamilton (1) in Area 8 at Belle river on 19 April.
 45. **Northern Waterthrush** - Cardiff/Dittmann (1) in Area 11 on 9 April and (2) on 23 April.
 46. **Worm-eating Warbler** - Cardiff/Dittmann (2) in Area 11 on 9 April; Hamilton (1) in Area 8 on 29 April and (1) in Area 9 on 3 May.
 47. **Blackpoll Warbler** - Hamilton (1) in Area 8 on 26 April and (1) in Area 9 on 3 May.
 48. **Ovenbird** - Styring (2) in Area 11 in Sherburne WMA on 27 April.
 49. **Hooded Warbler** - high number - Beck (80) in Area 4 on 4 April.
 50. **Common Yellowthroat** - high number - Styring (130) in Area 11 in Sherburne WMA on 13 April.
 51. **Yellow-breasted Chat** - high number - Pontiff (103) in Area 3 (Indian Bayou) on 9 May.
 52. **Summer Tanager** - high number - Styring (50) in Area 11 in Sherburne WMA on 4 May.
 53. **Scarlet Tanager** - rare - Cardiff/Dittmann (1) in Area 11 on 16 April; Hamilton (2) in Area 9 on 3 May.
 54. **Eastern Towhee** - high number - Styring (120) in Area 11 in Sherburne WMA on 6 April.
 55. **Grasshopper Sparrow** - (AB#259) - Pontiff (1) in Area 3 (Indian Bayou) on 3 April; Cardiff/Dittmann (1) in Area 12 on 7 May - territorial singing noted!
 56. **Leconte's Sparrow** - (AB#251) - Cardiff/Dittmann (1) in Area 11 on 9 April.
 57. **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** - Cardiff/Dittmann (1) in Area 11 on 23 April; Hamilton (1) in Area 8 on 26 April.
 58. **Indigo Bunting** - high number - Styring (130) in Area 11 in Sherburne WMA on 4 May.
 59. **Painted Bunting** - high number - Cardiff/Dittmann (41) in Area 11 on 23 April.
 60. **Dickcissel** - high number - Cardiff/Dittmann (133!!) In Area 12 on 7 May - all territorial!
 61. **Bobolink** - high number - Cardiff/Dittmann (75) in Area 12 on 7 May.
 62. **Brewer's Blackbird** - Hamilton (2) in Area 8 in Stephenville on 9 April.
 63. **Rusty Blackbird** - high number - Styring (100) near Simmsport on 9 March.
 64. **Boat-tailed Grackle** - common along coast but Cardiff/Dittmann (1) "singing" at South Farm in Area 11 on both 23 April and 7 May.
 65. **Great-tailed Grackle** - Cardiff/Dittmann (4) in Area 12 on 7 May.
 66. **Orchard Oriole** - high number - Cardiff/Dittmann (66) in Area 11 on 23 April.
 67. **Bronzed Cowbird** - Patton (6) in Area 4 on 23 April; Beck (1) in Area 4 on 25 April; Hamilton (6) in Area 8 on 6 May and (1) on 10 May.
 68. **LARK BUNTING** - (AB#260) - BECK (1) IN AREA 4 ON LEVEE JUST WEST OF BUTTE LAROSE ON 24 AND 25 APRIL. THIS COULD BE THE "BIRD" OF THE SURVEY.

List of Field Birders: Rick Bello, Steve Cardiff, Mike Carloss, Jim Delahoussaye, Donna Dittmann, Rob Dobbs, Bill Fontenot, Bob Hamilton, Jay Huner, Mike Musumeche, Dave Patton, Matt and Gary Pontiff, and Alison Styring.

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NOTES ON THE BREEDING BIOLOGY OF SWAINSON'S WARBLERS (*Limnothlypis swainsonii*) IN HONEY ISLAND SWAMP

Donata R. Henry

In 1999 I began studying the breeding biology of Swainson's Warblers in bottomland hardwood forests of southeastern Louisiana. What did I know about the species at that time? Relatively uncommon, fairly hard to find, skulking denizen of swampy places, places most folks had the sense to stay out of... was I warned? Oh yes. Did I listen? No way! Five years and several thousand mosquito bites later I have emerged from the swamp, perhaps not with all of the answers but certainly with a better understanding of an elusive bird. My dissertation research evolved into a comparison of reproductive success and habitat selection in bottomland hardwood versus commercial pine forests, a recently identified breeding habitat of Swainson's Warblers that may play a role in their conservation. In this paper I will provide a little background information on the Swainson's Warbler, both from the literature and my own observations, and then share some of the observations I have made over the course of my research in my favorite study site, the Honey Island Swamp of the Pearl River Wildlife Management Area in St. Tammany Parish, Louisiana (owned and operated by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries).

Background

The Swainson's Warbler (SWWA) is a Neotropical-Nearctic migratory songbird that winters in the Caribbean and breeds in the southeastern U.S. Arrival by SWWA to the Honey Island Swamp typically begins during the last week of March/ first week of April. The male establishes a territory that can be quite large, ranging in size from approximately 0.5 to 4 hectares (almost ten acres!; Meanley 1971, pers. obs.) The female builds a bulky nest of dead and skeletonized hardwood leaves that is well camouflaged by its resemblance to leaf litter accumulated in the axils of plant stems. One author has described it (rather unfairly-perhaps because he only found one nest) as, "old and dry and dead and worthless, so indisputably inert" (Burt 2001). The eggs are white and usually completely unmarked, a feature which Meanley (1971) speculates makes them more conspicuous and thus vulnerable to detection by predators. I have found active nests from the third week of April through the second week of August, which concurs with nesting activity documented across the breeding range. In 2002 I found one nest in which the first egg was laid on 22 April and two nests in which the first egg was laid on 26 April, the earliest nesting attempts recorded for this species (that I am aware of). The latest egg laying date I have recorded is 11 July. The female builds the nest in approximately three days, incubation lasts 13-15 days, and nestlings fledge after 10-12 days (Meanley 1971, pers. obs.). I have recorded clutch sizes from two to four eggs in Louisiana nests, although clutches of five have been reported (Brown and Dickson 1994). I'm lucky enough to be able to check nests by simply looking into them (no ladders or mirrors needed), although I have found a couple of high ones at 244 cm (8 feet).

SWWA is an elusive bird that typically inhabits dense, well-developed understories. The distribution of SWWA in contiguous mature forests is often patchy, corresponding to areas where disturbances have opened up the canopy and allowed light to reach the understory, promoting successional growth but sparse

herbaceous ground cover. The canebrakes (*Arundinaria* spp.) of bottomland hardwood forests exemplify this type of habitat. More recently identified habitats, such as unthinned, mid-aged Loblolly Pine (*Pinus taeda*) plantations, share many of the characteristics traditionally associated with SWWA habitat.

SWWA is a ground foraging insectivore that employs unique methods of foot trembling and leaf flipping to locate and extract arthropods from the leaf litter. On both the breeding and wintering grounds the most common prey types include beetles, spiders, and to a lesser extent, ants. Strong (2000) also found the bones of geckos and remains of orthopterans in emetic samples collected in Jamaica. On a few rare occasions I have observed SWWA uncharacteristically foraging in the canopy of understory/ low midstory trees, perhaps for caterpillars and/or homopterans to feed nestlings.

Due to its small wintering range and specialized habitat requirements in tropical forests, SWWA has been ranked among the Neotropical-Nearctic migrant wood-warblers most vulnerable to tropical deforestation (Morton 1992). Simultaneously, the bottomland hardwoods that comprise its primary breeding grounds have undergone a long history of decline due to high agricultural and timber demands for the soils and forests of the southeastern floodplains (Martin et al. 1993). The SWWA is identified as a species of 'Very High Priority Concern' by Partners in Flight, a 'Vulnerable Species' by the American Bird Conservancy, a top-ranked (1-5%) Neotropical migrant of management concern in areas of the Midwest, Northeast, and Southeastern United States (Brown and Dickson 1994) and is on the National Audubon Society's WatchList. A need for further research has been identified for all aspects of the warbler's life history and habitat requirements (Brown and Dickson 1994).

T.S. Allison

In June of 2001, Tropical Storm Allison caused severe flooding in the Honey Island Swamp. SWWA's were adversely affected by some loss of clutches and broods and probably by the severe decrease in available foraging sites (the leaf litter layer gets flooded and/or washed away and the arthropods with it). Graves (2001) suggests that SWWA's in the Great Dismal Swamp, Virginia, preferentially select territories in more well drained areas to avoid the negative impact of flooding on foraging sites. While he reports birds leaving optimal territories during flooding for this reason, I did not observe territory abandonment during flooding in the Honey Island Swamp, probably due to the sufficient availability of well drained foraging sites adjacent to some trails and roads. However, my field assistants and I were nest searching and monitoring in water that was sometimes up to our waists (and occasionally up to our necks!) for over a week after the storm ended. Two five-day-old nestlings died of exposure to the inclement weather, while nests with eggs fared better and generally lasted through the storm. In the same year I found both the latest and highest nests I had yet recorded, possibly the results of the storm inducing third or fourth nesting attempts and protection of the nest from high flood waters, respectively.

continued on page 9

One interesting observation was a nest built during the inclement weather prior to the major storms on 6-7 June 2001. On 8 June I nearly missed finding the nest as it was about half the usual size and lacking most of the bulky layer of hardwood leaves of the outer cup. Even as I approached it I thought it must be, at best, an old nest, possibly from the previous year. To my surprise a SWWA was incubating four eggs on the shabbiest nest I'd ever seen. Her selection of leaf litter was certainly limited, as the nest well reflected, probably due to the flooding. On subsequent visits I found the nest held together despite its thin cup and weather worn condition, but there was another problem. Due to the storm, the arrangement of branches in the mid and upper canopies had changed, exposing the nest to several hours of afternoon sunlight. The dense, dark understories that SWWA's inhabit typically protect their nests from such exposure. In this case I believe the sun, rather than the rain, caused this female to abandon her nest.

Polygyny

Although Swainson's Warblers are generally regarded as monogamous, one possible case of polygyny has been reported. Graves (1992) found two nests 2.8 meters apart, each being incubated by a separate female on one male's territory. Until 2002, I had never found any evidence suggesting polygyny. However, while searching for a re-nesting attempt in May, I located two nests that were approximately 4 meters apart from each other, each containing two eggs. One male was singing about 50 meters away. Suspecting that egg laying was not yet completed, I waited to make more detailed observations until the clutches were finished and the female(s) incubating. Upon returning to the nests I found one with a female incubating three eggs. The other nest also contained three eggs. Unfortunately, two had been poked open (in a wren-like fashion) while one remained intact. Although I do not have definitive proof, I suspect that this was a case of polygyny. I subsequently located two older, inactive nests that were also within several meters of each other on the same territory, possibly an earlier round of nesting attempts, one by each female? A couple of weeks later, when the chicks in the surviving nest were almost near fledging, I located what I surmised to be the re-nest of the second female further away (though still only about 18 meters) on the same territory. Eventually each nest fledged 3 young.

While the behavior of the male and the proximity of these nests caused me to suspect polygyny in this case, I have sometimes observed colonial behaviors in this species as well. I have watched as many as four individual adults foraging together during the early incubating stages of the breeding season, exhibiting courtship-like postures and vocalizations. Although territory size can be quite large, I have also found nests of separate pairs of birds in fairly close proximity, as well as multiple adults attending fledglings.

Whose nest is this, anyway?

In 1999 I revisited nests after the completion or failure of a clutch, curious about the condition and durability of the nests over time. To my surprise, several of the nests I checked were altered, and occupied. A dome-like cap of dead leaves and an inner lining of dead grasses and sometimes fur had been added to the original nest. When I tapped on the top of one such nest out popped a small orange mouse with four babies attached to her teats. She leapt and clung to a nearby cane, some of the babies falling off in the process. I picked them up and replaced them in the nest, and from a distance watched the mother return safely to her litter.

Since then I've had many encounters with the Golden Mouse (*Ochrotomys nuttali*), an arboreal species that inhabits the dense understories of pine and hardwood forests and constructs separate globular nests for shelter and feeding, and breeding (Lowery 1974). The placement of their nests in the understory is very similar to that of several bird species, and it is not unusual to find that what looked like a Swainson's nest from a distance actually belongs to a mouse. How many of the mouse nests I find are renovated vs. original construction? They make use of several species of birds nests, the most common I've found being those of Swainson's Warblers, Northern Cardinals, and Carolina Wrens. I have never found an active nest taken over by mice for this purpose, although in 2002 I found a White-eyed Vireo nest that had been preempted for storage. Three broken eggs were lying directly beneath the nest, and the nest was filled to the top with cached acorns. In 2003 I placed artificial nests with button quail and plasticine eggs in my study sites in order to compare predator assemblages between habitat types. Eventually some of these were also used for other purposes, some converted to mouse nests and some used for storage. One contained two crawfish claws, a snail shell, and several acorns. Another common occurrence is the occupancy of these birds nests turned mouse nests by Hymenoptera such as wasps and ants, so be forewarned if you're poking around for mice!

Acknowledgements

Thanks to G. Oussett, S. Tanner, and J. Harris for their brave assistance in the field. Thanks also to T. Sherry, P. Stouffer, and A. Bassett for their involvement in developing this project. B. Meanley and G. Graves should be recognized for providing much helpful information on a challenging species. Funding for my research has been provided by the Louisiana Ornithological Society, Orleans Audubon, Sigma Xi, the J. Bennett Johnston Science Foundation, and the Weyerhaeuser Company.

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This will allow folks to observe birds both to the west up to the jetty and pass as well as the large flock of birds usually found to the east. It will also provide a good view of the marsh behind and to the east of the beach. This tower will be a great asset to all birders visiting the area.

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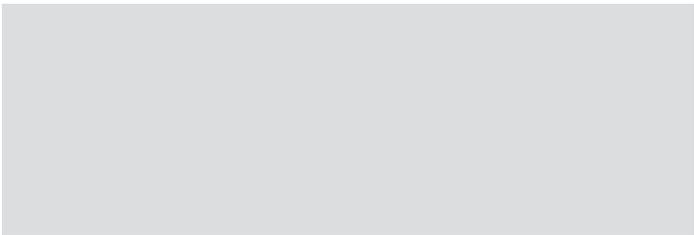
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