



NATURE NOTES

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PRESIDENT’S NOTE

Happy New Year!



As we move into a new year, I ask myself if SWLA Master Naturalists have made a difference in our community. I must first begin with those who have gone through the workshops, their perception of the natural world and their part in it. At outreach events such as Nature in Focus, Garden Expo, Guided Walks, Club talks, we share our awareness and enthusiasm guiding others towards making the natural world a better place.

Some of us work quietly to make the world a better place; planting Natives into our home landscapes, participating in Audubon Bird Counts, picking up Litter, and limiting the use of poisons in our environment.

Keep up the good volunteer work, post your hours on Track It Forward.

We have a calendar full of events and we need you to volunteer. We begin on January 25 with a Nature in Focus (Reptile) event at Riverside Park.

This year, SLAMN will be sponsoring a Wild Life & Fisheries VIP training on February 15. This will be open to members. Contact Lori Marinovich if you are interested in attending the training.

You are welcomed to attend workshops that you may have missed. You can also sign up to be a helper. You should register on Track It Forward.

I hope you will become more involved in Master Naturalists events in 2025. Follow Southwest Louisiana Master Naturalists on Facebook where we regularly post upcoming events.

See you out there,

Barbara Morris

SLAMN President

RENDEZVOUS 2025



Registration is now open for Rendezvous 2025! This Louisiana Master Naturalist statewide meeting will be held in Baton Rouge at the River Center. The dates are April 11 – 13 and activities slated are Butterfly tagging and a Paddle-In movie on the University Lakes. Use the link below to register!

<https://www.zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/cc6da91f-3f2a-4166-b388-195a16b45f05>

COMMUNICATION CORNER

Lori Marinovich

Did you know our organization has a Facebook group for members only?

This is one of the main ways we get information about upcoming events and volunteer activities out for the membership.

Please send a request to Lori Marinovich and we will add you to the group - send an invite.

The name of the Facebook group is

Southwest Louisiana Master Naturalists- Member Group

MERLIN BIRD ID & eBIRD

Dennis Herringshaw

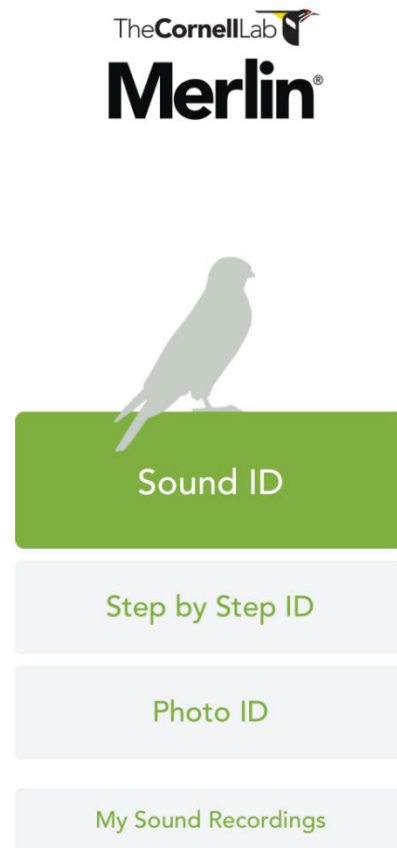
You see an unusual bird or hear an odd call. Your *Peterson Bird Guide* is at home. What do you do? Click on your *Merlin Bird ID* iPhone app! Take a photo, record its call or answer three questions on its size, color and habitat. Within seconds you receive several possible IDs showing a photo, call, and rarity ranking for comparison.

Merlin Bird ID and *eBird* are the most popular and powerful mobile apps a birder can possess. Don't leave home without it. These mobile apps are free, easy to download, and implement. Developed by Cornell Lab of Ornithology, these two apps work in tandem to not only ID birds but to effortlessly record your sightings, maintain your life list and lead you to proven birding hotspots.

Merlin Bird ID acts as a coach to help you identify your sightings by accessing the powerful *eBird* database that contains data on more than 25 million sightings. *eBird* can display maps showing locations of different species in your area, as well as, hotspots for your species and other statistics. In addition, *eBird* provides a fast and accurate way to record bird sightings when you are in the field by automatically tracking your exact location and time of sighting. You only need to select your bird from the suggested list of similar birds extracted from the database. Your sighting is automatically stored in your personal life checklist and added to the master database.

When initially installing, *eBird* asks for your area and downloads only bird data for that particular area from its worldwide database. So if you change areas, say traveling to Yellowstone, you need to download a new data set.

In addition to the iPhone app, the *eBird* website (<https://ebird.org/home>) contains supplemental tools and data for the advanced birder. A powerful interactive, zoom-in global map for each bird species displays total abundance, abundance by weeks of year, range of species, and trending abundance over



the past decade. Birders can also download bird status and trends data products for their personal research.

Merlin Bird ID and *eBird* together allow you to find more birds and keep track of your bird lists, photos, and sounds. You can also explore latest sightings from around the world, and you will be contributing to science and conservation.

References

eBird website <https://ebird.org/home>

How to use the eBird Mobile App: A Beginner's Guide, by Badgerland Birding
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pfyyn3GgWe8&t=5s>
(background info only. No info was used from this website in writing article)

THE MALLARD DUCK

Kay Nichols

My interest in the Mallard Duck began on Easter Sunday, March 31, 2024. I happened to notice several mallard drakes, 5 or 6, in my front yard. They were scratching through the grass searching for a meal. About an hour or so later, I observed a mallard hen leading the drakes to the nearby water source across the street from my home in central Lake Charles. Curious, I went to investigate my shrubbery and possible nesting sites in my front yard. I discovered a single blue-green egg carefully hidden with leaves, twigs, and feathers covering the nest. I continued to observe the hen and her suitors visiting my yard every morning and depositing one egg in the nest for the next eight days. The daily visits ceased when the weather became ill-tempered, rainy, and cloudy. I have no idea if the weather was the cause of the departure of my guests, but they did not return. I did not disturb the nest or eggs but let nature take its course and eventually the eggs were eaten by predators. The Easter Sunday visitation and subsequent visits appeared to me to be an invitation to educate myself a bit more about the mallard.



Mallard ducks are a migratory waterfowl species. They are somewhat flexible in their migratory routes, but usually fly in the V pattern to conserve energy and to keep the flock together. They wing their way to a warmer climate as seasons change. Sometimes, they discover sufficient food, water and somewhat comfortable climate available year-round, and they put down roots. Mallards have been domesticated since 5000 B.C. (1) The Mallard is quite adaptable and is widely dispersed throughout the world. It is found in fresh and saltwater habitats. Mallards are omnivores and flexible in their choice of food. It is a dabbling duck that rides along the water skimming the surface for food.

The male, Drake, is very easy to identify with the bright green iridescent head, well defined white collar, yellow bill with a black tip, blue speculum (secondary wing feathers) bordered with white on the wings. The female, hen, usually a mottled brown with feathers ranging from buff to dark brown, darker colored bill and features the blue speculum on the wings.

The mating season typically starts in late winter and continues into Spring. The hen lays between 8 to 13 eggs and incubates the eggs for 28 days and fledging takes from 50 to 60 days. The ducklings are precocious and capable of swimming as soon as they hatch. (2) In cases where a nest or brood fails, some mallards mate for a second time to raise a second clutch, typically around early to mid-summer. (3) After breeding, the drake molts and is very vulnerable at this time because he cannot fly.

In addition to human hunting, mallards contend with a wide range of predators. Raptors, owls, large fish, raccoons, snakes, turtles, domestic cats and dogs to name a few. The most prolific natural predator of adult mallards are red foxes. (4)

Since 1998, the mallard has been rated as a species of least concern on the IUCN Red List of Endangered Species. This is because of its large range of 7,700,000 miles and its ever-increasing population, due to its adaptability in all parts of the world.

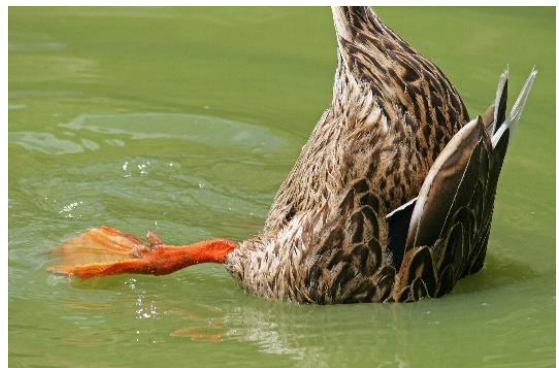
Some Interesting Facts:

Females of the species give out the well know “quack” sound which is heard for miles. This vocalization is also called “hail call” as the females use it to beckon other ducks, including their ducklings.

During the nesting period, the females are exposed to severe stress laying more than half their body weight in eggs.

The famous saying “water off a duck’s back” has to do with the waterproof plumage of these birds, their feathers maintain water repellency due to oil from their preen gland.

Although mallards mainly feed on the surface of shallow water bodies, they can also dive for food.



Bibliography

1. Zhang, Zebin; Jia Yaxoing; Almada, Pedro, (April 1, 2018) “Whole genome resequencing reveals signatures of selection and timing of duck domestication.”
2. “Urban Mallards – Portland Audubon” Portland Audubon. March 2022
3. “Ducklings hatch at a London Wetland Centre” BBC News. November 2011
4. “Impact of Red Fox Predation on the Sex Ratio of Prairie Mallards” Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center. August 2006

LSU HILLTOP ARBORETUM 2025 ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM

Baton Rouge, LA. Join us for an inspiring afternoon with renowned ecologist, **Douglas Tallamy**, as he discusses the transformative “Homegrown National Park” movement, an aspirational project to repurpose half of America’s lawnscape for ecologically productive use. Our ecosystem cannot solely be sustained by national parks and forests. The intention is to unite fragments of land scattered across the country into a network of habitat, starting in our own backyards.

Bill Fontenot and **Cheryl Geiger** will share their insights and experiences in planting native species and creating local ecological networks to help restore biodiversity and strengthen the surrounding environment. Learn practical tips on how you can locally contribute to this national challenge. Join this growing movement and be a model for positive change!

Date: Saturday, January 25, 2025

Cost: \$95

Time: 9:00am – 2:00pm

Location: EBRPL – Main Library, 7711 Goodwood Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70806

Registration at: <https://www.lsu.edu/hilltop/programs/adult/symposium.php>

2025 CALENDAR

January

8	General Meeting
11	Workshop 1: Applied Natural Science
16	Guided Walk Sam Houston Park
18	Workshop 2: Biological/Ecological Concepts
25	Nature in Focus Reptiles at Riverside Park 9-11am

February

1	Workshop 3: Backyard Habitat
15	Workshop 4: WLF VIP training
20	Guided walk, Sam Houston
22	Nature in Focus Native Plants at Tuten Park 9-11am

March

TBD	Booker Fowler
4	Mardi Gras
8	Workshop 5: Bird Study
12	Board Meeting
20	Guided Walk
22	Workshop 6: Fresh Water Marsh Ecosystem
27-28	Garden Expo

April

TBD	City Nature Challenge
2	General Meeting
5	Workshop 7: Cajun Prairie Ecosystem
11-13	Rendezvous in Baton Rouge
20	Easter
26	Workshop 8: Coastal Ecosystem

May

3	Workshop 9: Reptiles and Amphibians
10	Family Fish Day Sam Houston Jones State Park, Hosted by SLAMN
17-18	Workshop 10: Longleaf Pine Ecosystem
31	Nature in Focus Birds tentative date

June

4	Board Meeting
7	Workshop 11: Aquatic Invertebrates
14	Workshop 12: The Land Ethic, Outreach and Graduation
19	Guided Walk, Sam Houston

July

9	General Meeting
12	Field Trip

September

3	Board Meeting
18	Guided Walk, Sam Houston
20	Beach Sweep Lakeshore Drive

October

1	General Meeting
11	Family Fun Day

November

20	Guided walk, Sam Houston
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December

3	Board Meeting
18	Guided Walk