



Shreveport Society for Nature Study BIRD STUDY GROUP NEWSLETTER

Volume 27, Number 3
November 8, 2012

Next Meeting –November 13, 2012 "Whip-poor-wills in the Forest"

by Jo-Ann Jennier
Ouachita Mountains Biological Station

NOVEMBER MEETING

When: Tuesday, November 13, 2012, 6:00 p.m.
Where: LSUS, Science Lecture Auditorium

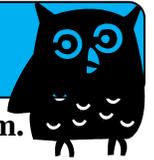
Topic: Whip-poor-wills inhabit forested areas, but are most often observed in edge habitat. During a long term study of Whip-poor-will vocalizations, I recorded observations on behavior. I recorded time of arrival and departure from the Ouachita Mountains Biological Station, nesting behavior, and interaction with Chuck-wills-widows. These seldom seen birds are truly fascinating in their behavior during the low-light hours of dusk and dawn.

Refreshments start at 6:00 p.m. and the program begins at 6:30 p.m. Come at 6 to chat with other birders!

The program is free and open to the public. For more information or directions to the LSUS Science Lecture Auditorium, call us at 318-797-5338.

Upcoming Field Trips

Owl Prowl



Saturday, November 17, 2012, 5:30 p.m.
Trip leader: Larry Raymond

We will meet at the LSUS Museum of Life Sciences at 5:30 p.m. and carpool from there to the Yearwood Road area and possibly the Yates Tract of the Red River NWR.

Check out next month's newsletter for more upcoming events:

Caddo Lake Count	December 1, 2012
BSG Christmas Party	December 11, 2012
Shreveport Christmas Count	December 15, 2012
Claiborne Christmas Count	December 20, 2012
Natchitoches Christmas Count	December 22, 2012

BSG Christmas Party

December 11, 2012, 6:00 p.m.
LSUS, Science Building, Room 201

This year the BSG will be celebrating the Holiday season with our annual potluck dinner (we will provide the turkey and ham, you bring a side dish). Instead of an auction we will be having a "Pirate Santa" gift swap. Bring a wrapped bird related gift (\$20 limit) to participate. It should be loads of fun!

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WILD BIRD CENTER EVENTS BEGINNER BIRD WALKS

The Wild Bird Center conducts field trips the first and third Saturday of every month, weather permitting. Meet at Wild Bird Center in the University Place Shopping Center (Target Shopping Center) at the corner of Youree Drive and East 70th Street. Destinations vary according to local sightings and may include local parks, country roads or a private backyard. Loaner binoculars are available. Be sure to bring a field guide.

For more information on any Wild Bird Center event, please call Dennis or Janice Forshee at the Wild Bird Center, 318-797-BIRD (2473).

Report from the Bois d'Arc WMA Field Trip By Trip Leader Hubert Hervey

Twelve of us had a good trip to the Bois d'Arc WMA near Spring Hill, Arkansas on October 6th. The weather was changing, as a cold front blew in, with a 15 degree change in temp and cloudy, windy conditions; perfect for migrant bird moving. The trip went about as described in the October BSG Newsletter, now available online, but we did not have time to include the Miller County drive on AR 134. We'll try to include that next time. Ebird flagged the large number of **Cattle Egrets, Great Egrets, Pied-billed Grebe, American Coot, Black Vultures, and Turkey Vultures**. I explained these numbers as being a result of weather and food availability. We were able to hear a **Red-breasted Nuthatch**, that was attracted to iPod calls, The **Red-breasted Nuthatch** was fairly vocal, but liked to remain hidden. We had one flock of **American Pintails**, and 4 species of **swallows** (mostly tree) that were busily feeding on the mosquito horde gathered at the end of one of the peninsulas jutting into the lake. I suppose next trip I will have to

include a weather alert so that all participants will be adequately attired, and not prefer to sit in the warm confines of their vehicles, I was comfortable, but I had on 4 layers of clothes. I think everyone was impressed with the area and habitat. We had one flock of **White Pelicans** drift slowly south down Red River, and a flock of 25 migrating **Ring-billed Gulls** soared back and forth over the lake, before heading south.



Bill Hall holding Bois d'Arc fruit (Osage orange or horse apple). Photo by Larry Raymond.



BSG Group birding the Bois d'Arc WMA near Spring Hill, Arkansas on October 6, 2012. Photo by Larry Raymond.

Put Down Your Binoculars.

By John Dillon



Birders are usually reputed to be among the nicest people in the world. But I have an alternate theory: birders are usually nice because, when other people run into us while birding, we're already happily engaged in doing something we love. So, of course we're nice.

Personally, I think most birders who read this would also agree that birders are notoriously fussy. Go to one LOS field trip, and, if you listen to the whispers, you can easily tally the following comments:

- “I can't hear anything over that woman's wispy nylon jacket.”
- “I don't care about grackles; I came here to get a life bird!”
- “Why is he stopping here again?”
- “Why did that idiot wear a white t-shirt? Has he ever been birding before?”
- “This guy doesn't know what he's talking about.”
- “I didn't come all this way to hear those women talk so loud on this field trip.”

But you won't hear me saying anything like that. Nope. That's because I'm so fussy I rarely go birding with more than about 2 people at a time.

So, with that, I must fuss now. Like all good birders, I have lots things to fuss about. Combine the promise of migration with the crashing disappointment of 20 mph winds, and you'll hear me say words that would make a sailor blush. But in terms of birders' habits, I never tire of fussing about how not to use binoculars.

Binoculars are supplementary to birding, not complementary. I had the good luck of birding one-on-one with Ted Floyd (editor of *Birding* magazine and author of the *Smithsonian Field Guide to the Birds of North America*) in Colorado a few years ago, and I couldn't help picking his brain about this topic, as well as a few others. I mentioned that I get frustrated when birders won't put down their binoculars when they should just use their eyes, specifically when trying to find a bird at close or relatively close range. Ted showed similar frustrations and agreed it was a major hindrance in becoming a better birder. Then he told me he actually leads field trips on which binoculars are not

allowed just to show birders how much they shouldn't use them. It felt so good to justify all that fussing.

Now, I'm not saying leave your binoculars home. But I repeat my thesis: binoculars are supplementary, not complementary. The basic mistake many birders make is that they instinctively opt to look through binoculars at times when using their eyes would be better. So, when are your eyes better than your binoculars? Simple. Either when you're unsure enough of an ID that watching the bird will teach you how to ID it next time or when the bird is close enough to observe without binoculars. For the latter, chances are that if the birder pointing out the bird to you isn't using his binoculars, you shouldn't have to use yours. The former, though, requires a bit more explanation.

For example, how many times have you looked up a soaring black silhouette and said, “**Turkey Vulture**,” with confidence and without binoculars? Probably every intermediate birder I know does it all the time. That's because you've watched **Turkey Vultures** often enough that you only need binoculars to identify them due to excessive distance, heat shimmer, or for some other reason that makes you cautious when you'd otherwise be certain. Don't you think the same concept applies to many other species?

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher is, I think, a great example of this. They have a distinctive overall coloration, an easily noticeable long, thin tail with bright white on the edges, and quick, jerky movements while foraging, often hovering for a couple seconds to catch glances of the bugs they're hunting. Yet birders are all the time IDing them through binoculars. Why? I assume it's because they're tiny birds, and the status quo thought is “tiny bird = use binoculars.” But I'd also like to assume that any birder who can ID a **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** with binoculars can ID one without binoculars because of the distinctive features I just mentioned. I seldom use binoculars to ID this species. I just see a long, thin, twitchy tail with white edges on a tiny arboreal bird and say “gnatcatcher.” But in that instant, I apply the same techniques I use in IDing a **Turkey Vulture** without binoculars. I've watched enough gnatcatchers.

Now, obviously our eyes see with less definition the farther away an object is, and this includes distant birds. And it makes perfect sense that, although I can ID a **Mississippi Kite** at 300 feet, I probably can't even find a **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** at 300 feet, must less ID one at that distance. So, of course you should use your binoculars then. That's when they supplement the skills you already have that are independent of binoculars. Many times, I take a look through binoculars at a bird that's so distant I can only see just enough of a bird to ID it to species. On those occasions, it's not as if the binoculars allowed me to have a better overall look; they allowed me to be certain about a few specific characteristics that were enough for me to ID the bird. In those instances, I'm using the same skills of identification that I'd use if the bird were 10 feet away; I'm just using them through binoculars as a supplement for my already existing skills. Birders who never put down the binoculars, even at close range, seem to delay learning those skills, I think.

If you think about it, this problem comes down to whether or not you want to be a better birder. If you've birded for years, but you still look in a field guide to identify your wrens, you haven't been watching the birds closely enough. And the best way to do that, provided you are actually close enough to the bird, is to put down the binoculars. Watch how the bird moves, how it forages, how it holds its tail or its head, if it stands erect or if it skulks, if it bobs its tail or has any other peculiar movements. Now zoom your eyes and brain out and see how high above the ground it is. Is it on a snag? On the ground? By water? On a lawn? Does it sally? Does it use the same perch? Does it

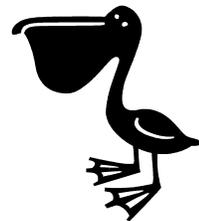
stay at the same height, or does it also fly to the top of the trees? This is what's involved in watching birds. (And notice these are all questions that don't ask about plumage characteristics.) With binoculars, you seldom are able to learn so much unless the bird is so far away that a large part of its immediate habitat is included in your field of view.

And I know what some of you are saying. You're saying, "Well, my vision isn't as good as yours," or, "I just can't see them like you see them." Ehh... Maybe. But I think most birders may be selling themselves short. Can't you ID a **Turkey Vulture** as well as I can? Then why not a **Yellow-throated Vireo**? Or a **Solitary Sandpiper**? It may not be your eyes that are the problem; it may be that you've trained yourself to depend on your binoculars and that you've never really tested your eyes. I hate to use the cliché, but get out of your comfort zone and build up your ID skills by watching the birds.

Now, if that logic makes sense to you, start with your feeder birds. If you can ID **House Finches** without binoculars, you're doing fairly well. Then, go birding where there's plenty of lower habitat, so you don't have to look 90 feet up a water oak. Find the **White-eyed Vireos** and all the other species you know should be there, and watch them. Use the binoculars to check yourself, but don't rely on them unless there's no possible way you can ID a bird without them. Do this a few times, and you'll realize how much you were missing by looking through those binoculars. You'll also realize you can improve your birding without them.

"The Pelican" by Dixon Lanier Merritt (1910)

A wonderful bird is the pelican,
His bill will hold more than his belican,
He can take in his beak
Enough food for a week
But I'm damned if I see how the helican.



One Busy Hummingbird Feeder in Stonewall

The following images were taken at the home of Donald and Linda Crnkovic in Stonewall, LA.



Three **Ruby-throated hummingbirds** share a feeder with a Green Anole lizard. Stonewall, LA. September 14, 2012. Photos by Donald Crnkovic.



Rufous Hummingbird adult male (right) and **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** adult male (left). Stonewall, LA. September 10, 2012. Photo by Donald Crnkovic.



Rufous or Allen's Hummingbird immature male or adult female. Stonewall, LA. September 10, 2012. Photo by Donald Crnkovic.

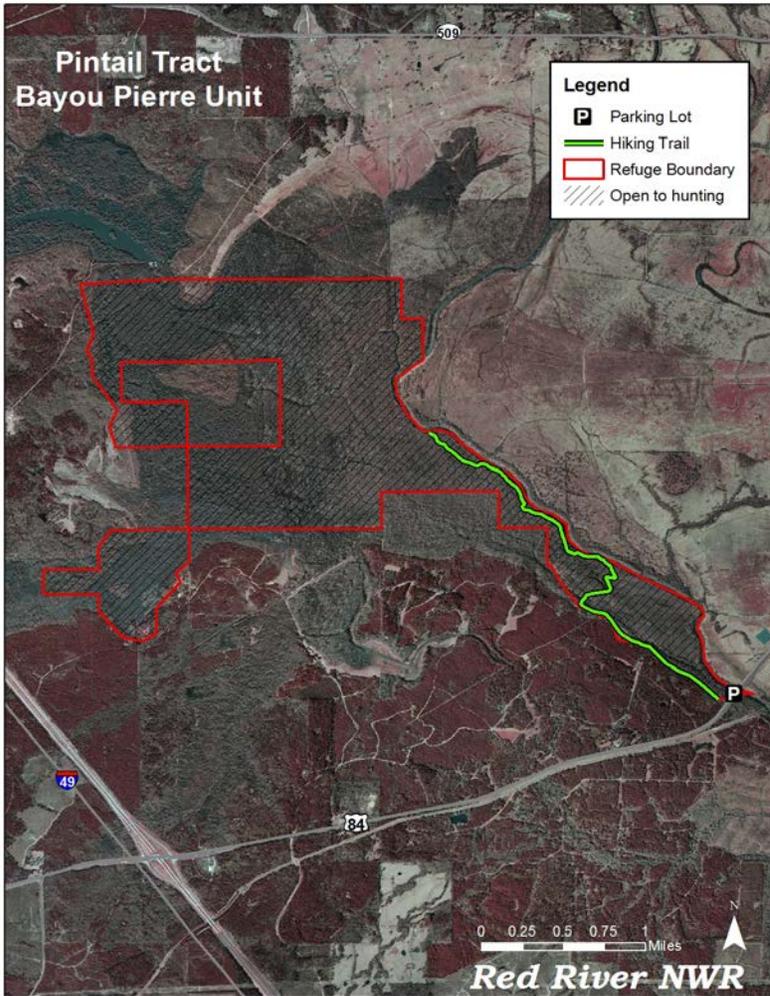
Red River NWR Pintail Tract Trail Now Open
By Hubert Hervey

You can now park your vehicle, and walk the trail at Pintail Tract, part of Bayou Pierre Unit of the Red River National Wildlife Refuge. An all-weather parking lot is located on the north side of US Highway 84 at Bayou Pierre. This location is half way between LA Hwy 1 south of the Yates Tract and I-49. The first mile of the trail is bounded by Mundy Bayou to the east, and privately owned mature pine to the west. At this time more mature woodland habitat is available here than elsewhere on the 4 units of the Red River National Wildlife Refuge, so it is important that we record the bird and animal life encountered here. After the first mile, the trail crosses Mundy Bayou into riparian woodlands of a couple of thousand acres, bounded by Bayou Pierre on the east and approaching Lake Smithport Dam on the north. The west and south boundaries are marked by “Blue Goose Refuge signs”. The crossing at Mundy Bayou will probably remain a low-water hard surface, with a foot bridge (not yet built) that will be under water during periods of high water in Red River which flood the lowlands of Bayou Pierre and Mundy Bayou.

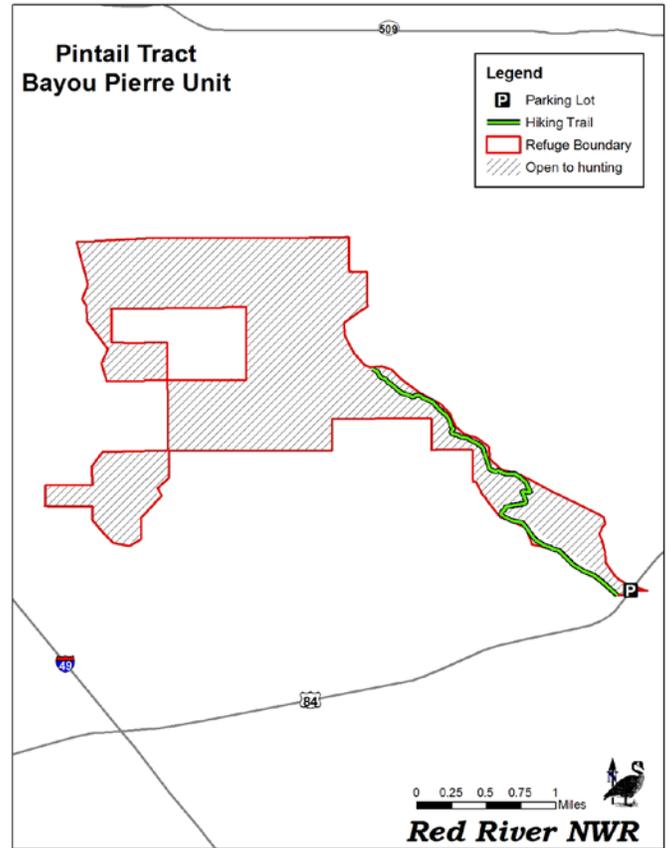
Last year a heron/egret rookery was located on the west side of the large area below Smithport Dam. This was the only rookery known on RRNWR lands last year. The location is still over a mile northeast from the end of the green trail. Over two miles of trail have been established, with some improvements in creek crossings accomplished last week and more to come. It is likely some extensions and side trails will need to be built also, to facilitate travel to the most interesting areas. This area is for the trail capable hiker, with advice to take a map and compass with you, as well as the usual liquid and insect repellent.

To Bayou Chapter of the Ozark Society members I would suggest an easy 6 to 7 mile downstream paddle on Bayou Pierre, starting on LA 509, and ending at US 84. This should be a short half-day trip. I have looked at the access and egress points, and any kayak or canoe that is portable should be able to launch without difficulty. Contact me at 925-9249 if you make this trip, so I can update my information.

Consider printing out the two maps below if you intend to examine this woodland area further. Remember that hunting may be allowed on some U.S. Fish and Wildlife Refuges, and check the current regulation booklet available at Refuge Headquarters in Bossier City. A fragmented in-holding of private land is shown on the western side of the map.



Map A: Topographic map of Pintail tract of Red River National Wildlife Refuge in De Soto Parish. Parking is off US 84 roughly 3 miles east of I-49, and 3 miles west of LA Hwy 1. The lot is on US 84.



Map B is an outline map of the boundaries of the Pintail Tract of the Red River National Wildlife Refuge. The green trail is open to some vehicles, but is still dirt and should be traveled carefully.

BSG Membership

Current 2012 BSG memberships expire on 12/31/2012.

Please support the Bird Study Group by sending in your membership dues.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

NOTICE Regarding BSG Membership Dues

All memberships are for a calendar year beginning January 1, 2012.

Benefits of Membership in the Bird Study Group

1. You are a part of one of the most active birding groups in Louisiana.
2. Memberships support conservation efforts that affect birds in Louisiana.
3. Memberships support student research and study of bird biology.
4. Memberships provide for a small honorarium for out-of-town speakers.
5. Memberships support the widely acclaimed web site of the BSG (www.birdstudygroup.org).
6. Memberships support the refreshments for the BSG meetings.
7. Members participate in the Christmas Bird Counts, the North American Migration Count, the North American Hawk Watch, the Backyard Bird Count, and the Big Sit.
8. Memberships support the bird library at the Museum of Life Sciences
9. Members can easily participate in the online Bird Alert email List Server (to sign up email: birdalert@birdstudygroup.org).
10. The BSG Newsletters are online and access is not restricted.

You get all of the above benefits for the modest annual membership cost of: \$15 for one membership, \$20 for a family membership, and \$35 for a sustaining membership.

VOLUNTEER NEEDED TO ENTER BIRD RECORDS

We would like to have a volunteer to enter current and backlogged records into the BSG Bird database beginning as soon as possible. We have many valuable records to be entered. The process is very easy and a volunteer will receive complete instruction at the museum. We would like a volunteer for a few hours a day or week on a regular schedule so that we can get as many records entered. At this time it contains 59 years of observations, from 1952 to the present, a total of 268,989 records.

Any Suggestions for the BSG?

Your Board of Directors is trying very hard to improve the Bird Study Group and make it more attractive to new birders. Give us your suggestions about how to grow the BSG.



BSG Board of Directors & Committee Chairpersons
BSG BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Numbers in parentheses are years remaining of a 3-year term.

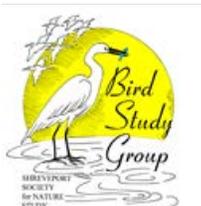
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Direct inquires to the Editor, Amanda Lewis, at (318) 797-5215.



Join/Renew the BSG!

The Bird Study Group of Shreveport invites you to become a member.
Renewals, please update information below.

Name(s) _____ Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____ Phone (Home) _____ Work _____

Yes, please add me to the email Bird Alert

Leave me out of the BSG member directory

Membership Levels: Regular (\$15.⁰⁰) Sustaining (\$35.⁰⁰) Family, *One Newsletter/ One Address* (\$20.⁰⁰)

Names of Family Members:

Donations: Library Refuges Refreshments General

Make check payable & mail to: SSNS- Bird Study Group
Museum of Life Sciences, One University Place,
Shreveport, LA 71115-2399



BIRD STUDY GROUP PHONE NUMBERS AND MORE

Bird Study Group meets the second Tuesday of each month, September through June, 6:00 p.m. To be placed on the list to send & receive emails, email birdalert@birdstudygroup.org.

Contact the BSG by email: lhardy@lsus.edu or phone (318) 797-5338.

Visit us on the web at <http://www.birdstudygroup.org>