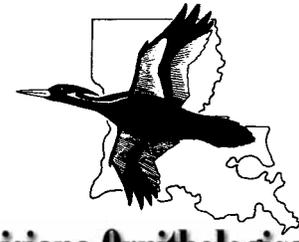


# LOS NEWS



[www.losbird.org](http://www.losbird.org)

NEWSLETTER OF THE

**Louisiana Ornithological Society**

## LOS OFFICERS AND BOARD MEMBERS

*President* - Nancy Menasco  
503 Haynes Avenue  
Shreveport, LA 71105  
nmcpa@aol.com  
318-868-3255

*Vice President* - Linda Stewart Knight  
604 Chevelle Ct. Suite C  
Baton Rouge, LA 70806  
stewknig@bellsouth.net  
225-769-0549

*Secretary* - Joelle J. Finley  
6654 Argonne Blvd.  
New Orleans, LA 70124  
joellefinley@bellsouth.net  
504-488-3996

*Treasurer* - Judith O'Neale  
504 Whitebark Dr  
Lafayette LA 70508-6362  
337-981-1011  
jloneale@aol.com

*Past President* - Bill Fontenot  
217 St. Fidelis  
Carencro, LA 70520  
337-896-9187  
natrldlite@cox.net

*Board Member* - Jackie Duncan  
112 Harper Ferry  
Boyce, LA 71409  
318-793-8064  
jrduncan@fs.fed.us

*Board Member* - Joan Brown  
3100 Deborah Dr #63  
Monroe LA 71201-2091  
318-322-3424  
bljnbr@colla.com

*Board Member* - Ed Wallace  
340 Audubon Blvd.  
New Orleans, LA 70125  
504-343-1433  
mottleduck@hotmail.com

*LOS News Editor* -  
Bob Hamilton  
444 E. Woodgate Ct.  
Baton Rouge, LA 70808-5411  
(h) 225.766.5461  
(fax) 708.570.9146  
bob\_hamil@yahoo.com

**Submission Deadline**  
*Winter LOS News is*  
**December 1, 2009**

*Journal of Louisiana Ornithology*  
James Ingold  
Department of BioScience, LSUS  
One University Place  
Shreveport, LA 71115  
Los-jlo@pilot.lsus.edu

## 2009 LOS FALL MEETING

**Friday and Saturday, October 30-31**

**Cameron/Creole**

We have our fingers crossed that no hurricanes will ravage the Louisiana coast so that we can once again return to Cameron/Creole for our fall meeting.

### Friday Evening, October 30

- 6:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m. Registration at the Creole Community Center The Cameron Parish Tourist Commission will provide light snacks.
- 7:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m. Meeting and Evening Program Birding Amazonian Peru and Machu Picchu presented by Carol Foil and Joelle Finley. This past July Carol and Joelle participated in a birding trip to Peru led by LOS past-president Karen Fay. In addition to a thrilling trip to Machu Picchu, they stayed in the cloud forest at the Cock of the Rock lodge and had phenomenal views of the amazing Cock of the Rock! They also spent time in the rain forest at the Amazonia Lodge on the eastern slope of the Andes.

### Saturday, October 31

- 7:00 a.m. Field Trip - Meet in the parking lot of the Cameron Motel. Ed Wallace will lead a field trip to the Cameron Parish hot spots.
- 5:30 p.m. - 6:00 p.m. Registration the Creole Community Center.
- 6:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m. Meal provided as a fundraiser by the Cameron 4-H group. Chicken/sausage gumbo dinner.
- 7:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m. Meeting and Evening Program Our speaker will be John Arvin from the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory. John is known to all of us for his reporting on the use of radar technology to study trans-gulf migration. John began his career in education, writing and producing educational films in the sciences for the Texas Education Agency. He became a full time birding tour leader in the late 1970s and followed that occupation for more than 25 years. He retired from full-time tour leading to live about half of each year in Peru as resident naturalist in Manu National Park. He joined the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory where he plans and oversees various research projects. He will present the results of some of these recent projects that will be of interest to Louisiana birders.

### Annual Business Meeting

Election of Officers

### Cameron Accommodations:

The phone number for the Cameron Motel is 337-775-5442. The Cameron Motel also has sites available for RV campers. Several eating places (in trailers) are open in Cameron. Other accommodations can be found in Sulphur or Lake Charles.

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**Directions to the Creole Community Center:**

The Creole Community Center/Fire Station is approximately 15-20 minutes from the Cameron Motel. It is ¼ mile east of the only traffic light in Creole (Parish Road 1143). It is on the right hand side of the road with a big fenced parking lot.

**2009 LOS New Members  
As of September 2009**

Judy & Dick Burkepile, Oxford MS

Jonathan Clark, Jena

Kevin D. Colley, New Orleans

Kevin Leigh, Youngsville

William Marmande, Houma

Kenneth McMillan, Baton Rouge

Lisa Montgomery, New Orleans

Lynn O’Niell, Franklin LA

Beverly Price, Pineville

Amy Shutt, Baton Rouge

Amy Stone, New Orleans

**CORRECTION.**

The Table in the article ‘The Next 10 Species in Louisiana’ in the Spring 2009 edition contained numerous errors. Corrections were published in [www.losbirds.org](http://www.losbirds.org). The errors were not the authors.” - ED.

**GUIDELINES FOR  
LOS GRANT REQUESTS**

Grant Proposal requests should be submitted to LOS by January 15 of each year. The Committee will have its recommendations to the LOS Board of Directors by February 15. The LOS Board will announce approved grants by March 1. Application materials are available at [www.losbird.org](http://www.losbird.org).

All proposals must be based on Louisiana Birds. Study subject should be a situation unique to Louisiana. Priority will be given to studies addressing current problems and issues in Louisiana ornithology or bird conservation in Louisiana habitats.

The researcher must be a member of the Louisiana Ornithological Society.

A synopsis of the study must be submitted to the Editor of the Journal of Louisiana Ornithology (JLO) within 6 months following project completion. It will be at the discretion of the Editor of the JLO whether the paper is published.

It is requested that, where possible, a slide presentation be given at a LOS meeting within 6 months after the project is completed. A presentation may be given during the study.

The same person may apply for a grant each year but a written report plus a letter from their research advisor or someone knowledgeable of the study must also be submitted.

Send applications to  
LOS Secretary Joelle J. Finley  
6654 Argonne Blvd  
New Orleans, LA 70124-3931  
[joelle\\_finley@bellsouth.net](mailto:joelle_finley@bellsouth.net)

Documents via email preferred

***Make a note ...***

**UPCOMING MEETINGS**

Winter meeting ..... January 29-31, 2010..... Baton Rouge

Spring meeting..... April 23-24, 2010..... Cameron

**DEADLINE**

We welcome submission from readers and others.  
Submission deadline for winter LOS NEWS is December 1, 2009

## Introduced Species and Origins of Rare Birds Discussion

John Sevenair has written an interesting note that deals with introduced species and the origins of rare birds. The Louisiana Bird Records Committee has responded. Below is a brief background of the Louisiana Bird Records Committee, the note, and the response. - Ed.

### Introduction

#### The Louisiana Bird Records Committee

Donna L. Dittmann, Secretary, LBRC

Each Louisiana Bird Records Committee (henceforth LBRC or Committee)'s annual report begins more or less the same way and provides background and basic operation of the LBRC: The LBRC was established in 1979 *to evaluate and archive records of unusual species that occur in Louisiana and strives to determine record acceptability to aid in understanding the patterns of occurrence of rarities in the state.* Records (in the form of observers' written reports, copies of field notes, photographs, videotapes, audio recordings, or specimens) are reviewed by each of seven elected LBRC Voting Members (in accordance with LBRC

Bylaws, *LOS News* No. 87; Bylaws updated 14 March 2009) and *all records* submitted to the LBRC are compiled by the Secretary and *archived in the LBRC files at the Louisiana State University Museum of Natural Science* (henceforth LSUMNS). The LBRC Bylaws contain additional operating procedures and are available at the LBRC website: <http://www.losbird.org/lbrc/lbrc.htm>.

The boldfaced italics used above are added for emphasis. Nevertheless there seems to be uncertainty surrounding the Committee and its functions as exemplified by the note by John Sevenair below.

## Bird Record Committees, Birding, and Ornithology: Uncertain Relationships

John P. Sevenair

Bird record committees (BRC's), birding, and ornithology interact in several ways. In one vital aspect they form an almost-seamless whole. BRC's insist that rarities be documented, and the effects here are all positive. BRC records are data in a grand project on vagrancy in birds; BRC insistence on field notes, photographs, and/or specimens of rare birds makes birding, birders, and ornithology stronger.

### BRC debates on introduced resident species

Birders, or rather listers, don't have to care about this. Individuals of such species will be easy to find long before the species becomes a candidate for a state list. I saw my first Monk Parakeet in Louisiana in 1984. Listers will just follow the rules.

For ornithologists and conservationists, though, current LBRC policies have important negative consequences. There are four common introduced species that live and breed in Louisiana, and they all have been almost ignored: Canada Goose, Mallard (feral), Muscovy Duck, and Monk Parakeet.

Two other areas of conflict can take up large portions of BRC time: introduced species and the origin (rather than the identity) of rare birds. Here the interests of birders, ornithologists, and even conservationists can diverge. Here are some ideas on the subject. The Louisiana BRC is the only one I know much about, so I'll use it as my example.

Thanks to birder prejudices as reinforced by the LBRC, we have little information on population and distribution trends for any of them.

They've all been in Louisiana for decades, but they have been mostly invisible on Christmas counts, the major place for all-species data prior to eBird. A 3x5 card on any of them is unlikely to make *North American Birds*, and we're unlikely to submit many; we've been well trained to ignore those species. That superb new institution, eBird, has it exactly right, in Louisiana at least: count everything. The LBRC should put

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the word out: every bird in the big four is countable if it can fly and lives outside a cage or pen. Park Canadas, Rockefeller Canadas, yes. Serious birders will still look for, and try to document, 'real' Canadas. Yes, I'm saying that not only Monk Parakeet but also Muscovy Duck should be on the state list.

There should certainly be debates about putting introduced resident species on the state list. Black Swan populations might be at the right level for a debate to start. Wild, pristine America has not been present for thousands of years. Birders and the LBRC should give up their European-derived cultural nostalgia for a lost golden past and accept the reality, for the sake of better science.

## **BRC debates on bird origins for highly unusual records**

These debates are important for listers but unimportant for ornithology. Listers want to know if their rare bird is countable NOW, but on the whole ornithologists only need to know if the bird was identified correctly. Patterns will be apparent (or not).

Consider these species, all recorded in Louisiana: Clark's Nutcracker, Harris's Hawk, Gray Gull, Kelp Gull, Crowned Slaty-Flycatcher, House Crow, Ringed Kingfisher, Eurasian Wigeon, and Magnificent Hummingbird. Louisiana is well outside their normal ranges. Did they fly to Louisiana on their own, follow a ship or ride on one, were they kept captive on a ship or in a car, did they escape from a collection or a falconer? With a single record for most of these species it's hard to be sure.

The most extreme case is probably the notorious Swallow-tailed Gull from California. There have been several records from Central America since the first California sighting, so vagrancy in Swallow-tailed Gulls should be no longer be surprising. Birders' desire for a quick decision encouraged a premature discussion, in which too much passion and too many theories chased too few facts.

Perhaps a category of "accepted records lacking full evidence" could be expanded to include questions of origin as well as a lack of hard evidence (the LBRC's Red-throated Loon category). But at least records of these species exist under the current regime, as long as the deadly words "don't think about submitting that" are never taken seriously.

I hope this provides some food for thought.

## **LBRC response to Sevenair's essay**

**Donna L. Dittmann (Secretary); Steven W. Cardiff (Chair); Paul E. Conover, James L. Ingold, Dave Patton, Curtis C. Sorrells, and Phillip Wallace (Voting Members); and B. Mac Myers III (Alternate Member)**

Sevenair agrees with the LBRC's policy regarding evaluation of the correct identification of Review-List rarities, but has issues with how the Committee should handle introduced species and issues of origin. Both of these fall under LBRC jurisdiction with regard to placement of species on the State List: (LBRC Bylaws section: II. Purpose. G. *Keep the official Louisiana State Bird List.*)

*Feral species.* Feral species pose a challenge: what combination of population size, extent of distribution, and time frame should represent the threshold of an acceptable standard of establishment, and, therefore, qualifies a species to be added as an Introduced Species to the Louisiana State List? Sevenair suggests that the LBRC has impeded the official addition of invasive species to the State List by directly or indirectly discouraging birders from recording and submitting records to the Committee.

We are sure that most everyone can agree that every escaped or released aviary bird encountered does not warrant that species' placement on the State List as an Introduced Species. However, for any sort of "presence" beyond "anecdotal" occurrences of obvious escapes, it is much more difficult to decide upon some arbitrary but standardized threshold to determine official recognition. The LBRC does its best to apply standards consistently and has periodically modified and refined sections of the Bylaws pertaining to these matters (see Bylaws: <http://losbird.org/lbrc/bylaws.htm>). But, not all invasive/introduced species are created equally and, thus, they require case-by-case analysis.

First, consider historically Introduced Species such as Rock Pigeon, European Starling, and House Sparrow. With the possible exception of Rock Pigeon, these species were not directly introduced into Louisiana but occupied the state "indirectly" during the course of their large-scale, continent-wide expansion that occurred over relatively short time periods; they have continued to thrive for over a century. More recently (late 1970's to early 1990's), two more species have joined Louisiana's introduced avifauna under circumstances similar to those above: House Finch (originating from the feral Eastern population) and Eurasian Collared-Dove (originating from the Bahamas via Florida). Both of these species quickly

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established large, viable, *wide-ranging* populations, and it would now be difficult to imagine Louisiana without them. The first documented Eurasian Collared-Dove for Louisiana, at Fort Pike in 1988, was initially considered unacceptable by the LBRC because of questionable origin. This seemed logical at the time, as there was an aviary near Ft. Pike, and collared-doves had not yet occupied areas immediately to the east in Mississippi and Alabama. But, as additional Louisiana records were accumulated, and it became apparent that collared-doves were “leap-frogging” their way west, the species was finally officially added to the State List in 1995 and Eurasian Collared-Dove was removed from the Review List by 1996. Because the Committee is, well, a committee, there is an unavoidable delay (at least back in the “primitive” 1980’s-1990’s!) in placing a species on the State List as initial observations are submitted, circulated by mail, reviewed, debated, and published, and numbers, distribution, and breeding status are monitored to determine if/when the species met the requirements for official introduced status (see below). In other words, the Committee does not immediately convene a summit every time a potential new species is reported; it takes time to synthesize the evidence for adding a species to the State List. Although the 7 years that it took to add Eurasian Collared-Dove to the State List may have seemed like an eternity to some, it was actually a fairly rapid decision for a records committee decision on an introduced species. In fact, at the time that the species was added to the list, relatively few records had actually been submitted and accepted. So, if anything, the Committee was willing to expedite addition to the list and deviate from the normal policy of waiting to accumulate many more records.



individuals. The most prominent examples in Louisiana have been Black Francolin and Monk Parakeet. Black Francolin was deliberately introduced as a potential upland game bird in 1961-62 by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife

In a separate category are exotic species that have been directly introduced into Louisiana through known or presumed intentional and/or accidental releases of captive

and Fisheries; in northern Cameron Parish. The population initially spread and thrived enough that George H. Lowery with “no hesitation” declared the species as a “successfully introduced exotic” by 1974. But, the species subsequently experienced a rapid decline and ultimately disappeared. The LBRC removed Black Francolin from the State List in 1988. There have been numerous similar examples of initial success and ultimate failure of introductions from across the country. Monk Parakeet is a commonly kept cage bird, but “feral” Monks have been noted in parts of the Greater New Orleans area since the mid 1980’s. So, although fairly conspicuous within a limited area, Monks have been slow to expand their distribution. Monk populations in different parts of the country are certainly derived from independent colorizations from local releases and, thus, each population must be considered for introduced status. Monk Parakeets have been observed elsewhere in the state, but these are considered to be isolated escapes and not dispersers from New Orleans. This complicates matters, as new populations appearing outside Greater New Orleans in the future would have to be evaluated separately. For that matter, it is also difficult to determine if new escapes/releases continue to augment the New Orleans population itself. Muscovy Duck can also be squeezed into this group. Louisiana “muscovies” are obviously derived from released birds and they occur almost exclusively at park ponds. Wild-plumaged individuals are rare and may or may not even be able to fly. They also frequently hybridize with other mongrel park ducks. This blurs the very definition of Muscovy Duck. So, it would appear that we have a long ways to go before the LBRC would need to consider the established introduced status of Muscovy Duck in the state. Many other species of exotic waterfowl have been reported in Louisiana: Egyptian Goose, Black Swan, Mute Swan, Ruddy Shelduck, Mandarin Duck, etc. None of these species have a pattern of natural vagrancy to the New World, nor do any of these species show a clear pattern of establishing breeding populations in Louisiana. Upland game birds (a la Black Francolin) are another problematic group because of deliberate introduction attempts or periodic releases at hunting preserves. Thus, the occasional Ring-necked Pheasant, Chukar, Gray Partridge, etc., is encountered in Louisiana. But none of these species has shown signs of persisting in the wild. The Committee encourages monitoring and submission of records (on 3 X 5 cards) of all these species.

One might argue that because small, localized populations

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of New Orleans Monk Parakeets or scattered flocks of “Muscovy Ducks” have persisted longer than Black Francolin, including surviving hurricane events; they should be considered viable and established enough to merit Introduced Status. Conversely, it could also be argued that small and localized populations, especially of Monk Parakeet (which is considered a pest species due to its bulky nests- a threat to utility towers - and its potential to damage agricultural crops) are still highly “vulnerable” to extirpation (whether natural or through deliberate persecution); these “small-scale” populations do not rise to the same level of establishment as the “large-scale” invaders such as Eurasian Collared-Dove.

Hard to imagine Louisiana now without



Whether the LBRC should add small, localized populations to the state list is worthy of continued debate, but the LBRC is not compelled to bend to pressure to rapidly list these species. With regard to this issue, the LBRC bylaws state:

(a) Addition to the State List. The LBRC will review records of breeding populations of introduced species not on the State List but only if evidence is submitted that attempts to prove the correct identification of the species and the viability of the population. To be judged viable, a population must (1) be documented breeding in the state for a minimum of ten (10) consecutive years, (2) have numbers of individuals increasing or stabilized after an initial period of increase, and (3) be judged to have occupied geographically contiguous suitable habitat to such a degree as to sustain the population and be thought unlikely to significantly diminish. A population maintained primarily by recurrent releases, either intentional or accidental, or requiring intense management for survival, shall not be considered viable.

Feral Canada Geese and Mallards are special cases because they represent introduced populations of native-occurring species. Canada Geese were formerly common in Louisiana in winter, and wild individuals may occasionally occur here during that season. As Canada Geese gradually shifted to wintering north of Louisiana and precipitously declined here during the 1950's-1960's, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries initiated a program to establish a



resident population in coastal southwestern Louisiana. The so-called “Rockefeller Refuge” population has now persisted for 40-50 years, but has never become

widespread or common enough to allow the intended hunter harvest. Meanwhile, many other local feral populations have sprung up around the state. Feral populations have also proliferated across the northeastern U.S., and some of these populations may undergo limited migratory movements (but this has not been documented in Louisiana). Regardless, the Committee’s perspective on this is that Canada Goose cannot be added as an introduced species if wild individuals were known to occur or potentially still occur in Louisiana, and we do not see the point in listing species as introduced using a seasonal definition. Therefore, Canada Goose is best considered a vagrant and it has recently been added to the Review List. Somewhat similarly, Mallards are common in Louisiana in winter, but small numbers also occur during the summer, primarily in urban and suburban park situations. There is almost no way to be certain if summer Mallards are of wild, captive, or feral origin, but the default conclusion is usually that they are not wild birds if they remain here to breed. In any event, the LBRC would hope that the birding public will understand the reasoning behind how these species are treated on the state list. As Sevenair mentions, e-bird can now be used to archive feral birds.

Falconer’s escapes represent yet another potential source of escapee “vagrants” that might otherwise be assumed to be of wild origin. Of primary relevance for Louisiana is the recent popularity among falconers of Harris’s Hawk. Many Louisiana occurrences of this species are believed to pertain to escapees, whereas others have been associated with well-documented natural irruptions north and east of the species normal distribution. The Committee believes that it is important to try to differentiate between these natural and unnatural occurrences rather than counting every individual that doesn’t obviously have leg jesses or other signs of captivity, even if it means basing some of those decisions on probabilities. Other vagrant raptors, especially relatively “tame” adults in urban situations during non-irruption years,

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would also be considered worthy of extra scrutiny.

To wrap up this section, the Committee would like to emphasize that it encourages, rather than discourages, monitoring of exotic and feral bird populations, and we dismiss the claim that the LBRC has biased observers into ignoring them until they are suddenly so common that listing and countability are merely a formality. For example, Monk Parakeet, although not on the official State List was added to the Review List to encourage submissions of reports supporting their establishment. To the contrary, it could be argued that, were it not for periodic LBRC requests for information on, and monitoring of, these species, we would have even less understanding of these species' history and current status. Once these species have been officially listed and removed from the Review List, they are generally beyond the jurisdiction of the Committee (unless they go into decline). If anything, when a species suddenly becomes entrenched enough to be listed as Introduced, then the Committee is actually sending a strong signal that the species has reached a status benchmark that may warrant biological threat assessment by the appropriate authorities. However, we assume that most exotics are under scrutiny by the USDA et al. much earlier on in their invasion history. There are plenty of examples of pockets of potential crop pests being exterminated quickly after being discovered (Japanese White-eye and Red-whiskered Bulbul in California come to mind). Furthermore, the implication that we have contributed to any possible "bad consequences" is dependent on the claim of LBRC-induced birder prejudices against tracking these species, which, again, in our opinion is a false claim. Thus, if Monk Parakeet had been listed soon after flocks of feral birds began to be reported from New Orleans, then perhaps the species would have received much more scrutiny from the USDA and been systematically eliminated because of the species' potential "bad consequences." Sevenair wrote: "Birders and the LBRC should give up their European-derived cultural nostalgia for a lost golden past and accept the reality, for the sake of better science." We would argue that science is not necessarily served by a "make everything countable" philosophy. "Count everything" (as in submitting lists to eBird)- yes, but countability should be based on existing criteria that have been worked out over decades of policy trial and error.

*Issues of origin.* In addition to obvious exotic species, the question of wild origin must be considered for other long distance vagrants, especially potential first state records of extraordinary significance. Again, the Committee evaluates the likelihood of wild origin on a case-by-case basis: it takes into account: a species' dispersive tendencies, patterns of vagrancy, the behavior and physical condition of individual vagrants, and the species' status in the cage bird trade. Certainly this is a topic worthy of debate. Probably everyone can agree that some species/individuals are not countable because they have obviously escaped from captivity, whereas the origin of other species/individuals is not always clear and often can never be known for certain. The LBRC has attempted to set a reasonable standard for evaluation as stated in the Bylaws:

(b) Origin. (1) Natural origin. For the purpose of the LBRC and these Bylaws, "natural origin" will be defined as: a bird is considered to be of natural origin if, and only if, the probability of its arrival as a result of man's assistance (either active or passive) is negligible. Because determination of human assistance for any particular individual or record may not be possible, a designation, "Origin-Hypothetical" can be assigned to those records that are problematical. (2) Origin Hypothetical is defined as: A) a species with known range and natural history such that it would *not be* a good candidate for vagrancy; B) a species that is *kept in captivity* (even though no escapees have been reported and the species might be a good candidate for vagrancy based on range or natural history); or C) there is at least circumstantial evidence suggesting that an occurrence may not be of natural origin, even though the species is a potential candidate for vagrancy. **Records designated "Origin-Hypothetical" will be so indicated by an appropriate symbol on the State List (for a first or single state record) or in a LBRC Report.** The "Origin-Hypothetical" symbol will be removed from the species name on the State List in the event of a subsequent record where origin is not questioned. (3) Origin Questionable. Records will be rejected on origin, if the origin is *known* or highly *suspected* to be man-assisted.

Boldface and italics emphasize LBRC policy with regard to birds with hypothetical origin. The LBRC already has this option in place. Species designated Origin-Hypothetical are listed on the State List and are countable.

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## Let's dissect some of the examples mentioned by Sevenair:

~**Kelp Gull.** A Southern Hemisphere species with no prior pattern of vagrancy to Central or North America, but northward range expansion had occurred within South America. Origin was an obvious concern but we were also dealing with a gull and obtaining definitive evidence of correct identification took time. Once that was settled, natural vagrancy was debated, and the species wild origin was ultimately accepted because of the presence of multiple breeding individuals, probability, and the fact that additional occurrences had accumulated from Mexico, the Caribbean, and elsewhere along the gulf coast.

~**Crowned Slaty-Flycatcher.** A well-documented South American "austral migrant" (with a seasonal pattern similar to the nominate subspecies of the Fork-tailed Flycatcher—breeding in southern South America during the southern summer and migrating north to northern South America for the southern winter). This species had long been considered a long-shot candidate for vagrancy to North America. The Louisiana record is from early June, which is a perfect time for a northbound "overshoot" to reach the U.S. Although a spectacular occurrence, it is not completely unanticipated and the Committee had no reservations about acceptance of this species because of natural origin.

~**Eurasian Wigeon.** Vagrant waterfowl are especially problematic because members of the family are popular zoo/aviary birds. So, again, records must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis and probabilities must be prominently considered. Eurasian Wigeon has a well-established pattern of winter vagrancy across North America. The accepted Louisiana records, in addition to being well-documented for identification confirmation, fit that pattern. The Committee is currently re-evaluating a previously unaccepted occurrence of Baikal Teal, based on a clearer pattern of vagrancy in the western U.S. than was available during the first review of the Louisiana record.

~**Clark's Nutcracker** is a well-known irruptive species in the western U.S. The Louisiana individual was clearly correctly identified and in perhaps the best "nutcracker habitat" in Louisiana. But, it had a deformed bill, and the Committee took an extra close look due to this and the "pet corvid" hypothesis. What would you consider most likely: that this nutcracker was under human care then released (perhaps by a family returning from a vacation in the

Rockies...), or that it got here on its own around the same time that a number of other out-of-range nutcrackers were being recorded in the east and Midwest? In the case of the nutcracker, the committee decided the later was more probable (and that nutcrackers are not commonly adopted as pets)—*but that does not make it true*, just more probable in the minds of the Committee members reviewing that record.

~**Ringed Kingfisher.** A well-documented occurrence of a species with a well-established pattern of northward range expansion, and generally not kept in captivity. The LBRC was comfortable that this occurrence involved a natural vagrant.

~**Magnificent Hummingbird.** Again, vagrants north and east of the normal distribution are not unprecedented, and there seemed little reason to doubt natural vagrancy for the Louisiana bird.

Note that the above species were all accepted (most of them relatively quickly) and added to the State List by the LBRC. The exceptions mentioned by Sevenair are:

~**Gray Gull.** This record was not accepted on the basis of questionable identification. The two main issues were that some of the photos of this bird were deliberately withheld from the LBRC, and that a melanistic Laughing Gull could not be eliminated (you'd be surprised at the overall structural similarity of these two species). The Committee cannot debate origin if there is not a consensus on the identification.

~**House Crow.** This record has not yet been circulated. In the meantime, assuming that the identification will be accepted, consider that: 1) this species is a native of southern Asia; 2) it is a corvid, a family of birds commonly kept as pets and easy to maintain in captivity; 3) certain features of its plumage could be interpreted as indicating recent confinement; 4) it was relatively tame; and 5) it was not too far from major shipping routes (Galveston, Sabine Pass, Calcasieu Pass). Even if the bird was in pristine condition and wary, there would still be an overwhelming probability that the bird arrived here with human assistance (e.g., rode a ship and/or was provided with food). Thus, a final decision on this record would likely come down to a majority opinion as to whether "unrestrained ship-assistance" is an acceptable wild origin. So far, similar occurrences (e.g., Eurasian Jackdaw at Venice, Pied Crow on a gulf oil platform, etc.) have not been accepted. Certainly, there is a growing school of thought among bird record reviewers that such "unrestrained bird transported aboard a ship" records are acceptable, but so far the LBRC remains conservative regarding this issue.

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Sevenair concludes by resurrecting a controversial non-Louisiana record, California's infamous Swallow-tailed Gull found at Monterey Bay in June 1985. Instead of re-hashing the California deliberations, just for the sake of argument let's pretend that this bird was found in Louisiana, at the mouth of Southwest Pass of the Mississippi River. How would the LBRC handle it? How would *you* handle it? Would you be more or less biased depending on whether or not you *saw* the bird? This individual of a highly pelagic species was an alternate-plumaged adult that turned up during a time of year when the species should be nesting in the equatorial eastern Pacific Ocean. There were no documented extralimital records at that time, and it had been 2 years since the last strong El Nino event. Identification is straightforward, so it comes down to a choice between natural vagrancy and human-assisted origin. Some might accept the record without reservation, whereas others might be reluctant because the bird is onshore, in the wrong ocean, at the wrong time of year, and in the vicinity of a major shipping corridor.

All we can do is make educated guesses across a continuum from "no-brainer obvious escapes" to agonizing about probabilities for more borderline cases. The educated guess of each member of a committee (based on personal knowledge, research, opinions, and philosophies) will influence the ultimate outcome. We believe that Sevenair would like to see the LBRC and other BRCs ignore probabilities, stop the "agonizing," and just accept everything except for the obvious "no-brainer escapes." This brings us back to interpretations of the purpose of records committees. If the committee only serves an archival purpose, then there is no real need for a committee *per se*. But, if an organization creates a BRC to serve multiple roles, including archiving of *all records*, promotion of high standards of documentation, having members personally serve as good examples in documenting and submitting records, and to provide objective analysis of record acceptability (all of which the LBRC considers as its mandate), then hopefully the committee will fulfill those expectations. Although only those species on the Review List or not on the state list are solicited, the LBRC has never discouraged submission 3x5s cards for introductions or obvious escapes, etc. These cards are maintained at the LSUMNS, but space limitations in *North American Birds* preclude publishing many interesting records. We hope that this discussion has helped observers better understand the inner workings of the LBRC.

*My record wasn't accepted - why some observers don't want to participate*

Although not a concern of Sevenair's essay, this is a good opportunity to discuss an observer's reaction towards having a record deemed unacceptable. No one enjoys having a record "rejected" by a committee of peers, whether it involves identification or origin. Part of the LBRC's function is to make decisions of acceptance based on available information, the foundation of which is the *submitted documentation*. The LBRC believes distributional information is better if it is based on a solid foundation, which means that some good records may ultimately be considered unacceptable. Digital technology makes it a lot easier now to submit hard evidence, and the LBRC encourages observers to embrace this technology. It is still important to make careful visual observations and to record detailed notes because such information will always be an important back-up to any "hard evidence." The more detailed and informative the report, the more important it will be as part of the historical record of a species' occurrence. It is important to be honest with yourself regarding your observation, what you actually saw and for how long. This will be taken into consideration along with your general skill level to evaluate how robust the documentation ultimately submitted is. Remember that everybody makes mistakes. *Everybody at least occasionally misidentifies a bird or fails to describe a rare bird convincingly: yes, even all of the current and former LBRC members have had one or more of their records not be accepted.* A good philosophy is to be open-minded and objective, to refrain from emotional attachment to your records, and to avoid treating skepticism or constructive criticism as a personal attack on your integrity. Birding is a constant learning experience. It involves both positive and negative feedback, but the common goal is to improve personal skills and to educate the birding public. **Remember that, regardless of the outcome, all submitted records are archived and available for future inspection.**

### **LBRC: II. Purpose**

A. To the extent possible, determine the validity of records of rare birds (see section VI. for definition of records treated) from within the boundaries of the state of Louisiana and adjacent ocean. "Adjacent ocean" is herein defined as all ocean waters nearer to Louisiana land than to land of any other state, and within 200 nautical miles of the Louisiana coastline.

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These waters begin at the mouth of the Sabine River on the west, and the mouth of the East Pearl River on the east.

B. Maintain permanently the original bird records and all committee votes and comments for future use by interested parties.

C. Publish at least minimal data on all records receiving a decision.

D. Provide a means by which sight records of rarities can gain acceptance as valuable scientific data.

E. Contribute to knowledge of the birds of Louisiana.

F. Establish high standards of observation and reporting that will set a positive example for, and encourage other field observers.

G. Keep the official Louisiana State Bird List.

Donna L. Dittmann, Secretary of the Louisiana Bird Records will give a presentation at the LOS Spring 2010 Meeting on how to document rare birds. This should be fun and interactive presentation. Put it on your calendar!

## **LOS Awards**

**At our Spring Meeting at Grand Isle, LOS presented the following awards:**

### **LOS PRESIDENT'S AWARD The Louisiana Ornithological Society recognizes and honors BILL FONTENOT**

on this 18th day of April 2009 for his outstanding efforts in educating Louisianans about birds and their habitats and encouraging them to develop bird-friendly landscapes. A true naturalist, Bill attracts a broad spectrum of people through his unique knowledge of birds and native plants. As Director of the Acadiana Park Nature Center for over 20 years, Bill established the flagship Fourth Grade Environmental Education Program as well as field trips, workshops, and lectures for the general public. A prolific writer, he has captivated readers with his almost-poetic writings on the fascinating life of local birds. Widely sought as a speaker, Bill brings a unique program to his audiences - blending his in-depth knowledge of native flora

and fauna. Many a birder and native gardener got their start after attending a lecture or hike with Bill.

### **LOS PRESIDENT'S AWARD The Louisiana Ornithological Society recognizes and honors PETER YAUKEY**

on this 18th day of April 2009 for his pioneering research into the short and long-term impacts of hurricanes on the avifauna of south Louisiana. His earlier surveys of birdlife in key New Orleans areas and his use of citizen research in other areas of Louisiana have provided a strong baseline to scientifically evaluate the impacts of Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Gustav, and Ike on bird populations in south Louisiana. Peter's continuing research tracks the recovery of birds in these regions and evaluates factors influencing their recovery. Basic data developed from these pioneering studies will assist scientists in developing programs to aid the recovery of our avifauna after devastating hurricanes and other severe weather events.

### **DR. GEORGE H. LOWERY AWARD The Louisiana Ornithological Society recognizes and honors DAVID MUTH**

on this 18th day of April 2009 for his success in conserving habitat for Louisiana birds. Through his active leadership roles in the Orleans Audubon Society and the Louisiana Ornithological Society, his work with the National Park Service and his strong, positive leadership position within the Louisiana birding community, David has constantly focused the community on the critical need of habitat conservation for migratory and resident birds. Through his collaboration with others, David was instrumental in setting aside significant woodlot acreage on Grand Isle. He continues to work untiringly to preserve and improve habitat in the Cameron coastal plain, the Venice region and other areas of South Louisiana.

**Louisiana Ornithological Society**

**[www.losbird.org](http://www.losbird.org)**

## LOS Membership Renewal Time

**Membership renewals are due January 2010 for the coming year.**

**Your expiration date is on your mailing label.**

*Thank you for renewing your LOS membership.*

### LOS MEMBERSHIP FORM

***Please join today!***

*Dues are payable January 1st of each year;  
Please check your mailing label for expiration date.*

Renewal     New Member

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone:(\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Make check payable to: **LOS**

Send to: Judith L. O'Neale, LOS Treasurer  
504 Whitebark Drive, Lafayette, LA 70508-6362

#### DUES STRUCTURE:

___ Regular:	\$20.00/yr
___ Family:	\$25.00/yr
___ Junior (under 14):	\$7.50/yr
___ Student:	\$10.00/yr
___ Senior (over 65):	\$15.00/yr
___ Senior Family:	\$20.00/yr
___ Library	\$15.00/yr*
___ Contributing:	\$50.00/yr
___ Sustaining:	\$100.00/yr
___ Life:	\$300.00**
___ Family Life:	\$500**

\*Please add \$2.00 for foreign subscriptions

\*\*Installments may be arranged for Life memberships

## Yellow Rails and Rice Festival

The First Annual Yellow Rails and Rice Festival" is scheduled for 30 October-8 November 2009. These dates are chosen to maximize the chances that second crop harvesting operations will be in progress and that



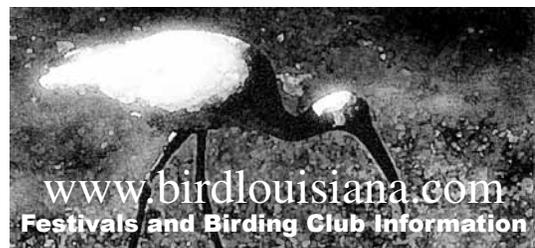
Yellow Rails will have arrived in the region in substantial numbers. This year's festival coincides with the LOS fall meeting in Cameron Parish so that LOS participants will have the opportunity to attend the Yellow Rails and Rice Festival on their way to, during, or after the meeting. The "Yellow Railing" will continue through the first week of November, with the finale on the weekend of 7-8 November. Rice harvesting is dependent on good weather conditions, so any significant rainfall could interfere with harvesting. But, hopes are that the longer festival period may lessen the chances of a complete washout, and rain-contingencies are in consideration. So, mark your calendars and please stay tuned for further developments.

The festival is intended: 1) to bring birders and rice farmers together during Louisiana's late (second) rice harvest in a more organized format that will make Yellow Rail searching a more reliable endeavor; 2) to give individuals the opportunity to see

rice harvesting operations up close and personal and to further appreciate the rich cultural traditions of southwest Louisiana agriculture-based communities; 3) to promote mutually beneficial agritourism/ecotourism that will provide recreational enjoyment and generate economic opportunities in southwestern Louisiana's rice-growing region and adjacent areas; 4) to further educate the birding public and others of the critical importance of rice cultivation and other "working wetlands" to bird populations and to encourage cooperation between agricultural and bird conservation interests in a joint effort to preserve these relatively bird friendly agricultural systems; and, most importantly, 5) to have fun, see lots of great birds, and meet lots of nice people!

Festival details are still in preparation, but the focus will be on seeing Yellow Rails, whether escorted by "facilitators" to harvesting operations or aboard a harvesting combine. In addition to seeing Yellow Rails, observers will be able to enjoy a tremendous variety and abundance of other bird species in the region.

Steve Cardiff & Donna Dittmann





**Judith O'Neale**  
**Louisiana Ornithological Society**  
**504 Whitebark**  
**Lafayette, LA 70508**

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*Dues are payable in January of each year; Please check your mailing label.*

**- PRE-REGISTRATION FORM -**  
**LOS 2009 FALL MEETING – CAMERON/CREOLE, LA**  
**FRIDAY & SATURDAY, OCTOBER 30-31, 2009**

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Number registering for meeting \_\_\_\_\_ at \$10.00/person = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Number attending banquet \_\_\_\_\_ at \$6.00/person = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Membership Dues = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Total enclosed** = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Complete form and send with check payable to LOS to:**  
Judith O'Neale, 504 Whitebark Drive, Lafayette, LA 70508-6362  
**337-981-1011 or [jloneale@aol.com](mailto:jloneale@aol.com)**