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## President’s Note

### Greetings

This past year with the SWLA Master Naturalists has been filled with moments of connection, discovery, and shared purpose. From early mornings in the forest to lively conversations at our gatherings, your presence has brought energy and heart to everything we’ve done. It’s been inspiring to see how each of you contributed your time and talents to make our community stronger and our environment healthier.

On behalf of the SWLA Master Naturalists, I extend sincere gratitude for your dedication and service. Your commitment to volunteering has made a meaningful difference in our community and in the stewardship of our natural environment.

This past year has been eventful and productive for the SWLA Master Naturalists. Through educational programs, conservation projects, and outreach efforts, we have advanced our

mission and strengthened our impact. These accomplishments were possible because of your time, energy, and willingness to contribute.

As we look ahead, we encourage you to continue your involvement in the coming year. Your participation is vital to sustaining our efforts and expanding the reach of our work. Together, we can build upon this year's successes and further our shared goal of making the world a better place.

**I'll see you out there,**

*Barbara Morris*

President, Southwest Louisiana Master Naturalists

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## How to Befriend Crows

by Marilyn Jones

### How to Befriend Crows: A Guide to Gaining the Trust of These Intelligent Birds

Crows have long fascinated people with their intelligence, curiosity, and complex social behavior. While they may not be traditional pets, many have found joy in forming bonds with wild crows. With patience and consistency, you can befriend these clever creatures and enjoy a unique and rewarding relationship. Here's a human-friendly guide on how to make that happen.

#### Why Befriend Crows?

Crows are among the most intelligent birds on Earth. They're capable of recognizing faces, solving problems, and even using tools. More impressively, they can remember and distinguish between humans who have treated them kindly or posed a threat. This makes them especially responsive to people who approach them with consistency and respect.

#### Step 1: Understand Crow Behavior

Before you begin, it helps to know a bit about what makes crows tick:

- **Social Intelligence:** Crows live in family groups and communicate using a wide range of calls and gestures.
- **Opportunistic Diet:** They'll eat everything from seeds and fruits to small rodents and food scraps.
- **Strong Memory:** Crows can remember individual human faces and associate them with positive or negative experiences.

In short, if you're kind and consistent, they'll remember you—and possibly even bring you little gifts in return!

## Step 2: Create a Crow-Friendly Environment

To attract crows, make your space appealing and safe:

- **Choose an Open Area:** Crows prefer open spaces where they can see potential threats from afar.
- **Offer a Variety of Foods:** While unsalted peanuts in the shell are a favorite, you can also offer corn, fruit, or meat scraps.
- **Provide Water:** A clean bowl or birdbath gives them a place to drink and bathe.
- **Leave Nesting Materials:** Small twigs, grass, and even bits of yarn may be picked up for nest-building.

By creating an inviting space, you're giving them good reason to keep coming back.

## Step 3: Use Food to Build Trust

Food is the fastest way to a crow's heart, but the key is **routine and patience**:

- **Start with Unsalted Peanuts in the Shell:** These are easy for crows to carry and break open.
- **Feed Them at the Same Time and Place Daily:** Consistency builds trust.
- **Develop a Unique Signal:** Use a whistle, clap, or short call when you offer food. Over time, crows will associate that sound with treats.
- **Be Patient:** At first, they may keep their distance. That's normal. Let them come to you on their own terms.

## Step 4: Stick to the Routine

Once the crows begin to recognize you, it's important to maintain your schedule:

- **Feed Them Regularly:** Skip too many days, and they might lose interest or forget your signal.
- **Keep Your Distance:** Don't rush in to get close. Let them approach when they feel comfortable.
- **Observe and Learn:** Crows are expressive—watch how they respond to your behavior and adjust accordingly.

Over time, they'll come to see you as a friend rather than a threat.

## A Simple Example Routine

Here's a basic daily practice you can follow:

1. **Choose a Spot:** Find an open area in your yard or a nearby park where you can reliably leave food.
2. **Leave the Food:** Place a few unsalted peanuts on the ground.
3. **Make Your Signal:** Use the same whistle or sound every time you feed.
4. **Walk Away:** Don't linger—crows may feel more comfortable approaching once you're at a distance.
5. **Repeat Daily:** Keep the routine going, and you'll likely see the same crows return again and again.

## Final Thoughts

Befriending crows isn't something that happens overnight. It takes consistency, patience, and respect. But for those who commit to the process, the rewards can be surprisingly rich. Crows may start to recognize you, greet you with calls, or even leave small tokens of appreciation like shiny objects or feathers.

In a world where we often overlook the intelligence of animals, forming a friendship with crows is a beautiful reminder of the connections we can build with the wild—one peanut at a time.

## References

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— AI assistance was used to help draft and organize this article; human oversight ensured factual accuracy and proper sourcing.

## Snakes of Louisiana

by Alexandra Hudson

Snakes. One of the most controversial topics in wildlife; people often have strong emotions regarding them, whether positive or negative. This controversy has been present throughout history, around the world, and across cultures. From being a protective emblem in Mesopotamia and the symbol of godhood for the ancient Egyptians, to a representative of evil in Christianity and a symbol of tragic victory for the ancient Greeks; snakes have symbolized anger, protection,

murder, medicine, cruelty, fertility, healing, betrayal, sexuality, redemption, hedonism, and wisdom. Regardless of depiction, snakes are an integral part of any ecosystem, particularly ours here in southwest Louisiana.

Louisiana is home to over forty different snake species inhabiting diverse habitats across the state. Our forests and woodlands house timber rattlesnakes, pine snakes, rat snakes, and eastern copperheads. Fossorial, or burrowing snakes, make themselves at home in leaf litter and fallen trees that create soft, insect-rich soil perfect for habitation. Along moving waterways, we find diamondback water snakes. By calmer, more permanent water sources, we might spot plain-bellied water snakes and rough green snakes. More brackish waters attract mud snakes and salt marsh snakes. Our prairies and open fields serve as habitat for coachwhips and racers. Regardless of where you go in the state, snakes

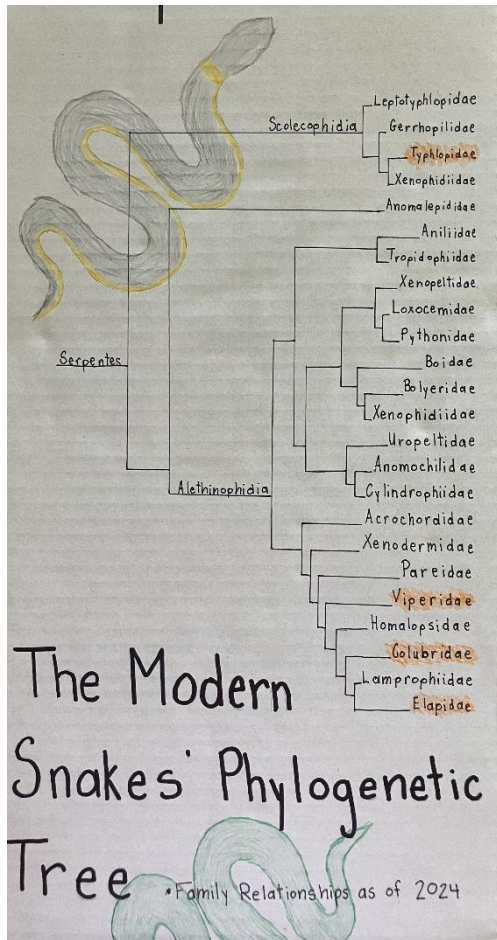


serve to reduce pest populations and maintain a balanced ecosystem.

I've always enjoyed working with snakes and have fond memories of searching for snakes during herpetology courses in college. Being able to partake in such a class during this Master Naturalist course was a pleasant addition. Wading through Tuten Park following a torrential downfall was entertaining and messy, as the best outdoor activities often are! Our walk unearthed various skinks and anoles, as well as two individual ribbon snakes enjoying the sun after the rain. On another

of our class trips, out to the Louisiana Ecological Forestry Center (L.E.A.F) at Hodges Gardens, we had the great opportunity to catch and handle a beautiful rat snake.

I wanted to highlight these unique individuals we have in our state and how they can be categorized. Louisianan snakes can be organized into four families on the taxonomic level; Typhlopidae, Viperidae, Elapidae, and Colubridae.



The Typhlopidae are a family of blind snakes consisting of eighteen genera and over two hundred species found throughout the tropical regions of the world. Of this family, Louisiana houses only one, *Indotyphlops braminus*, or the brahminy blind snake. While this snake is not believed to be native to the Americas, there has been no definite introduction date and is believed to be fully naturalized.

The Viperidae can be further organized into three subfamilies; Azemiopinae, Crotalinae, and Viperinae. For us, it is the Crotalinae subfamily, commonly known as the pit vipers or pit adders, that is of importance. Five of Louisiana’s seven venomous snakes can be classified within this subfamily, distinguishable by their infrared-detecting organs and a specialized muscle utilized for venom movement. The genus *Agkistrodon* boasts the northern cottonmouth and the eastern copperhead, while the *Crotalus* genus contains the timber rattlesnake and the eastern diamondback rattlesnake. A third genus within this subfamily is present in the pygmy rattlesnake, *Sistrurus miliaris*, who carries a different scalation pattern from the

larger rattlesnakes.

The Elapidae family is responsible for the other two venomous snakes found in Louisiana. These snakes are endemic to the subtropics and tropics, carrying hollow fangs commonly channeling neurotoxic venom. Both species found in our state are of the *Micrurus* genus, the eastern coral snake and the Texan coral snake. The Texan coral snake was considered a subspecies of the eastern coral snake till as recently as 1991 but now has six recognized subspecies most of which



are endemic to Mexico.

The majority of our snakes fall within the Colubridae family; a group of two hundred-and-forty-nine genera found on every continent apart from Antarctica. The current, recognized subfamilies found in Louisiana are the Natricinae, the Dipsadinae, and the Colubrinae. The Natricinae are mostly semiaquatic, feeding on fish and amphibians, and represented by such species as the glossy swamp snake, banded water snake, and Graham's crayfish snake. The Dipsadinae are greatly varied, demonstrating arboreal, aquatic, fossorial, and terrestrial lifestyles. Representatives in Louisiana include the western worm snake, the eastern hognose snake, and the ring-necked snake. The Colubrinae subfamily boasts our most common snakes; our racers and rat snakes, our kingsnakes and milksnakes. Snakes of this subfamily are never truly aquatic and can be found in almost all other habitats and are extremely morphologically different from one another.

Each of our snakes is unique in their own way just like our birds, our plants, and our people. Adapted to Louisiana, they are as integral to our ecosystems as purple and gold are to our flags. They might not be your favorite, you might not even want to contemplate them, but they are here and I hope my presentation can inspire some fascination in everyone (especially since all photos were collected through iNaturalist, the majority of which were taken in our state)!

Sources:

[Observations · iNaturalist](#)

[Species Field Guide - Reptiles | Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries](#)

[Pyron et al 2011.pdf](#)

[Life is short, but snakes are long: The Linnaean Snakes: Part I](#) & [Life is short, but snakes are long: The Linnaean Snakes: Part II](#)

[Louisiana Snakes Identification Guide: Species You May Meet!](#)

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## General Meeting Reminder

Southwest Louisiana Master Naturalists (SLAMN) will meet on Wednesday, January 7, 2026, at the Calcasieu Central Library on the corner of W. Claude and Ernest Streets in Lake Charles. A representative from CRCL (Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana) will be there to share information about the organization and how you can volunteer. We meet at 5 pm with a short social time – join us!

## Tree Planting in State Park

by Pam Langley

Members of the Southwest Louisiana Master Naturalists joined Friends of Sam Houston Jones State Park, Diggers and Weeders Garden Club, and Phillips 66 volunteers to plant trees in the Sam Houston Jones State Park. Trees planted included Long Leaf Pine, Loblolly Pine, Red Maple, and Bald Cypress. The event was coordinated by Friends of the park leader and Master Naturalist Lori Marinovich. Louisiana Irises were also planted along the water's edge. The event took place on Saturday, November 22. Since there were so many volunteers, the planting took only about 2 hours. Trees were planted along an eighteen-hole Disc Golf Course that is being created in the park. The trees are meant to become natural obstacles on the course.



Photo above shows the combination of the four groups that were involved in the planting.



The photo on the left shows the Master Naturalist members and students that participated. And a good time was had by all!

## Events

### Social

Every third Tuesday of the month, members gather at the Crying Eagle Brewing Company on McNeese Street for dutch-treat eats, drinks, and camaraderie. The next gathering will be **Dec 16, 2025**. Bring a friend and join us. We usually start showing up around 5 or 5:30 pm. See you there!

## Hiking



Kick off the new year with a ranger-led First Day Hike at Palmetto Island State Park on January 1st at 10:00 AM. We'll meet at Pavilion 1 and explore some of the most beautiful areas of the park together.

Choose between a 2-mile scenic hike featuring the Abbeville Red Iris display, Evangeline Pond, and the Palmetto forest — or a shorter 0.75-mile kid-friendly, pet-friendly route perfect for families.

Bark Ranger Gabbro will be leading the pet-friendly hike, so feel free to bring your dog along. They can even earn their official BARK Ranger certificate and dog tag after completing the hike.

Be sure to bring your bug spray and water as we start the year outdoors.

Entrance fees apply: \$3 per person.

Children 3 and under and adults 62 and over get in free.

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## Links

Back issues of Nature Notes: [Nature Notes & Docs - SOUTHWEST LOUISIANA MASTER NATURALISTS](#)

Louisiana MN: [Louisiana Master Naturalist - Louisiana Master Naturalist Association Homepage](#)

Facebook site: [Louisiana Amphibian and Reptiles Enthusiasts](#)

The Biodiversity Library: <https://about.biodiversitylibrary.org/>

Louisiana Plants: [Plants of Louisiana - USGS](#)

Louisiana Birds: [Louisiana Ornithological Society](#)

Fish Field Guide: [Species Field Guide - Fish and Shellfish | Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries](#)