

NATURALIST NEWSLETTER

Louisiana Master Naturalist Greater New Orleans

LMNGNO COMMITTEE OVERVIEW

By: Alahna Moore

As you surely know, our organization is outstanding and impactful thanks to the dedicated service and passion embodied by our membership. What you may not know is how much work goes on behind the scenes in order to provide you with the best there is in education and opportunity! For this reason, we've chosen to focus this newsletter on the great work performed by the many LMNGNO Committees.

Did you know that the only requirement to join a Committee is LMNGNO certification? Even if you're not quite certified, you can participate in a committee as an honorary member while you work towards certification; Some committees even offer volunteer credit for your time, effort, and expertise!

Committees are the grease that keep the gears of LMNGNO turning. The **Development, Fiscal, Membership, Recruitment,** and **Sales** Committees track the number of members that we gain each year, and they make sure that your membership dues are used so that our group continues grow. As expected, Dr. Bob heads a handful committees, including **Awards**, which handle the Viosca and Bradburn awards, **Nominating**, which manages board appointments, as well as the **LMNA** Committee which interfaces with our statewide group, and the **Curriculum** Committee that designs the LMNGNO educational workshops.

The **Scholarship** Committee creates funding opportunities to make sure that everyone who wishes to become a Master Naturalist has the ability to do so, while the **Development** and the **Events and Outreach** Committees work to expand the reach of the Louisiana Master Naturalists by networking with local environmental advocacy groups to build partnerships and provide meaningful volunteering opportunities.

The **Certification** Committee manages the event calendar and publicizes extra credit opportunities, while also keeping tabs on members' Volunteer and CE hours on Track it Forward.

In this issue:

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- Rangia Clams: Long May They Reign!"

Volunteer Events:

(Click event title for info)

August

- 2nd, 9th, 16th, 23rd, 30th, and ongoing Fridays [Trail Maintenance at City Park's Oak Grove](#)
- 20th [LMNGNO iNaturalist ID Workshop](#)

September

- 5th - 7th [Bayou Bonfouca Marsh Restoration Planting](#)
- 28th [B.I.G. \(Believing in Girls\) Event in BR](#)

October

- 5th [Work/ Play Days at Southeast Louisiana Refuges](#)
- 6th [Fall Garden Show Tabling](#)

Continuing Education Events:

(Click event title for info)

August

- **27th - 29th** [SOUL NOLA Community Forest Series](#)
- **30th** [Spider Walk with Dr. Aimee Thomas](#)

September

- **9th, 14th, 16th, 21, 23rd, 28th, 30th** [Fall Birding Basics Class - Hilltop Arboretum](#)
- **9th, 16th, 23rd** [Fall Birding Class - OLLI](#)
- **11th, 18th, 25th** [Fall Birding Class - Ponchatoula](#)

October

- **2nd** [Fall Birding Class - Ponchatoula](#)
- **6th** [Fall Birding Basis Class - Hilltop Arboretum](#)
- **12th** [Wild Things Tabling](#)

LMNGNO Committee Overview Cont'd

The **Naturalist Adventures** Committee is the newest to the LMNGNO cohort. This Committee is specifically designed so that members who have graduated from the Master Naturalist course have the opportunity to get out in nature with other naturalists following the completion of their workshops.

And finally, my committee! The **Communications** Committee focuses on publicizing the great work done by LMNGNO through newsletters, social media posts, and our website. The Communications Committee is currently seeking new members, as well as photo, writing, and media submissions that can be published for credit hours online and in this very newsletter! If you're interested in contributing to any of the LMNGNO Committees, feel free to reach out to the chairperson to find out how you can be of service!

Contact Information for LMNGNO Committees

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It's chanterelle season! These mushrooms were found in Pearl River WMA.
Photo Credit: Alahna Moore

The Corvid Chronicles Part 1

Rebecca Stilling (Fall 2018)

I'd been neighbors with a large family of crows for twenty years or so. Brilliant black birds, they had always been busy minding their own business in the vacant double lot next door, sparing me just the occasional bright eye and head cocked in my direction or a random caw. For my part I'd always smiled at them or offered the occasional "Morning crows." They were good neighbors.

When last fall the two lots next door finally sold and construction began, I was distraught. What would become of our crow neighbors? One early morning before the bulldozers began again, two crows perched on the telephone wire in front of my house. They looked down into the torn up lot and cawed in what I perceived as distress. I ran out of my house, throwing bread as an offering (all I could put my hands on quickly). I called out "Crows, crows, crows! I'm so sorry your place is being destroyed. Please don't leave. You belong here! I'll look out for you". The crows began cawing in patterns of three — "Caw, caw, caw!" Apparently it was a call to beckon family members. Several crows flew over from nearby trees to observe the offering.

Just then I heard laughter behind me and turned to see my neighbor on the other side call out, amusement in her lovely Indian accented voice, "Rebecca, what are you doing?" Laughing, I went to explain, and the crows swooped down to feed. My neighbor assured me, "I am sure the crows have a language of their own but it is not yours!"

Nonetheless I believe the crows did understand me. Beyond a doubt, they at least understood that I was a human with good intent. Initially in the mornings or whenever I heard the crows, I went out to bring them offerings. Figuring that bread wasn't good for them, I offered, berries, vegetables, catfood, whatever I had on hand. Later I researched their preferred foods and read that although they will eat almost anything, they really love unsalted peanuts in the shell. My field research proved this to be true. So peanuts in the shell it was!

I talked extensively with my friend Alanna Frick who loves corvids and began feverishly researching corvids, crows in particular. My crow companions were American crows (*Corvid Brachyrhynchos*). They are extremely smart and adaptable with fascinating social lives. Crows have good memories, can solve puzzles, can count, will drop peanuts on roads for cars to crack for them. Corvids and humans have complex, interesting relationships. They know us and remember us. Some of us humans love them, some of us not so much.

Being one of those humans who love them, I began to partially crack the peanuts for my crow friend and also to mimic three caws in response to their calls when I threw the peanuts. As months progressed, the crows came more dependably and seemed to reinforce my cawing behavior. They were a happy part of my day. It always seemed to me that there was one crow in particular who connected with me the most. That crow was the boldest and responded by flying down the soonest and the closest to me for peanuts. Although there were no distinguishing physical characteristics that I could discern, behaviorally one specific crow seemed distinct. It seemed to trust me the most. Frequently, one solitary crow took a position in the oak tree behind my house to call loudly. That crow had to be my bold companion crow. I noticed that crow often had a companion bird, who followed close behind.

From researching I learned that crows may mate for life. Older offspring from previous seasons may often serve as "helpers" to feed and care for the new season's fledglings with both the male and female parents. So I came to think my bold companion corvid probably came most often accompanied by the mate. And frequently my bold companion led the way for a group of 4-6 crows.

Photo Credit: Rebecca Stilling



The Corvid Chronicles Part 1 Continued

Crows do recognize individual human faces. They can distinguish and remember us. I feel certain my bold companion corvid knew me and recognized me personally, although my schedule is somewhat erratic and our encounters occurred at different times of the day. Whenever I threw peanuts I would mimic their distinctive three caws and then withdrew into my house or at least into the alcove of my house. Occasionally they'd reinforce my behavior by flying down as soon as I began to retreat. They were training me well.

I never found research to support my three caws call. Apparently for crows, the three caws call that indicates "Come, there is plenty of food to share" is similar to the three caws that means "Danger".

However my cawing never seemed to hurt our relations. So I kept doing it.

One evening when I hadn't seen the crows all day I grew anxious. I heard crows calling away in the distance so I grabbed my peanuts from their bowl by the front door and ran outside. I repeatedly gave the 3 caw call and was rewarded in a few minutes. my two magnificent crow friends came to perch on the wire in front of my house. They eyed me and gave 3 caws.

Rangia Clams: Long May They Reign!

By N. J. Stanley (Fall 2018)

I am seriously embarrassed to admit this, but until a few days ago, I had no idea what Mignon Faget's jewelry was like. (I know, you may not either or care, but bear with me.) I remember the name from my growing-up years in New Orleans. I remember her first shop and thinking what an arresting name she had. Then I observed over the decades how she built up her brand and her name to celebrity status in NOLA.



Photo Credit: N. J. Stanley

So I was in conversation with a friend recently, and we somehow ventured onto the subject of Mignon Faget. My friend told me that Faget's signature is found in her choice to incorporate New Orleans imagery into virtually all her designs. So not just your usual, worn-out fleur de lis, but earrings mimicking banana leaves or a segment of a cast iron railing, for example.

As it happened, I was on my way to Lakeside Mall after this conversation, so I decided to swing by the Faget store and, because time was short, I vowed to only window shop and not go inside. I started at the far end of the store, peering into each window at length and making my aesthetic assessment regarding whether I liked what I saw or not. And, of course, noting the NOLA influence if possible.

As I reached the final window, I saw a silver pendant on a simple chain and matching earrings. At first, I couldn't tell what I was looking at. Then I drew my nose close to the glass and was rewarded with the realization: These were high-end, no doubt sterling silver, reproductions of Rangia clam shells!

You can't imagine my delight! I have a thing for Rangia clams since taking the Master Naturalist course last fall. Well, the story goes a lot farther back than that—since I was a little girl, in fact. When my family first moved to River Ridge in 1962, my street bed was composed of Rangia clam shells. I remember how brilliantly white they appeared when under a deep blue sky, and I also remember the dust that exuded from the shells every time a car drove by.

Rangia Clams: Long May They Reign! Continued

And it wasn't just my street, but the entire subdivision that boasted these white byways piled with crunchy shells. More than 50 years later, I finally learned about the marine creature that creates this ubiquitous shell in Southern Louisiana.

Did you know that the Atlantic Rangia clam is a native species in Lake Pontchartrain? That's simply because it's the perfect habitat. The water in the lake is brackish and relatively shallow. The lake's bottom is composed of soft, sandy mud—the perfect composition for Rangia clams, which do not rest on the bottom but burrow into the mud below the surface, where they spend the rest of their lives.

And now for some history. There were an incredible number of Rangia clams snuggled comfortably underneath the lake's bottom—billions in fact—until human beings began dredging the lake in 1933 when they realized those clam shells could be quite useful! Billions of clams were harvested to use their shells in roadways, levees, parking lots, and in the production of cement.

By the 1970s, the water in Lake Pontchartrain had become nasty, and it was closed to swimming. It took people 20 years to realize the vital connection between the water's dense turbidity and the loss of the Rangia clam population. Finally, in 1990, dredging the lake for clam shells was banned. The pollution in the lake began to decline exponentially as the Rangia clam population increased. Why?

The Rangia clam is a filter feeder, sucking water through its gills and filtering out the microscopic algae it lives on. The animal sends out a siphon that pushes up through the mud and pokes out above the surface in order to ingest the water flowing along the lake's bottom. It also sends out a second siphon that expels the filtered water.

The clam is nonselective, meaning it ingests any- and everything in the water, including silt and clay particles. These unwanted particles are bound up in mucous (called pseudofeces, a kind of poop!) and squirted out. This concoction sinks to the bottom, making the floor of the lake a natural "landfill" for all nature's garbage. And the clear water emitted by the clams is essential to the health of the lake as well as the host of sea creatures that call it home.

Today, both the Rangia clam population and the ecosystem of Lake Pontchartrain are healthy and happy. Currently, the Rangia clam population "cleans" the 629 square miles of water that make up Lake Pontchartrain approximately every five days. Isn't that astonishing?!

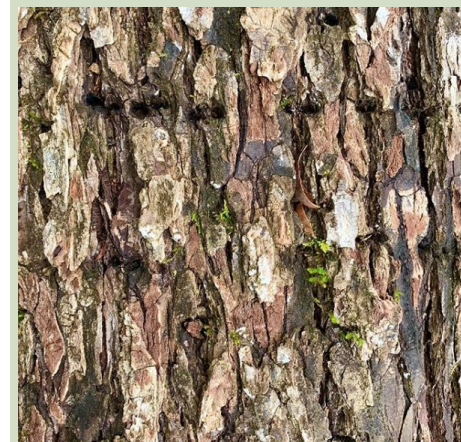
Social Media Buzz



Night time frogging!
Photo by: Alanna Frick



The ghostly home of a Tent Caterpillar
Photo by: Alanna Frick



The Yellow-Bellied Sap Sucker makes shallow holes in tree bark, then uses its long tongue to lick up sap and the bugs trapped in it!

