

LOS

NEWS



www.losbird.org

NEWSLETTER OF THE

Louisiana Ornithological Society

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Submission Deadline
Spring LOS News
February 1, 2015

Journal of Louisiana Ornithology
Jennifer O. Coulson
64340 Fogg Lane
Pearl River, LA 70452
Jacoulson@aol.com

COME ON DOWN TO NEW ORLEANS 2015 LOS WINTER MEETING Wyndham Gardens Hotel Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, January 23, 24 & 25, 2015

The Orleans Audubon Society and Crescent Bird Club welcome everyone to join us in New Orleans for winter birding! Here's your chance to visit City Park's renowned Couturie Forest, see the thousands of Black-bellied Whistling Ducks at Lafreniere Park, hunt for winter flycatchers in Diamond, sparrows in the Bonnet Carré Spillway and the "never know what you will get" at Bayou Sauvage!

Accommodations: Reserve your room before December 24th.

A block of 20 rooms has been reserved at the Wyndham Gardens New Orleans Airport (not near the airport!), 6401 Veterans Memorial Blvd., Metairie, Louisiana 70003 (where I-10 crosses Veterans Blvd.). To get the special rate of \$89 (+12.75% tax, breakfast not included) per night you must **make your reservation with the hotel before December 24th** and mention the group name "**LOS Meeting.**" Phone: 1-877-999-3223. There are many fast food places and family restaurants in the general vicinity. **Directions from I-10 West:** Take exit 225, take ramp right and follow signs for Veterans Blvd., turn left onto Veterans, arrive at hotel on your right.

Friday, January 23

6:00 pm Registration

Wyndham Gardens (Cash bar)

Snacks provided by Orleans Audubon Society and Crescent Bird Club.

7:00 pm Meeting and Program

Donata Henry, Ph.D., speaker

Donata received her Ph.D. from Tulane University studying the breeding habits of Swainson's Warblers. For the past ten years

she has run a MAP station in the Honey Island Swamp where her study area has progressed from a partial clear cut to a closed canopy forest. She has a remarkable study of the birds from this evolving habitat.

Saturday, January 24

6:00 pm Registration

Wyndham Gardens (Cash bar)

6:30 pm Banquet

Green salad, pasta with meat sauce, green beans, rolls, bread pudding with rum sauce, iced tea and coffee. **Reservations MUST be received by Saturday, January 10th.**

7:30 pm Meeting and Program

Jennifer Coulson, Ph.D., speaker

Jennifer received her Ph.D. from Tulane University studying Swallow-tailed Kites. She has continued her kite research following breeding success, predation and migration patterns. She has now started radio-tracking Swallow-tailed Kites on their migration routes and has some fascinating stories to tell. In addition to her love of kites, Jennifer and her husband Tom are falconers and in addition to breeding Harris Hawks, keep an array of raptors at their home.

NOTE: Please mail your LOS Winter Meeting Reservations to Joelle Finley, 709 Dodge Avenue, Jefferson, Louisiana 70121.

Deadline is January 10th.

LOS 2015 Meeting, Continued on page 2

2015 Winter Meeting SATURDAY TRIPS

Winter Birds of Venice

Trip leader: Ed Wallace Date: Saturday, January 24, 2015
 Time: 7:15 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. **Full day trip.**
 Meeting place: Wyndham Garden Hotel parking lot.

Description: Join Ed Wallace on this all day birding trip to Venice with a stop at the famous Diamond ball field. Target birds for the trip include mostly wintering ducks, shorebirds and waders, and migrant, vagrant, and resident passerines, including wintering warblers. A few target species are White-winged Doves, Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, Western Kingbirds, *Myarchis* flycatchers, Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows, Seaside Sparrows, Lesser Black-backed Gulls, and Yellow-headed Blackbirds. This area has also been good for wintering hawks and warblers. It is not uncommon to see Broad-winged Hawks and Yellow-throated Warblers. During the last trip in 2007, 87 species of birds were found by the group.

Birding the South Shore of Lake Pontchartrain

Trip leader: TBD Date: Saturday, January 24, 2015
 Time: 7:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. **Full day trip.**
 Meeting place: Wyndham Garden Hotel parking lot.

Description: All day birding trip. Trip destinations are the Seabrook Bridge, South Shore of Lake Pontchartrain, and Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge. Target birds include wintering ducks, grebes, gulls, terns, and wintering passerines. We hope to see Greater Scaup and possibly Surf Scoters and Eared Grebes, in addition to the more expected ducks and Horned Grebes. Lake Pontchartrain has large numbers of wintering gulls. In addition to the usual Laughing, Ring-billed, Herring, and Bonaparte's, we hope to find Lesser Black-backed Gull, and possibly better. With regard to wintering passerines, in addition to the usual wintering warblers, sparrows, and phoebes, Bayou Sauvage has been a good place for vagrant flycatchers such as Ash-throated and Vermilion Flycatcher. Bayou Sauvage also is good for Common Ground Dove and overwintering birds such as Prairie Warbler and Clay-colored Sparrow. New Orleans East has also had overwintering Say's Phoebe and Vermilion as well.

Birds of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve

Trip leader: TBD Date: Saturday, January 24, 2015
 Time: 7:30 p.m. – 11:30 a.m. **Half-day trip.**
 Meeting place: Wyndham Garden Hotel parking lot.

Description: Half-day trip birding the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve. The bottomland hardwood forests and swamps of Jean Lafitte NHPP provide lovely scenery for bird watching. We will search for winter warblers and other passerines. This is a great place to see Barred Owls up close.

Birds of Lafreniere Park and Couturie Forest

Trip leader: TBD Date: Saturday, January 24, 2015
 Time: 1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. **Half-day trip**
 Meeting place: Wyndham Garden Hotel parking lot.

Description: Half-day trip birding to the lagoons of Lafreniere Park where you can walk among the Black-bellied Whistling Ducks (bring halved grapes, cracked corn, and pumpkin seeds!) A sight to behold. Winter birding in Couturie offers an array of wintering warblers and ducks. This area also has spectacular scenery.

2015 Winter Meeting SUNDAY TRIPS

Le Conte's Sparrow and Birds of the Bonne Carré Spillway

Trip leader: Chris Brantley
 Date: Sunday, January 25, 2015
 Time: 7:15 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. **Half-day trip.**
 Meeting place: Wyndham Garden Hotel parking lot.

Description: Half-day trip to the Bonne Carré Spillway in search of the LeConte's Sparrow and other grassland sparrows. There are often large numbers of shorebirds and wading birds. The Spillway is a good area for raptors, and Bald Eagle and Osprey are expected. Common birds we expect to see are Eastern Meadowlark and American White Pelican. Eastern Bluebird is possible and there is a chance of seeing Rough-winged Swallow. This is also a good spot for both dark ibis species and Least Bitterns.

Northshore Birding Hot Spots

Trip leader: TBD
 Date: Sunday, January 25, 2015
 Time: 7:15 a.m. – Noon. **Half-day trip.**
 Meeting place: Wyndham Garden Hotel parking lot.

Description: Half-day trip to birding hot spots on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain. We will begin at the Mandeville Lakefront and then choose between a few other locations like the Northlake Nature Center, Pelican Park, and Fontainebleau State Park. The Mandeville area of the lakefront usually has Common Loon, Brown Pelican, Bufflehead, Canvasback, and sometimes Redhead. Other birds sometimes seen here include Long-tailed Duck and Great Black-backed Gull. Last year these areas had a Brown Booby and an Iceland Gull. If trip participants are interested, we can also travel to Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge in search of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers and other pine woodland specialists. There has even been an over-wintering Say's Phoebe in Slidell, which hopefully sticks around.

Magical Hummingbird Gardens

Trip leader: TBD
 Dates: Sunday, January 25, 2015
 Time: 7:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. **Half-day trip.**
 Meeting place: Wyndham Garden Hotel parking lot.

Description: Half-day trip birding backyards of southeastern Louisiana in search of winter hummingbirds. Trip destinations are not finalized at this time because winter hummingbirds are still arriving. We will advertise the meeting place and destinations closer to the meeting, when the locations of the most interesting winter hummingbirds are known. If the early arrivals (e.g., Buff-breasted, Calliope, and Anna's Hummingbirds) are any indication of what is to come, January might have an interesting variety.

NEW PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

In spite of a low turnout and smaller than usual species sightings, the meeting was very good. We had two great speakers – John Sevenair and Landon Jones. A special thanks is in order to both of our speakers.

The total list on LABIRD for Cameron Parish was 148 species. Judith indicated that this was the lowest number of species at any LOS fall meeting records since starting in 1986. The highlight for me was the two sightings of White-tailed Kite – one off East Jetty Road and the other off of Mae's Beach Road.

I would like to thank Ed Wallace for all of his excellent work as President for the last two years. I will be calling on him for assistance during my two year term, especially when it comes to field trips. Also to Linda Stewart-Knight for her presence on the board for these past six years. I would also like to welcome Donna Dittman as the new Vice-President. I look forward to working with her in the coming years pursuing the goals and objectives of LOS.

The weather was great, which may have led to some of the reduced attendance and lower number of species.

Looking forward to the next meeting scheduled for New Orleans in January.

Marty Floyd

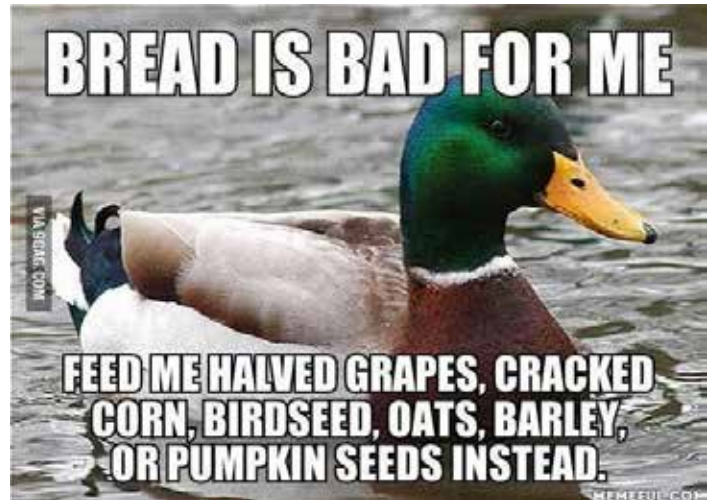
In Memoriam
Michael Crago, New Orleans

LOS ON FACEBOOK

Labirders: This is just to let you know that those of you who are LOS members and are also on Facebook may be interested in "liking" LOS's new Facebook page. Just type in "Louisiana Ornithological Society" in the FB search box, and you'll find it.

Good birding,

Christine Kooi
Baton Rouge



LOS NEW MEMBERS

Samantha Collins, Grand Chenier, LA
 Charles & Teri Ferguson, Houma LA
 Lynn Hathaway, Baton Rouge, LA
 Marybeth Lima, Baton Rouge, LA
 Jeanie & Jim Pousson, Lake Charles, LA
 Diana Richards, Lake Lure NC
 Terrebonne Bird Club, Houma LA
 Angela Trahan, Maurice LA
 Natalie Waters, Grand Isle, LA

LOS Grant Deadline

The deadline for applying for an LOS grant is January 15, 2015. All proposals must be based on Louisiana Birds and the study should be a situation unique to Louisiana. Priority is given to studies addressing current problems and issues in Louisiana ornithology or bird conservation in Louisiana habitats. The researcher must be a member of the Louisiana Ornithological Society. Further Details can be found on the LOS website <http://losbird.org/bulletin/grant.htm>

Louisiana Ornithological Society
www.losbird.org

Crawfish and Rice Equal Birds

Jay V. Huner, Louisiana Ecrevisse, 428 Hickory Hill Drive, Boyce, Louisiana 71409

Robert P. Romaine, LSU Aquaculture Research Station, 2410 Ben Hur Road, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70820

Michael J. Musumeche, 1621 Southwood Drive, New Iberia, Louisiana 70506

It's well known that rice farms provide important bird habitat. Louisiana, however, is unique in that its 400,000 acres of rice is home to about 185,000 acres of crawfish production. Crawfish is a cool season crop. The predominant cultured crawfish is the red swamp crawfish but some white river crawfish are harvested from crawfish ponds. Most female crawfish reproduce in burrows during the hot, dry summer and emerge with their young in the fall in response to the intentional flooding of the fields by crawfish producers and to rainfall events associated with frontal passages throughout the fall.



Rice, of course, is a warm season crop being planted in the spring and harvested in the summer and fall. As a result, rice and crawfish are complementary crops grown in the same fields. Crawfish are not fed. Rather, they are omnivorous, feeding on rice and weed seeds, vegetation, and the potpourri of invertebrates that flourish on decomposing rice stubble and secondary (ratoon) rice that grows after rice is harvested. Sure, crawfish do eat decomposing plant material but it only provides micro-nutrients, not the substance that animals and plant seeds provide.

There are several rice-crawfish scenarios. Crawfish and rice can be grown in the same field year after year. In this case, crawfish are stocked once and usually do not have to be stocked again. The rice may or may not be harvested. If rice is not harvested, it is called "crawfish rice" and usually planted in mid-summer to ensure that it is green and less likely to decompose quickly when the field is filled in the fall. This reduces low dissolved oxygen conditions. Crawfish are harvested in winter and spring. Then rice is planted.

The most common rice-crawfish scenario is to plant rice, stock crawfish, harvest rice in summer, flood for crawfish in fall, harvest crawfish in winter and spring, and repeat the scenario the following spring. In some cases, water is left in the field until fall or winter when it is drained so the field can be prepared for rice planting. In other cases the field is drained

in May or June and a crop like soybeans or sorghum is planted or grass is allowed to grow for cattle pasture or cutting hay.

A review of these rice-crawfish cultural methods reveals that there is shallow water and moist soil habitat present in the state's rice cultural landscape year round. This creates habitat with macro-invertebrates, especially crawfish, and annelid worms and dipteran (fly and gnat) larvae and small vertebrates including amphibians and fishes for at least 70 species of waterbirds including wading birds, cormorants, grebes, pelicans, shorebirds, marsh birds, gulls, terns, and kingfishers. In addition, the more omnivorous native and migrant waterfowl benefit from seeds and plant corms/roots and, prior to breeding, invertebrates, especially zooplankton.

Macroinvertebrate and small vertebrate prey is especially available when crawfish impoundments are drained. This can happen as early as February and as late as the following October. Draining before May occurs when it is not profitable to harvest the crawfish crop and creates a food rich bonanza for all predaceous waterbirds in the region. Draining in following fall occurs when water is left in rice-crawfish rotational ponds for weed control before the fields are prepared for rice planting in the coming spring. The entire suite of waterbirds in the region will come to such impoundments in staggering numbers as this is a period with little rainfall and standing water.



A recent review of crawfish management methods showed that the following estimated amount of acreage associated with each management scenario: [Note that some crawfish farmers use volunteer vegetation or a crop like sorghum-sudan grass as the forage base for their crawfish crops.] No Rice - 29,390 acres; Rice for Forage Only - 27,490 acres; Rice-

Crawfish and Rice, Continued on page 5

Crawfish and Rice, Continued from page 4

Crawfish-Rice-Crawfish – 25,650 acres; and Rice Rotations – 100,790. [Re: Huner, Romaine and Musumeche. Waterbirds, rice and crawfish. Journal of Louisiana Ornithology, In Review.]



Over 375 bird species are associated with the working wetland landscape. The southwestern Louisiana working wetland landscape has been identified as a GLOBALLY Important Bird Area by the National Audubon Society. It is the home of the Yellow Rails and Rice Festival in the fall and the Waders in Working Wetlands: Shorebird Extravaganza in the spring.

LOS MEMBERSHIP FORM

*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: _____

DUES STRUCTURE:

- ___ **Regular:** \$20.00/yr *Please add \$2.00
- ___ **Family:** \$25.00/yr for foreign
- ___ **Junior (under 14):** \$7.50/yr subscriptions
- ___ **Student:** \$10.00/yr
- ___ **Senior (over 65):** \$15.00/yr **Installments may
- ___ **Senior Family:** \$20.00/yr be arranged for
- ___ **Library** \$15.00/yr* Life memberships
- ___ **Contributing:** \$50.00/yr
- ___ **Sustaining:** \$100.00/yr
- ___ **Life:** \$300.00**
- ___ **Family Life:** \$500**

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

Louisiana CBC Circle Centers

| Next CBC Date | Code | Area | Compiler | Compiler Email | Last CBC Date |
|------------------|------|---------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|------------------|
| 3-Jan | BR | Baton Rouge | Dan Mooney | dan.mooney@birdnerds.com | 01/04/14 |
| 3-Jan | BC | Bossier-Caddo | Paul Dickson | paul@morrisdickson.com | 01/05/14 |
| 30-Dec | CA | Catahoula NWR | Marty Floyd | Progne99@aol.com | 12/30/13 |
| 16-Dec | CB | Claborne | Joan Dillon | kisforkryptonite@gmail.com | 12/17/13 |
| 22-Dec | CR | Creole | Erik Johnson | ejohnson@audubon.org | 12/28/13 |
| 16-Dec | CW | Crowley | Marty Floyd | Progne99@aol.com | 12/23/13 |
| 3-Jan | CL | C'ville-Lecompte | Marty Floyd | Progne99@aol.com | 01/03/14 |
| 20-Dec | DA | D'Arbonne | Joan Brown | bljnbr@att.net | 12/14/13 |
| 17-Dec | FP | Fort Polk | Jim Johnson | jimejohnsonphoto@msn.com | N/A |
| 18-Dec | GI | Grand Isle | Chris Brantley | chrisbrantley@charter.net | 12/19/13 |
| 16-Dec | JB | Johnson Bayou | Ken Sztraky | berrysheepfarm@att.net | 12/21/13 |
| 14-Dec | LT | Lacassine-Thomw | Steve Cardiff | scardiff@lsu.edu | 12/14/13 |
| 29-Dec | LA | Lafayette | Erik Johnson | ejohnson@audubon.org | 12/30/13 |
| 20-Dec | NA | Nachitoches | Charlie Lyons | lyon5516@bellsouth.net | 12/21/13 |
| 27-Dec | NZ | Natchez | Stratton Bull | strattonbull@earthlink.net | 12/28/13 |
| 2-Jan | NI | New Iberia | Erik Johnson | ejohnson@audubon.org | 12/21/13 |
| 27-Dec | NO | New Orleans | Glenn Oussett | goussett@bellsouth.net | 12/28/13 |
| 30-Dec | NS | Northshore-Slidell | Thomas Trenchard | trench19@hotmail.com | 12/30/13 |
| 5-Jan | PP | Pine Prairie | Marty Floyd | Progne99@aol.com | 01/05/14 |
| 26-Dec | RB | Reserv-Bonnet Carre | Melvin Weber | mweber@rtonline.com | 12/26/13 |
| 21-Dec | SA | Sabine NWR | Jeanie Pou | jeanie.pousson@gmail.com | 12/15/13 |
| 14-Dec | SH | Shreveport | Charlie Lyons | lyon5516@bellsouth.net | 12/14/13 |
| | ST | St. Tammany | Linda Beall | lbeall@minilogic.com | 12/27/13 |
| 20-Dec | SC | Sweet Lake-Cam Pr | Steve Cardiff | scardiff@lsu.edu | 12/16/13 |
| | TR | Tensas River NWR | | | |
| 2-Jan | VE | Venice | Robert Purrington | danny@tulane.edu | 01/02/14 |
| 15-Dec | WL | White Lake | Michael Seymour | mseymour@wlf.la.gov | 12/22/13 |

**part of this count is in LA*

| | Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 |
| LT | | WL | CB | FP | GI | | SC |
| SH | | | JB | | | | DA |
| | | | CW | | | | NA |
| | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 |
| SA | | CR | | | | RB | NZ |
| | | | | | | | NO |
| | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | | LA | NS | | | VE | BR |
| | | | CA | | | NI | BC |
| | | | | | | | CL |
| | 4 | 5 | | | | | |
| | | PP | | | | | |

December 14, 2014 – January 5, 2015

**Net Worth As of 11/30/2014
Account 11/30/2014 Balance**

ASSETS

Cash and Bank Accounts
IberiaBank LOS 11,300.45
LOS Petty Cash 155.84
Postmaster Bulk Mail 131.23
Ted Parker YSF 1,500.00

TOTAL Cash and Bank Accounts..... 13,087.52

Other Assets

ENSI 11,075.28
Iberia Bank CD 12,276.97

TOTAL Other Assets..... 23,352.25

TOTAL ASSETS..... 36,439.77

LOS October 25, 2014 Checklist

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck
 Fulvous Whistling-Duck
 Greater White-fronted Goose
 Mottled Duck
 Blue-winged Teal
 Northern Shoveler
 Green-winged Teal
 Ruddy Duck
 Pied-billed Grebe
 Neotropic Cormorant
 Double-crested Cormorant
 Anhinga
 American White Pelican
 Brown Pelican
 American Bittern
 Least Bittern
 Great Blue Heron
 Great Egret
 Snowy Egret
 Little Blue Heron
 Tricolored Heron
 Reddish Egret
 Cattle Egret
 Green Heron
 Black-crowned Night-Heron
 White Ibis
 Glossy Ibis
 White-faced Ibis
 Roseate Spoonbill
 Black Vulture
 Turkey Vulture
 Osprey
 White-tailed Kite
 Northern Harrier
 Sharp-shinned Hawk
 Cooper's Hawk
 Red-shouldered Hawk
 Broad-winged Hawk
 Swainson's Hawk
 Red-tailed Hawk
 Clapper Rail
 Virginia Rail
 Sora
 Common Gallinule
 American Coot
 Black-necked Stilt
 American Avocet
 Black-bellied Plover
 Snowy Plover
 Semipalmated Plover
 Piping Plover

Killdeer
 Spotted Sandpiper
 Greater Yellowlegs
 Willet
 Lesser Yellowlegs
 Whimbrel
 Long-billed Curlew
 Marbled Godwit
 Ruddy Turnstone
 Sanderling
 Dunlin
 Least Sandpiper
 Western Sandpiper
 Short-billed Dowitcher
 Long-billed Dowitcher
 Wilson's Snipe
 Laughing Gull
 Franklin's Gull
 Ring-billed Gull
 Herring Gull
 Lesser Black-backed Gull
 Gull-billed Tern
 Caspian Tern
 Forster's Tern
 Royal Tern
 Black Skimmer
 Eurasian Collared-Dove (I)
 White-winged Dove
 Mourning Dove
 Inca Dove
 Barn Owl
 Great Horned Owl
 Barred Owl
 Ruby-throated Hummingbird
 Rufous/Allen's Hummingbird
 Belted Kingfisher
 Red-bellied Woodpecker
 Downy Woodpecker
 Hairy Woodpecker
 Northern Flicker
 Crested Caracara
 American Kestrel
 Merlin
 Peregrine Falcon
 Eastern Wood-Pewee
 Eastern Phoebe
 Vermilion Flycatcher
 Scissor-tailed Flycatcher
 Loggerhead Shrike
 White-eyed Vireo
 Blue-headed Vireo
 Blue Jay

Crow, sp.
 Tree Swallow
 Northern Rough-winged Swallow
 Barn Swallow
 Carolina Chickadee
 House Wren
 Sedge Wren
 Marsh Wren
 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet
 Eastern Bluebird
 Hermit Thrush
 Gray Catbird
 Brown Thrasher
 Northern Mockingbird
 European Starling (I)
 Tennessee Warbler
 Orange-crowned Warbler
 Nashville Warbler
 Common Yellowthroat
 American Redstart
 Northern Parula
 Magnolia Warbler
 Palm Warbler
 Yellow-rumped Warbler
 Prairie Warbler
 Black-throated Green Warbler
 Chipping Sparrow
 Clay-colored Sparrow
 Vesper Sparrow
 Lark Sparrow
 Savannah Sparrow
 Nelson's Sparrow
 Seaside Sparrow
 Song Sparrow
 Lincoln's Sparrow
 Swamp Sparrow
 White-throated Sparrow
 White-crowned Sparrow
 Northern Cardinal
 Blue Grosbeak
 Indigo Bunting
 Dickcissel
 Red-winged Blackbird
 Eastern Meadowlark
 Common Grackle
 Boat-tailed Grackle
 Great-tailed Grackle
 Bronzed Cowbird
 Brown-headed Cowbird
 House Sparrow (I)

Total 154

Do A Little, Save A Lot: Keep Cats Indoors

by Grant Sizemore

Director of Invasive Species Programs
American Bird Conservancy

As self-proclaimed bird lovers, members of birding and nature organizations across the country are uniquely positioned to enjoy, monitor, and protect America's resident and migratory birds. Whereas enjoying and monitoring these birds is standard practice, how to protect the birds we see is sometimes less apparent. It turns out that one of the best ways to contribute to bird conservation in the United States is to promote the practice of keeping domestic cats (*Felis catus*) indoors.

Outdoor Cats: Impacts on Birds

The introduction of domestic cats to environments around the world has resulted in substantial ecological damage and contributed to the extinction of 33 species.¹ The International Union for the Conservation of Nature lists cats among the world's worst invasive species globally, and in the United States the Department of Interior's State of the Birds 2014 Report recognized outdoor cats as the number one source of direct, human-caused mortality for birds.^{2,3} A 2013 study by scientists from the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimated that outdoor cats kill approximately 2.4 BILLION birds every year in the contiguous United States alone.⁴

Unfortunately, feeding cats is not enough to eliminate the risks to birds. Even well-fed cats instinctively hunt and kill.⁵ Although surprising to some cat owners, this behavior is confirmed repeatedly inside the home. When a cat plays with a feather toy or laser, it is demonstrating hunting behaviors that are often lethal when practiced outside on thrushes, sparrows, or other unfortunate victims. Even when cats do not directly kill birds, their mere presence has been shown to result in a reduction in the feeding of nesting chicks by one-third and an increased likelihood of nest failure by an order of magnitude.⁶

Cats Indoors: Protecting Wildlife, Protecting People

Maintaining cats indoors also benefits birds, other wildlife, and people when it comes to disease transmission. Cats are known to carry and transmit a wide variety of parasites and diseases and may serve as a reservoir for some of these.⁷ Rabies and toxoplasmosis are of particular concern. Domestic cats are the number one carrier of rabies among domestic animals and, according to scientists from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, represent a "disproportionate risk for potential human exposure" because people are much more likely to interact with a cat than with wildlife.⁸ Toxoplasmosis is a disease caused by infection with the parasite *Toxoplasma gondii*, which relies on felids to complete its life cycle. Up to 74% of all cats will host *T. gondii* during their lifetimes and subsequently excrete in their feces hundreds of millions of eggs (called oocysts) into the environment, where they remain

infectious to all warm-blooded species for up to 18 months.⁹ Consequences of infection in people include miscarriage, blindness, memory loss, and death. For both rabies and toxoplasmosis, outdoor cats are far more likely to spread these diseases than indoor cats.

How to Help

Birding organizations have an opportunity to lead on an issue that is critical to the conservation of birds in America. For those of us that own cats, like myself, we can no longer avoid the inconvenient truth that allowing our pets outdoors kills birds. Whether our cats are walked on a leash or kept in an outdoor enclosure, we must represent the change we wish to see in the world and lead by example. Second, kind but persistent education of our communities about the many benefits of maintaining cats indoors (e.g., cats live longer, healthier lives) is necessary. A number of resources are available to help with this endeavor, but I recommend beginning with American Bird Conservancy's Cats Indoors website (www.abcbirds.org/cats). Finally, promoting bird-friendly legislation and speaking against misguided public policies is essential to ensuring long-term conservation. With determination, it is possible to prevent the deaths of billions of birds throughout the United States and to show people that keeping cats indoors is better for cats, better for birds, and better for people.

1 Medina F.M., E. Bonnaud, E. Vidal, B.R. Tershy, E.S. Zavaleta, C.J. Donlan, B.S. Keitt, M. Le Corre, S.V. Horwath, and M. Nogales. 2011. A global review of the impacts of invasive cats on island endangered vertebrates. *Global Change Biology* 17: 3503-3510.

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