

# NATURALIST NEWSLETTER

Louisiana Master Naturalist Greater New Orleans

## Join Us for the Upcoming General Meeting!

Join our General Meeting on Thursday, July 23rd, 2020 for an evening of naturalist fun! [Click here to join the meeting.](#)

6:30-7:00 p.m.: Business Meeting

7:00-8:00 p.m.: Speaker

We are excited to welcome our keynote speaker, Linda Auld. Linda will speak about Caroline Dormon, a Louisiana-native who was the first woman hired by the U.S. Forestry Service in 1912. She was instrumental in establishing the Kisatchie National Forest in 1930, and wrote beautifully about her home, Briarwood, located in Saline, Louisiana.

## In This Issue:

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- Morning Coffee Observations
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Congratulations to Dinah Maygarden who received the 2020 Percy Viosca Jr Outstanding Naturalist Award at the last board meeting. The Award is given annually to an LMNGNO member to highlight their exceptional contribution to our organization.

**Congratulations to our newly certified members from our Fall 2019 cohort!** Dale Campo, Tom Dumas, Nicole Green, Roy Rogge, Cathy Schieffelin, and Lisa Valence



Photo by: Dot Wood



Photo by: Tanee Janusz

## Upcoming Wednesday Seminars:

(Click title to join!)

**July 22**  
**Nature's Notebook,**  
Liz Marchio, Jean  
Lafitte National  
Historic Park and  
Preserve

**July 29**  
**Phenology,** Julie  
Whitbeck, Jean  
Lafitte National  
Historic Park and  
Preserve

**August 5**  
**Documenting**  
**Change Around Us,**  
Julia Kumari  
Drapkin, I See  
Change

**August 12** (2 hrs)  
**All About Birds,** Erik  
Johnson, Louisiana  
Audubon Society

**August 19**  
**Nature Journaling,**  
Lauren Hemard,  
Certified Master  
Naturalist



## Morning Coffee

By: Marianne Maumus

Lately, Kevin and I have been taking our morning coffee on the back porch. We have a small backyard that abuts Ponchartrain Boulevard, which is a two-lane street. The road is the origin of the Ponchartrain Expressway near the lake. There is a tall brick wall between our backyard and the street. Cars are continually traversing. Across the street is another neighborhood, similar to ours with its own brick wall. Also across the street, to the left and right, are telephone poles, and in these poles are birds.

The left pole has a colony of sparrows. Through binoculars, we have been watching them for years. They come to our chicken coop for breakfast in the morning. They are little brown birds with a dark head, dark beak, brown wings and tail, black beard, white breast and white patch on the chin. They are incessantly chirping all day long. We watch them fly to and fro, bringing fresh branches and insects to the nests which are tucked away safely in hollow square metal cross beams. These beams are fastened to the pole. There are always five to six sparrows on telephone wires keeping guard.

This year, on the right pole, there is a mockingbird nest. The cross beams are wood on this pole. Wood rot has hollowed out one of the cross beams. The rot forms a pit where the nest was built. We can hear the babies' high pitched immature ditties when the adults come to feed them. Each morning, after the baby birds are fed, the daddy sings his cadre of songs. There are many. It is obvious that he is teaching the kids, through observational modeling, as they listen. He is so loud and proud of his communication skills. One cannot escape noticing the show.

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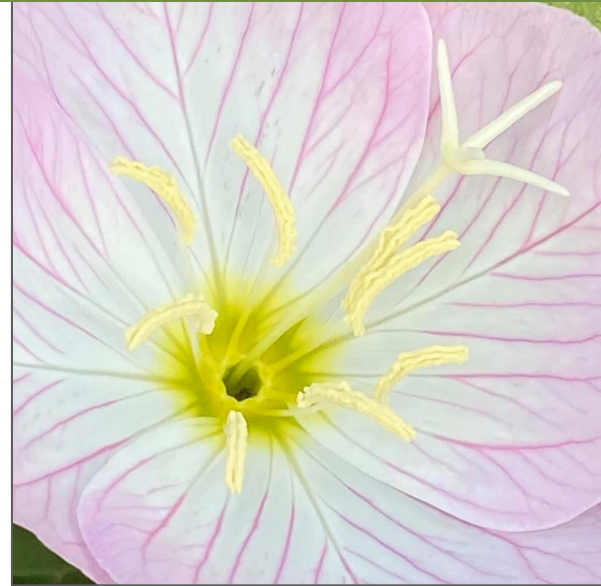


Photo by: Connie Eason Thompson



## Morning Coffee, continued

Yesterday, while watching the above scene again, a very large and hungry crow landed on the telephone wire just above the mockingbird nest. Daddy mockingbird became quite anxious, increasing his volume, hopping fervently on the wire and changing to a more aggressive tone in his songs. We watched for a bit, and became worried for the innocent babies in the nest. The crow was pitch black and shaking his head in jerks, as if to say, "I have found my breakfast, and there is nothing you can do about it." Our conversation stopped for about five minutes as we watched the display of anxious whistling coming from the powerless mockingbird. The crow seemed to be taking his time, enjoying his ability to terrorize the daddy mockingbird.

Kevin could not take it anymore. He walked into the house, dug out his old tennis racket and a ball from the closet under the stairs. Back in the 1980s, Kevin was an ex-collegiate player on the UNO tennis team. He has put in many hours of work on the court in his younger days. He dropped the ball and took one well-calculated swing. The ball was shot up 50 feet, across our backyard and the highway with cars driving by, to the level of the telephone wire, coming within three feet of the crow. The ball went over the roof of a house and landed somewhere in the other neighborhood. The crow was startled, of course, not ever experiencing a missile attack before, and flew away. I'm not sure if the mockingbird took in what happened. He was too busy dancing and screaming on the wire. After the crow left, the mockingbird stayed on the wire and calmed down his tunes, as we finished our morning coffee, laughing.



Photo by: Sue Ellen Lyons

## Naturalists are Also Heroes: A Review of *Spillover*

By: Janell Simpson, President, LMNGNO

I first saw references to David Quammen's prophetic book in a Scientific American article published on March 12, 2020. The re-printed interview, which took place in 2012 shortly after the book's publication, discusses Mr. Quammen's enormous effort in documenting zoonotic diseases. The author traveled the world to find out the backstory of many obscure and perhaps forgotten illnesses that were traced back to animal reservoirs, zoonotic diseases. He joins a research team in their efforts to collect macaques from a religious shrine in Bangladesh to find evidence of Herpes B and treks along a transect through the jungles of central Africa looking for colonies of primates infected with Simian immunodeficiency virus.

In all of these investigations, the people at ground zero of these investigations are naturalists, observers of the natural world. Sometimes, they even have scientific training. Often these naturalists are local residents who know the habits of the animals in their environment. They notice when the birds are feeding, when the bats are migrating, when the primate colony has moved on. These naturalists are the heroes of the search for human disease reservoirs because they have made careful study of natural communities and the animal populations that make up a particular ecosystem.

Why do I call this a prophetic book? In the opening section of the book, Mr. Quammen asks, "Will the Next Big One be caused by a virus? Will the Next Big One come out of a rainforest or a market in southern China? Will the Next Big One kill 30 or 40 million people? Some knowledgeable and gloomy prognosticators even speak of the Next Big One as an inevitability." Now that the "inevitable" pandemic is upon us, it is imperative that naturalists continue to observe, interpret, and report about the nature around us.

### Resources:

Mirsky, Steve, host. "David Quammen: How Animal Infections Spill Over to Humans." Scientific American, 18 Mar. 2020. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/podcast/episode/david-quammen-how-animal-infections-spill-over-to-humans/>  
Quammen, David. *Spillover*. The Bodley Head Ltd., 2012.

## What are our fellow naturalists reading?

Sue Ellen Lyons is reading *Bayous and Barriers, Canals and Katrina: An Artist's Journey into the Science of Global Climate Change* by Dee McLean.

Amy Wing is reading *The Garden Awakening: Designs to Nurture our Land and Ourselves* by Mary Reynolds.

Nadine Phillips is reading *Sparrow Envy* by J. Drew Lanham.

Mighnon Tourné recommends the *Wanderlust* series by Gestalten and Cam Honan.

Caroline Senter is reading anything by Wendell Berry.

Amanda Galloway Pennington is reading *There's no such thing as bad weather: A Scandinavian Mom's Secrets for Raising Healthy, Resilient and Confident Kids* by Linda Åkeson McGurk.

## Stormwater Runoff

By: Roy Rogge

In south Louisiana, we are accustomed to rain events which can cause a variety of problems – namely flooding and water pollution. Governments of all sizes are entrusted with the responsibility of providing drainage systems to prevent flooding of homes and businesses. Such systems include levees, spillways, subsurface channels, drainage canals, pump stations, and floodgates. As a resident of St. Tammany Parish, I have noticed an interesting addition to its flood control system in recent years: retention and detention ponds.

In order to understand the significance of these ponds, it is necessary to understand what a watershed is. A watershed is the area of land that drains to a particular wetland, bayou, stream, river, or lake. In my particular neighborhood, rainwater drains from properties and roadways into ditches. Downstream, smaller ditches flow into larger ditches which, in turn, flow into the Abita River. The Abita River feeds into the Bogue Falaya River, which flows into the Tchefuncte River, which empties into Lake Pontchartrain. During heavy rainstorms, the ditches will fill and sometimes overflow, flooding streets and homes.

Rainwater is not all that is carried off by the drainage ditches: pet waste, fertilizers, motor oil, detergents, insecticides, herbicides, and litter such as cigarette butts are transported to our waterways. These rivers and streams provide drinking water for land animals and become a part of the ecosystem for organisms living in the water.



Watersheds of the United States

Throughout St. Tammany, stormwater is directed towards a wetland area or manmade lake capable of retaining large amounts of runoff. These are known as retention ponds, since they will *retain* the runoff until it is absorbed into the ground or evaporates. Some retention ponds are planted with native vegetation to enhance their capacity to retain water, while others are open bodies of water that can attract local and migrant birds and other wildlife.

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## Stormwater Runoff, continued

Detention ponds – or dry ponds - are located mostly in more populated areas. During a rainstorm, runoff is channeled towards these empty “dry” lots. There, the water is detained in a shallow depression. Once the depression is filled, the water will drain into a canal or other outlet. This moderates the amount of runoff rushing towards canals and streams, thus reducing the danger of flooding. Detention ponds are designed to *delay* the flow of water rather than *retain* it.

A program known as Adopt-A-Pond allows St. Tammany Parish Public School students to participate in establishing and maintaining approximately 72 detention and retention ponds throughout the Parish. Students plant native trees and vegetation in ponds to improve water quality and retention, and conduct water quality monitoring. The data collected is entered into a database which the parish government can access.



**Retention Pond**



**Detention Pond**



Photo by: Linda Van Aman



Photo by: Denise Gentry