

Southwest Louisiana Master Naturalists

Nature Notes



Charter 2016

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In This Issue:

<u>President's Note</u>	1	<u>SLAMN Calendar</u>	20
<u>Editor's Note</u>	2	<u>Resources</u>	20
<u>Chapter Business</u>	3	<u>Board Members</u>	21
<u>Local News</u>	4		
<u>Call for Volunteers</u>	6		
<u>iNaturalist Spotlight</u>	7		
<u>Naturalist Notes</u>	8		

President's Note:

Greetings, Master Naturalists!

What does it mean to me to be a Master Naturalist? This organization is an opportunity for me to interact with other people who enjoy being outdoors. **What do I get from this organization?** I learn something more about the world around me from everyone I meet. **What do I give to the organization?** I attend outreach events and hope I inspire one person to recognize the natural community in which they live and their impact upon it. I share articles, photos, and events that educate and inspire. I try to be a good steward of the earth in my own community.

The Master Naturalist group is in need of your involvement and participation. Ask yourself these three questions and get involved in your organization and your community.

Help wanted: Committee members, class instructors and facilitators, community outreach ideas, field trip organizers, newsletter editor, web master, photographer, gardeners for Tuten boxes, and participants.

President: **Barbara Morris**
 Vice-President: **Lori Marinovich**
 Treasurer: **Clay Ardoin**
 Secretary: **Patty Palmer**
 At-large Board Members:
David Booth,
Theresa Cross,
Tommy Hillman
Robby Maxwell
 Past President:
Irvin Louque

Editor's Note:

With this issue of Nature Notes, we begin a new era. Since its inception in 2016, Nature Notes has been edited by the very capable Arlene Caine. Arlene has decided to make a new life near her children in Indiana and will be moving on from Nature Notes and from SLAMN. We thank her for her years of service and wish her happiness in her new life.

For the moment, I am acting Editor and will be working with the rest of the Publications Committee to sort out how we will continue to turn out Nature Notes in Arlene's absence. This is a work in progress, and we hope you will be patient while we figure this out.

You will notice some changes. First of all, we will publish quarterly between the Board Meeting and the General Meeting so that we can inform you about business recently concluded by the Board and about the expected agenda of the upcoming General Meeting. You can see this reflected in the new "Chapter Business" section that replaces the old "Meeting Notes."

We will experiment with streamlining the newsletter by replacing the Volunteer Opportunity and Continuing Education Opportunity sections with links to the same information on our website and Facebook page. We will continue to publish articles about these opportunities submitted by members, and will announce any new opportunities submitted by members, but for now say goodbye to long lists in every edition.

We will also try to focus the Resources for Naturalist section on items submitted by members. We are looking for short reviews of books, websites, apps, educators, museums, arboreta, nature oriented B&Bs or tours, or any other resource that you think others will appreciate.

For now, you can send any news, articles, photos, comments, or other items to me, Clay Ardoin, at clayardoin@outlook.com.

You can expect some additional changes in the future as we work with the technical details to make editing easier of the committee. On behalf of the Publications Committee, I thank you for your patience with us as we figure out how to do this, and we look forward to hearing from you.

Clay Ardoin, SLAMN 2018

Sorghastrum nutans from Maxwell
Prairie, closeup of rames
Micrograph by Clay Ardoin



Chapter Business

[Back](#)

Graduation

The 2021 Southwest Master Naturalists Course is approaching its conclusion. Seven new members will graduate Saturday June 26 at the LSU AG Center Building next to Burton Coliseum after they complete their final course. Congratulations Class of 2020/2021! It was a long haul, but you have seen it to the end.

Next General Meeting

The next General Meeting will be held on July 7th at the LSU AG Center Building next to Burton Coliseum. There will be a “social half-hour” starting at 5:30 so that folks can mingle and chat with the meeting kicking off at 6:00.

The guest speaker will be SLAMN Past President Irvin Louque, who was recently appointed Whooping Crane Outreach Coordinator for Louisiana by the International Crane Foundation. Irvin will discuss Whooping Cranes and the ongoing effort to protect and restore them. You can read more about it in the Local News Section below.

Nominations for Office

The Nominations Committee will be considering candidates for all offices and will present a slate of nominees to the Board of Directors at the September Board Meeting. If you would like to be considered for office, or think someone else deserves consideration, now is the time to contact the chair or one of the members of the committee to offer your services or make recommendations. We encourage all members to consider serving as officers.

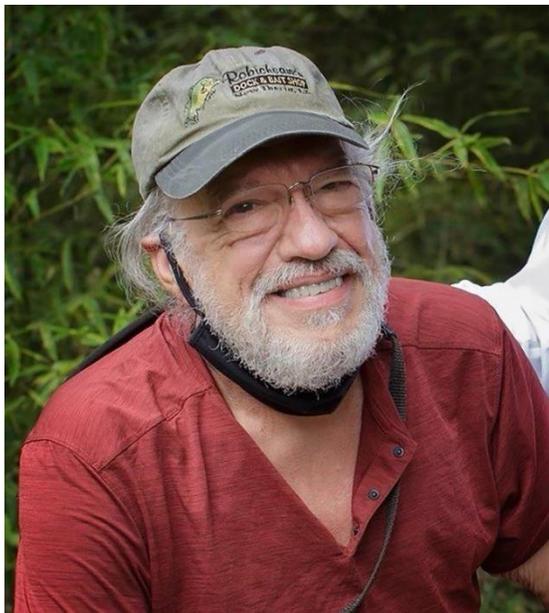
Field Trip

The next field trip is scheduled for Saturday July 10th at a location to be determined. We are attempting to arrange a tour of the Whooping Crane facility at White Lake with Irvin. We will keep you posted.

Next Board Meeting

The next Board Meeting will be held on September 7th at Tuten Park. The Board will receive the slate of Nominees for Office from the Nominations Committee, plan for next year’s courses, and conduct other business as required. As always, all members are invited to attend as observers.

Local News:

[Back](#)

Dorman Award Goes to Acadiana's Bill Fontenot

The Louisiana Master Naturalist Association has presented the Caroline Dormon Award for Outstanding Louisiana Naturalist to William "Bill" Fontenot.

The Louisiana Master Naturalist Association founded the Outstanding Louisiana Naturalist Award as a tribute to the legacy of Caroline Dormon and to recognize people who personify her commitment to conserving and appreciating the rich biodiversity of Louisiana. William 'Bill' Fontenot is the fourth recipient of the award.

In 1986, Bill Fontenot began his career with Lafayette Parish Consolidated Government, working first as Curator of Natural Sciences at the Lafayette Natural History Museum, then as manager of the Acadiana Park Nature Station. He has dedicated his career in biology to restoring ecological integrity to land, from the smallest urban gardens to the largest wildlife management areas. As a local columnist, for over two decades he helped educate the public about our natural heritage.

Bill works as an Ecological Consultant. His workbook, "Native Gardening in the South" by **Bill Fontenot**, is a resource for landscaping your yard with native plants. Bill lives in the Lafayette area and is a member of the Acadiana Master Naturalists. He is also active in the Louisiana Native Plant Society Group. His presentations can be found on YouTube. He also has a Blog at <http://thenaturedude.blogspot.com/>

New Program Manager at Tuten Park

Emerald Fletcher, SLAMN Class of 2019, has been named Program Manager for the Nature in Focus program at Tuten and Riverside Parks in Lake Charles. Emerald graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Natural Resource Conservation Management from the College of Agriculture, McNeese State University in 2021. While earning her degree in 2019 she was a coastal prairie research intern working with Brian Sean Early with LDWF.

With her help, we will coordinate future volunteer opportunities with Nature in Focus and resume the use of the Tuten Park facilities for meetings and classes. Congratulations, Emerald! We look forward to seeing you back at Tuten Park!

Local News:

[Back](#)

Irvin Louque to Speak at July General Meeting

Irvin Louque, SLAMN's past president and the International Crane Foundation's Whooping Crane Outreach Coordinator for Louisiana, will give a presentation on Louisiana's Whooping Crane reintroduction project at the July 7 meeting.

At 5 feet tall, Whooping Cranes are the tallest bird in North America. These large, long-legged white birds sport a red cap, black mask, and black wingtips making them unique among wading birds in North America. They are also one of North America's most endangered birds with only about 650 birds in the wild, though the population was as low as 15 birds in the 1950s. Whooping Cranes are dependent on marshes and other open wetland habitats for breeding, wintering, and foraging. Prior to European settlement, Southwest Louisiana's marshes and prairies hosted the highest numbers of Whooping Cranes in the world, but sadly the last Louisiana Whooping Crane died in 1950. In 2011, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries began reintroducing a nonmigratory population of Whooping Cranes to Louisiana's marshes where they once again fly free. That population now numbers around 70 but still has a long-road to become self-sustaining.

The International Crane Foundation has played a pivotal role in the recovery of Whooping Cranes and in the conservation of all 14 other crane species worldwide through captive breeding, outreach, research, and habitat conservation programs. Attend this talk to learn more about Louisiana's Whooping Cranes and how they're benefiting from agriculture and what you can do to support their recovery.

Mushrooms and Fungi Class at Allen Acres

The 2020/2021 class travelled to Allen Acres near Pitkin, LA for Fungi and Mushroom field work. Fortunately for us, David Lewis was conducting a fungus BioBlitz there, and he was able to serve as our instructor. We participated in the Mushroom Foray and identified many species of mushroom and lichen. James Doucet proved to have a good eye for spotting mushrooms in the leaf litter.

Many of those who attended had never been to Allen Acres. It was such an interesting adventure. Some participants stayed the night at the Bed & Breakfast. We took the nighttime moth sheeting walk and found Luna Moths. Everyone had a really good time. Allen Acres is such a great resource for our area.



Call for Volunteers:

[Back](#)

Volunteer to serve on one of SLAMN's Committees

We want to encourage all SLAMN members to participate in one or more committees. Contact members on the committee of your interest to join or to provide suggestions or ideas.

We encourage all SLAMN members to participate with time and energy for all events sponsored by the Volunteer Committee and the Promotions Committee.

Course Planning Committee

Contact Irvin Louque: irvinlouque@gmail.com

Maximum number of members: 8

Duties:

- Develop schedules, finds speakers and coordinators for each workshop in the annual course.



Promotions Committee

Contact David Booth: david@boothenvironmental.com

Maximum number of members: 6

Duties:

- Keep SLAMN in the public eye and connect well with other affiliated groups.
- Maintain momentum of group developing interest and adding desired activities that are well attended by past graduates and new students

Publications Committee: CHAIR NEEDED

Maximum members: 4

Duties:

- Produce newsletter (Nature Notes) every 2 months
- Maintain and update website
- Produce brochures, flyers, and other organization documents as needed

Volunteer Committee:

Contact Lori Morinovich: elleu1@yahoo.com

Maximum number of members: no limit

Duties:

- Find, plan, and execute volunteer projects that have clear ecosystem benefits and/or publicity for our chapter and the natural world
- Priorities include outreach classes, natural space improvements for local nonprofits, public space improvements and improvements to private property.

Nominations Committee:

Contact Irvin Louque: irvinlouque@gmail.com

Duties: Present a slate of nominees for office to the Board of Directors each year in September.



iNaturalist.org's Journal Official Blog

<https://www.inaturalist.org/blog>

Check out the "Observation of the Week" post.

**iNaturalist Southwest Louisiana Master Naturalists Project
Observation of the Month by Student Naturalist James Doucet**

<https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/81298299>

[Purple Passionflower](#) (*Passiflora incarnata*)



**All observations of Students and Members are automatically added to the
Southwest Louisiana Master Naturalists project.**

<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/southwest-louisiana-master-naturalists>

TANGLEHAVEN – A Different Kind of Beautiful

By: Micky Deal



This is the scene of my front gate the day after Hurricane Laura devastated my beloved home, I call Tanglehaven. The slightly diagonal white line at about 2 o'clock in the photo is the roofline of my house. I was trapped in my own yard and my carport was collapsed onto both my vehicles. Fortunately, friends came to the rescue & cleared my way out and were able to dig my truck out of the destroyed carport. I had a bit of "freedom" back in my life...



As my dog, Tipper, and I surveyed the damage, we found that the bridge that had once so gracefully spanned the creek, also was not spared by the wrath of Laura. Even Tipper was overwhelmed by the sight!

The following months were spent directing four different church groups in their efforts to bring a little accessibility back to Tanglehaven. I thank God for their generosity in helping the stricken people of our area regain some hope!

Hope is what I so desperately needed!

Naturalists Notes:

[Back](#)

Because the entire yard was covered in rain-filled ruts from the equipment that had been used to remove trees, I started seeing plants that had never grown here before. I now have an abundance of Umbrella sedge (*Cyperus eragrostis*) that I find to be quite ornamental. (We had a class on sedges and grasses last year and I remembered “sedges have edges”). In addition to this fine addition, I also have porcupine sedge (*Carex hystericina*), perennial ryegrass (*Lolium perenne*) and great woodrush (*Luzula sylvatica*). I feel like I’m living in my own little bog!



As usual, nature restores order back to what is supposed to be. The picture on the left is of my cat, Hearty, watching the numerous American gold finch and a lone cardinal at the window feeder earlier this year. In the background is my “Discovery Channel” view of the pond right outside the window.

The middle photo is a beautiful display of butterweed (*Packera glabella*) that came up as a surprise this spring.

The photo on the right is my old faithful winecup mallow (*Callirhoe involucrate*) that has graced my lawn for years. I surely welcome the color into my life! I have some Cajun Prairie going on here!

Naturalists Notes:

[Back](#)

I end this article with one of the highlights of my year, the newest addition to Tanglehaven, a rufous phase common screech owl (*Otus asio*), who could hardly wait to move into the new house I put in a topped-out oak tree! I was so saddened by the loss of so many trees, but again, nature is doing her magic by springing up new growth in situations that looked hopeless. Tanglehaven is indeed becoming a *Different Kind of Beautiful!*

Sources: (1) www.inaturalist.com, (2) Field Guide to the Grasses, Sedges and Rushes of the United States by Edward Knobel, (3) www.naturespot.org.uk/gallery/grasses-rushes-sedges, www.lizzieharper.co.uk, and (4) www.gardeningknowhow.com

Pitcher Plant Bog at Kisatchie National



Photos courtesy of Barbara Morris

Naturalists Notes:

[Back](#)

Cedar Waxwings

by Sherri Plummer

Species: *Bombycilla cedrorum*

Genus: *Bombycillidae*

Order: Passeriformes

Life Span 8 years

I chose to write about the Cedar waxwings because they once visited me and instilled a desire to know more about them. It was about 2 years ago in February when they swarmed my front yard (see the video at <https://youtu.be/IHUnOtz-gMs>). At that time (pre-Hurricane Laura) we had an ornamental holly tree loaded with berries. I opened my front door only to receive a very large ear-full of cedar waxwings feeding. Most of the birds were in a tree across the street, perhaps somewhere around a hundred. They seemed to take turns coming in small numbers like 10 to 15 to feed on the berries in our tree. Just as if a bell went off, the next group of birds came to do the same then return to the tree. This trading off continued for some time, long enough to let me find my phone and make a video of this event.

It was fascinating, plus these birds were so beautiful and well behaved. I was starstruck. I found it particularly interesting as Dan, my husband and the amateur photographer, was out hoping to capture photos of these birds, and in doing so missing the entire event.

Naturalists Notes:

[Back](#)

Cedar waxwings got their name because of the waxy, red secretions on their secondary wing tips. Their purpose is not clear. Perhaps this wax is to protect the secondary feather wing tips.

Cedar waxwings are brownish in color with pale to lemon yellow bellies that may change a little with diet to slightly yellow orange. They have a crest and black band across their eyes like a mask. Males and females share the same coloring, but females are slightly smaller, and males have broader tails and are darker in color under the chin. Cedar waxwings have high pitched lispy, trilling voices and call frequently during flight.



Accordingly, cedar waxwings are sometimes referred to as “masked marauders”, and their large and noisy flock given the moniker of “ear-full” or “museum”.

Though there are three species of waxwings – Cedar, Bohemian, and Japanese – cedars are the only waxwings found in Southwest Louisiana. Cedar waxwings may winter in the southern half of the US and Mexico, reaching as far south as Panama, and returning to their permanent residences of the lower half of Canada and northern United States as temperatures rise. Breeding range is also in this area and occurs in May and June.

Cedar waxwings are fruit eaters but like most birds hunt for insects such as beetles, caterpillars, and ants for feeding of their offspring.

If you are in hopes of inviting these lovely birds to your feeder it may not be easy, as they are hard to attract initially. Several sources recommend a special fruit feeder and a bird bath, as fruit eating birds are thirsty birds.

Lisa de Leon tells us on her blog that cedar waxwings sometimes eat fermented fruit in such large quantities they may become “drunk” and fall out of their trees. Without intervention these birds may die. There are in some areas rescue rehab centers for this purpose (something else besides being highly social that they share with humans.)

Occasionally Cedar waxwings are observed perching on a line and passing a fruit such as a berry from one bird to the next until one bird swallows the berry. This type of sharing maybe important in their mating ritual as the male will hop dance for the female offering a berry to his possible mate. If interested she, too, will hop, dance, and return the berry, sealing the deal!

This process of picking out a mate may seem to be easy for the cedar waxwings, but you would be fooled to think so. There is evidence that finding the right mate is about the plumage or color of plumage. Perhaps it is not how well he dances but may be related to how many stripes he or she have on their secondary wings,

Naturalists Notes:

[Back](#)

a phenomenon known as Delayed Plumage Maturation. These wing stripes are more numerous in older, more mature birds. These older birds have larger clutches/brood size and fledge more young; there's something good about getting old!

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"Cedar Waxwing - *Bombcilla cedrorum*", New Hampshire PBS Nature Works, <https://nhpbs.org/natureworks/cedarwaxwing.htm>, accessed 5/24/2021.

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"Cedar Waxwing and more", Birding with Lisa De Leon, <http://retiringwithlisadeleon.blogspot.com/2010/02/cedar-waxwing-and-more.html>, accessed 5/26/2021.



Examining Specimens
at the Mushrooms and
Fungi Workshop

Photo courtesy of Barbara Morris

In Appreciation of Vultures

by Dan Plummer

- Turkey vulture, *Cathartes aura*
- American black vulture: *Coragyps atratus*

I've been a little fascinated with vultures ever since I was a kid. We would commonly see them from afar, but not so often up close. When we did, their size and great wingspan of about six feet were a bit surprising. Shocking, even. We'd heard they'd vomit on you if you got too close. And that bald red head is, uh, unusual to say the least. Things haven't changed much for me, and I still like seeing them both aloft and on the ground. But as a budding naturalist, I think maybe it's important to reflect a bit on how they operate and their importance to the ecosystem.



Identification and Range

First, let's note that the turkey vulture is the most common of the vulture species here in Southwest Louisiana, but there is a healthy population of black vultures as well. We normally identify the turkey vultures in flight by the obvious dihedral angle between their wings and frequent tottering from one side to the other. Black vultures are typically differentiated by their stouter bodies, shorter tails, lighter wingtips, and rapid flapping. In the southern US, many vultures are year-round residents. In the northeastern US, turkey vultures are the dominant species, and, in the winter, they migrate southward into the southern US, including Louisiana. In the northwestern US, turkey vultures may winter as far as Central America or northern South America.

What are Vultures Doing Here?

The main role of vultures in the ecosystem is to eat dead carcasses. Turkey vultures are what are known as obligate scavengers, which means that they eat dead things and dead things only. Both species are adept at finding animal carcasses, especially the turkey vulture. Several sources point out that turkey vultures

Naturalists Notes:[Back](#)

prefer fresh carcasses but will eat well-decomposed carrion when they need to. Both species, like many vulture species, have especially acidic stomachs and strong immune systems that allow them to clean up corpses that may be infected with communicable diseases like anthrax, rabies, salmonella and more. And rather than spreading these diseases, they tend to defeat them and not pass them on to other organisms.

Without vultures, facultative scavengers like crows, gulls, rats, and dogs, would, and do, take over their scavenger role. The upside of vultures doing the scavenging is that they are fast at finding carrion and efficient at eating it, and they rarely come into human contact. In contrast, these other scavengers may be more likely to carry diseases and to come in contact with humans. The result is a higher risk of spreading diseases to humans.

A main risk to populations of vulture species in many parts of the world are carcasses tainted with poisons, for example poisoned by poachers, or by those trying to control a pest population. They can also be made ill or killed by medicines given to livestock intentionally in agricultural settings.

How Do they Find their Meals?

Vultures find their meals by their senses of smell and sight. Turkey vultures have especially well-developed senses of smell and can detect even slightly decomposed flesh in this way. As it turns out, this was learned in part through serendipity in the late 1930's by ornithologist Kenneth Stager, former curator of ornithology at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, when an oil company employee told him about vultures being attracted to leaks in pipelines carrying gas that was intentionally odorized with chemicals known as mercaptans. (These are the same chemicals used today to odorize gas, and they do indeed have foul smells like rotten eggs, or cabbage.)

Vision is important as well, as both of our vulture species can and do locate carcasses by sight. And of course, once a single vulture begins circling a carcass to land on it, this can be seen by other individuals, and the feeding party can begin in that way, too.

So, next time you're passing a buzzard or two on a carcass on the roadside, slow down and make a bit of room, and thank the birds for their service.



Photo by Clay Ardoin

Naturalists Notes:

[Back](#)**And, Finally, a Few Odes to Vultures...**

The Vulture

The Vulture eats between his meals,
And that's the reason why
He very, very, rarely feels
As well as you and I.

His eye is dull, his head is bald,
His neck is growing thinner.
Oh! what a lesson for us all
To only eat at dinner!

Hilaire Belloc (1870 - 1953)

Cathartes aura

I will hate to see them go.

They glide the updrafts of October
so far above the shore
even their scavenger's matchless
acuity is useless at such height.

Twelve latent fingers (turned plume
by fluke of evolution) spread
to wave all gravity away,
they soar for joy
and purely trace the thermal's arcs,
caress its curves with effortless
affection.
They ornament the sky.

Some do not love them, see them
as lore's sin-eaters
stoking themselves with all putrescence,
storing evil unburdened only at death
by filial commitment.

Nor are they match for agile enmity
of fisher crows, those rooks they battle
startled, every spring, for strips of shore.

Naturalists Notes:

[Back](#)

Beached then, and innocent of weapon,
they flounder over rock and stump,
dismayed and flapping
into kinder air.

Yet something in life loves them,
gives them two score years and ten
to migrate the season's loop,
refuses them claws to snap a spine,
or beak to pierce a jugular,
breeds them to eschew all seeded fruit
quick or dead,
to sit the leafless branch.

The crow can be seduced by easy corn,
The raccoon cannot wash some stench away.

But they, *Cathartes aura*,
golden gleaners,
turn carrion to beauty, scour the beach
so silent walkers find,
scraped to bare perfection,
the sterile white of bones in sculptured order.

I will hate to see them leave.
They preserve the sand, the air
as only they, or ice, can do.
I hope the frosts come soon.

Trudy Plummer (1929 – 2021)

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Naturalists Notes:

[Back](#)

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Coragyps atratus on and over
Cow Carcass

Photos by Clay Ardoin



Let Nature (and a few Master Naturalists) Be Your Teacher

By Connie McDonald

Poet William Wordsworth advised us to "Let nature be your teacher"; and I agree, but would add how much it helps to have two master naturalists to tromp alongside while you're at it. After the long pandemic, this past week was pure magic: I had the privilege of gathering with fellow nature lovers, in and out of doors; learning through lecture, film, discussion, and trudging down trails.

Last Saturday I drove a short distance from my home in Iowa to Robby and Danielle's slice of paradise in Lacassine. Their property is gorgeous, and they are knowledgeable, generous hosts. About a dozen of us gathered for a guided tour. We were surrounded by islands of native plants: dog fennel, cone flowers, mountain mint, swamp sunflowers. The names sounded like poetry, and each cluster looked like a painting: bee balm, wild bergamot, maypop.

Along with names of plants, info about collecting seeds and using herbicides, planning burns, and identifying butterflies was steadily offered by our hosts, as well as answers to our many questions: What kind of butterfly does the caterpillar on the maypop turn into? (Gulf Fritillary) When should we do a burn? (December) What kind of plant is that? (wild lettuce, a natural pain reliever) What kind of butterfly? (Monarch) What plants attract monarchs? (Willow leaf aster, Joe Pye weed) Some do's : droppers of Round-Up around stumps); and don'ts: Don't fertilize native plants! (Who knew?); switchgrass is fun to burn; geriander mint has a square stem.

I left the Maxwell's land tired from tromping but exhilarated by all the plants and ideas I'd been introduced to.



Freshwater Fish and Riverine
Ecology, 2021

Photos Courtesy of Barbara Morris



SLAMN Calendar

[Back](#)

Southwest Master Naturalists 2021 Calendar

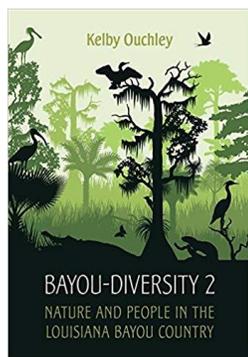
All dates are subject to change.

For more information and to sign up, go to www.TrackitForward.com

June 2021		July		August		September		October		November	
23	Pollinator Garden Cleanup Tuten Park	7	General Meeting			7	Board Meeting Nominations	5	General Meeting Elections		
26	Public Outreach and Graduation Class	10	Field Trip					9	Field Trip Lacassine Pool		
December 2021		January 2022		February		March		April		May	
1	Board Meeting							8-10	Rendezvous Camp Hardtner		

Resources for the Naturalists:

[Back](#)



Bayou-Diversity 2: Nature and People in the Louisiana Bayou Country, October 10, 2018

By Kelby Ouchley

<https://www.amazon.com/Bayou-Diversity-Nature-People-Louisiana-Country/dp/0807169382>

In this sequel to his previous exploration of Louisiana’s bayou country, conservationist Kelby Ouchley continues his journey through the vast ecosystems of the state with a fresh array of historical and cultural narratives, personal anecdotes, and reflections. Informative and entertaining, *Bayou-Diversity 2* revisits familiar flora and fauna like endangered black bears, infamous feral hogs, and the ghostly bald cypress forest. Ouchley’s thought-provoking discussion considers the long-term human impact on Louisiana plants and wildlife.

Our Mission Statement

The mission of the Southwest Louisiana Master Naturalists is to promote awareness, understanding, and respect of Louisiana’s natural resources using unbiased, accurate, scientific information provided by a trained corps of volunteers. These volunteers provide education, outreach, and services dedicated to the conservation and management of our ecosystems



AMAZON SMILE

Southwest Louisiana Master Naturalists

<https://smile.amazon.com/ch/47->



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Board of Directors

[Back](#)

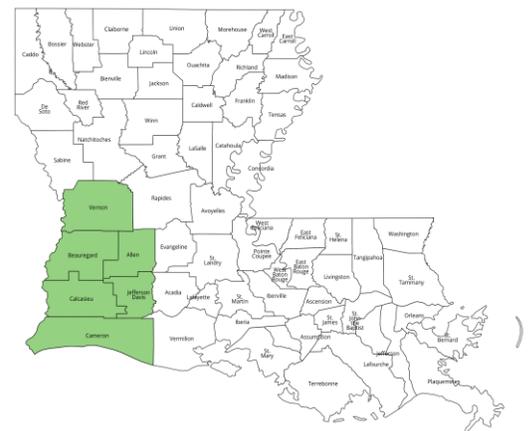
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About SLAMN Nature Notes

Southwest Master Naturalists Nature Notes is published the second week of the following months:

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We welcome contributions of original writing of observations, and topics on nature in our area of Southwest Louisiana. We welcome reports, reviews, and digital photographs.



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