



NATURE NOTES

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President’s Note

As we wrap up another inspiring season of workshops and step into a fresh new year, I want to take a moment to celebrate all that we’ve accomplished—and all that lies ahead.

From discovering native plant species to honing our field skills, each workshop this past year has been a reminder of the passion and dedication that lives within our amazing community. Whether you joined us in the field, in the classroom, or shared your knowledge with others, your presence made a difference.

Now, with a new year unfolding, we have a wonderful opportunity to take that energy even further. I encourage each of you to stay active, stay connected, and consider volunteering your time and talents in ways that continue to support our mission. You can explore current volunteer opportunities on **Track-It-Forward**, where there are plenty of ways to contribute that span a range of interests and schedules.



This year, we’re also exploring the formation of **interest groups** around favorite activities like **kayaking, planting native grasses, hiking, and studying native plants**. These groups can be

casual, flexible, and member-driven—just another way to connect, learn, and enjoy the beauty of nature together. If you're excited about joining or helping organize one of these, we'd love to hear from you.

To stay connected, don't forget we hold casual monthly meet-ups on the **third Tuesday of each month at 5:00 p.m. at Crying Eagle Restaurant**—a great way to catch up and share ideas in a relaxed setting. And mark your calendars: our next **General Meeting is July 9 at 5:30 p.m. at the Central Library**. We'd love to see as many of you there as possible.

Let's keep learning, sharing, and growing together as stewards of the natural world here in Southwest Louisiana.

I'll see you out there,

Barbara Morris

President, Southwest Louisiana Master Naturalists

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Bluebirds, a Symbol of Hope and Happiness

by Clare Prejean

My experiences throughout the Master Naturalist program this year have been extraordinary. The workshop on Backyard Habitat was the most interesting. We learned to use the dichotomous key for leaves and salamanders, how to use a field journal, discussed native pollinators, wildlife habitat, built Bluebird nesting boxes and installed them at Tuten Park. Before our group was finished installing the last Bluebird box there were Bluebirds flying tree to tree above the nest boxes we had just installed. Within weeks, Bluebirds were nesting in one or more of our boxes along the walking trail for others to enjoy. I love everything about the outdoors and nature itself, but bird watching, especially Bluebirds and Hummingbirds, is one of my favorite morning rituals.



Female and Male Bluebird scoping out a nesting box.

My love of Bluebirds began as a child when I saw my first Mountain Bluebird as a child camping in Colorado. Growing up in SWLA, we were only able to enjoy Eastern

Bluebirds when we camped at Toledo Bend or campgrounds in, around or north of Alexandria. My journey with Bluebirds began in the late 80's when I spotted a pair of Eastern Bluebirds scouting an ornamental bird house in our backyard. We live south of Lake Charles, so I immediately contacted the North American Bluebird Society (NABS), and was told that I was the first to report Eastern Bluebirds south of I-10. We purchased our first Bluebird nest box and I purchased meal worms from our local pet store to feed and encourage them to stay and nest. I communicated with NABS regularly through email thereafter. NABS encouraged me to start a Bluebird trail in our neighborhood the following year, and naturally, our neighbors complied.



Male Bluebirds are the most brightly colored of a mating pair.

We've enjoyed Bluebirds every year since and I've helped lots of friends and family, establish Bluebird boxes. My signature gift for years was Bluebird nest boxes!

Bluebirds do not feed from bird feeders. They feed on insects and berries, and occasionally during winter months they will feed on mealworm suet cakes. Over the years we planted various shrubs and trees that attract them such as Mulberry, American Holly, Dogwood, Holly shrubs that produce red berries, Beautyberry, Elderberry, Elaeagnus, Cherry Laurel, Mahonia, Blackberry, Pokeweed and Junipers.

Once you've established that you *can* attract Bluebirds, the next question you should ask yourself is if you *should*? Before selecting a site for a Bluebird nest box, you need to commit to monitoring the box if you live in areas where House Sparrows are present. As quoted by Jon Boone, one of the founders and former editors of NABS journal *Sialias*: "*The bluebird, while symbolic of hope and happiness, is also a totem of the environmental movement, which is the chronicle of how adverse consequences too often stemmed from the uninformed actions of the well-intentioned.*" House Sparrows were imported from Europe in 1851 and by the early 1930's the Bluebird population was declining and even becoming extinct in some areas. In 1934, Thomas Musselman from Illinois began writing articles for the National Audubon Society magazine in an effort to save Bluebirds. Without our help to control House Sparrows, Bluebirds would be nonexistent. Bluebirds are cavity nesters and require nest boxes to reproduce. House Sparrows are very aggressive and often kill Bluebirds

and/or their young to control the nest box. It takes daily monitoring to control House Sparrows during nesting periods. By law, you are allowed to destroy House Sparrows and their eggs if you find them in your nest box because they are not protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. If you cannot control House Sparrows, it would be better to not have and/or to remove the nest box.

Information for attracting Bluebirds, as well as the guidelines and practices for installing nest boxes, and controlling House Sparrows can be found on <https://www.sialis.org/>.

Bluebirds are present year-round here in SWLA. They flock together during the winter months and by Valentine's Day, they start scouting nest boxes. The male selects the nesting site and the female builds the nest. One pair of Bluebirds will usually produce at least one and sometimes three broods every year. Watching Bluebirds is rewarding year-round, but especially during the nesting season.

SWLA Native Lion's Mane Mushrooms

by Judah Fontenot

Introduction

Heridium mushrooms are a native fungus often referred to as a tasty functional food because they have benefits beyond basic nutritional value. There are as many myths as facts known about this unique fungus, including belief that Heridium can treat or prevent debilitating neurological diseases and disorders such as Alzheimer's. In fact, the medical benefits of Heridium is what first piqued my interest in learning more because our family experienced Alzheimer's brutal and heart-wrenching effects. After delving into every potential treatment and prevention option I could learn about, I was on a quiet walk in the woods near my home when I found Lion's Mane growing and immediately recalled reading several articles in medical journals that identified measurable positive health effects of the fungus. Can a native fungus really help with neurological health and what else is important about this functional food?

Louisiana Species of Heridium

In Louisiana, three main species of Lion's Mane mushroom are found: *Heridium erinaceus*, *Heridium coralloides*, and *Heridium americanum* (Bergo, 2024). All are snow-white and toothed; edible and sought after for their medicinal properties and delicious taste.

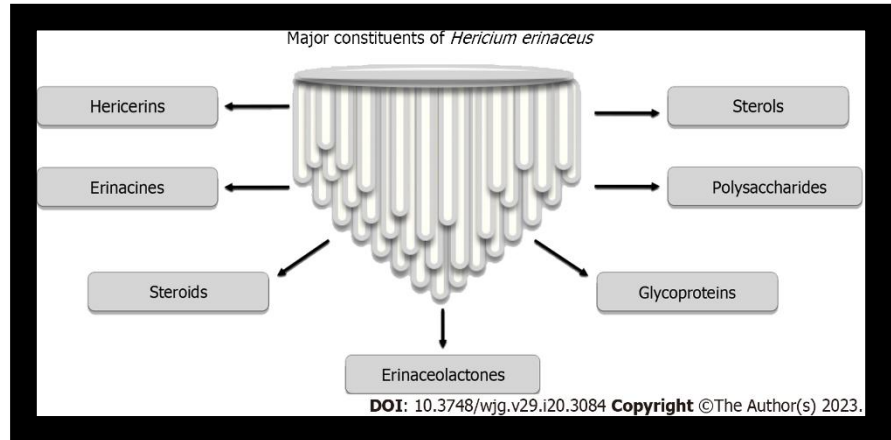


Heridium erinaceus, also known as Lion's Mane or monkey's head mushroom, is the most common species, composing 86-percent of the observations recorded for the state of Louisiana (iNaturalist, 2025). Lastly, the various species of *Heridium* are distinguishable by the configuration of their spines.

Health Benefits of Lion's Mane

The chemical composition of *H. erinaceus* includes polysaccharides, terpenoids (hericenones and erinacines), and phenolic compounds, which exhibit potent antioxidant effects by scavenging reactive oxygen species (ROS) and inducing endogenous antioxidant enzymes (Contato & Conte-Junior, 2025). In other words, Lion's Mane helps protect your cells from harmful molecules.

Additionally, *H. erinaceus* shows promising antimicrobial activity against bacterial and fungal pathogens, with potential applications in combating antibiotic-resistant infections. The mushroom's capacity to stimulate nerve growth factor (NGF) synthesis has highlighted its potential in preventing and managing neurodegenerative diseases, such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. Advances in biotechnological methods, including optimized cultivation techniques and novel extraction methods, may further enhance the bioavailability and pharmacological effects of *H. erinaceus* (Gravina et.al., 2023). Despite promising findings, clinical validation is limited, and future research should prioritize large-scale clinical trials. Studies that help medical professionals establish standardized extraction methods, and the understanding how derived drugs move through the body are needed to facilitate its integration into evidence-based medicine. The potential of *H. erinaceus* as a functional food, nutraceutical, and supplemental therapeutic agent highlights the need for interdisciplinary collaboration between researchers, clinicians, and regulatory bodies (Contato & Conte-Junior, 2025). For now, the most prevalent health treatment option for Lion's Mane is as a dietary supplement, often as a pill or tincture, but little is known about the measurable effects of these products (Gravina et.al., 2023).



Foraging Lion's Mane

Lion's Mane has a fruiting season that lasts from September to January when the temperature range is between 55°F to 70°F with high humidity. January and October after several days of rain are the most successful foraging periods I have experienced in western Calcasieu Parish. Published information on Lion's Mane describes hardwoods such as oak, beech, birch, maple, and cherry as the preferred growth environment, and my experience has been finding them only

on rotting water oak trunks. Lastly, keep an eye out for clues to areas where Lion's Mane might have previously fruited while foraging in the woods, often indicated by a dried sponge appearance material on decaying hardwood.

Growth Area Clues



Close-Up



Clues to look for when foraging for Lions Mane

Growing Lion's Mane

If your Lion's Mane plan includes consumption and you prefer growing the fungus yourself to ensure certainty, then commercial kits are available and very easy to use. The kits I purchased were easy to use and could be grown outdoors or indoors with very little attention. The process involved maintaining a moist and cool environment for the kit (60°F to 70°F), although I was able to grow some kits outside during the months of April and May and at temperatures above 80°F. The kits have all the instructions and typically you will have a fully grown fruiting Lion's Mane within 2-weeks of starting.

Lion's Mane for Dinner

Never consume any plant or fungus if you are not certain of the identification. If you know you have Lion's Mane, then you have a tasty and healthy food source. Bergo (2024) describes the taste of Lion's Mane as "mushroomy and nutty" along with a hint of shellfish and a texture of crab meat. In my opinion, cooked Lion's Mane had the taste and texture of steamed scallops, especially if cooked in a butter sauce. The fruit of the fungus can be consumed raw in a salad or cooked in many ways, including several local recipes that can be downloaded online. Most people that prepare Lion's Mane for food enjoy the taste and consider it a delicious treat.

Conclusion

Lion's Mane is a native fungus that has long been consumed in Louisiana and is readily found on hardwood across the state. The promise of significant medical benefits is driving some clinical studies but more is needed to move to the point that medical treatments are available from the derivatives of the fungus. Until medicines are developed and available, Lion's Mane can be easily grown and turned into a delicious meal or a dietary supplement with some published health benefits making it truly a worthy native functional food.

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Events

Next SLAMN general meeting will be **Wednesday, July 9, starting at 5:30 pm**. It will be held at the Calcasieu Parish Central Library on the corner of W. Claude and Ernest Streets. Please join us!

Every third Tuesday of the month, members gather at the Crying Eagle Brewing Company for dutch-treat eats, drinks, and camaraderie. The next gathering will be **July 15, 2025**. Bring a friend and join us. We usually start showing up around 5 or 5:30 pm. See you there!

Native Plant Blooming Now



Partridge Pea, or *Chamaecrista fasciculata*, is native to the eastern half of the US and parts of southeastern Canada. It is an annual legume, so it fixes nitrogen in the soil. It is also a host plant for the common sulfur butterfly. It was a common plant found on the lower Gulf Coastal Plain. The plant grows from 1 to 3 feet in height and grows in full sun or partial shade. It blooms best in full sun. It begins blooming in late spring and will bloom until the first frost. Seeds of partridge pea are known to be a major part of the diet of northern bobwhite and quail.

The Importance of Insects

from Purdue University Extension

We can find insects in almost every conceivable habitat. Their size, shape, color, biology, and life history are so diverse that it makes the study of insects absolutely fascinating.

Without insects, our lives would be vastly different. Insects pollinate many of our fruits, flowers, and vegetables. We would not have much of the produce that we enjoy and rely on without the pollinating services of insects, not to mention honey, beeswax, silk, and other useful products that insects provide.

Insects are underappreciated for their role in the food web. They are the sole food source for many amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals. Insects themselves are harvested and eaten by people in some cultures. They are a rich source of protein, vitamins, and minerals, and are prized as delicacies in many third-world countries. In fact, it is difficult to find an insect that is not eaten in one form or another by people. Among the most popular are cicadas, locusts, mantises, grubs, caterpillars, crickets, ants, and wasps.

And insects make our world much more interesting. Naturalists derive a great deal of satisfaction in watching ants work, bees pollinate, or dragonflies patrol. Can you imagine how dull life would become without having butterflies or lightning beetles to add interest to a landscape? People benefit in so many ways by sharing their world with insects.

--More at https://extension.entm.purdue.edu/radicalbugs/index.php?page=importance_of_insects

Calendar

July

9	General Meeting
12	Field Trip
15	Social at Crying Eagle

August

19	Social at Crying Eagle
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September

3	Board Meeting
16	Social at Crying
18	Guided Walk, Sam Houston
20	Beach Sweep Lakeshore Drive

October

1	General Meeting
11	Family Fun Day
21	Social at Crying Eagle

November

18	Social at Crying Eagle
20	Guided walk, Sam Houston

December

3	Board Meeting
18	Guided Walk