

the NATURALIST newsletter

Louisiana Master Naturalists, Greater New Orleans

Message from the President

Hi Everyone,

I hope everyone has found ways to get out into nature this past summer, despite the very unusual weather. We're planning a great event for Fall 2023 – a LMNGNO first ever annual gathering, similar to the state association rendezvous. The winter gathering will be held at the Group Camp in Bogue Chitto State Park, December 1-3. The camp has a full kitchen and dormitory style sleeping quarters with 2 large rooms of bunk beds. Total capacity in the dorm is 52. There may be sites available at the park for those members who would rather camp (paid separately through the state park website).

The draft schedule looks amazing, with outdoor sessions focusing on lichen, mushrooms, trees, river ecology and geology, as well as some artistic sessions and possibly even some auditory naturalizing! Fees for the weekend will be \$50.00 each, which includes meals and a bed for Friday and Saturday night (\$40.00 if you don't stay overnight). Get in touch if you'd like to help with this event (julialightner@gmail.com). Thanks to board member Byron Almquist for the great idea!

The Fall 2023 workshops have started and we're looking forward to welcoming new members to our organization. I've read through their bios and as usual they are all interesting and impressive. Thanks to the current workshop leaders who volunteer so much of their time organizing and leading these sessions: Janell Simpson, Kismet Collins, Carro Gardner, Tricia LeBlanc, Theodore Rhodes and Bob Thomas.

Fundraising is something new to our group, but necessary now that we have our wonderful location at STEM Lab Library. Our organization is paying monthly rent for our office and meeting space, and that was covered by a grant our first year. If you have any fundraising ideas or want to give to LMNGNO (we are a non-profit organization), get in touch. We need your ideas!

LMNGNO is a non-profit organization fueled by a huge volunteer effort. Thanks to everyone for your ongoing work! Contact me (Julia Lightner) at lmngno.president@gmail.com.

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Photo by Bill Van der Meer

Summer Tanager *Piranga rubra*

...at Peveto woods, Cameron Parish, LA,
all looking like little Draculas feasting upon
ripe Mulberries after that long northbound
migratory flight across the Gulf of Mexico

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2023 Viosca Award

This Year's Award Goes To.....

Linda Barber Auld was selected by the LMNGNO Board of Directors for the 2023 Percy Viosca award to honor her dedication to Louisiana Natural History. Linda is a Louisiana native who lives in the Greater New Orleans area.



Photo by Jeanell Strickland

Linda Barber Auld

She is an advocate for beneficial insects, beautiful butterflies and native plants and is involved in raising Palamedes swallowtails and attempting to alter their food source (red bay trees) which is threatened due to the ambrosia beetle. She has been involved in many projects promoting the care and conservation of Monarch butterflies such as distributing Louisiana milkweed seeds, participating in Monarch Watch, tagging and monitoring the migration habits of Monarchs; promoting the use of native plants to attract wildlife and serve as butterfly hosts.

Linda has also written a book, *BugLady's Butterfly Summer*, plus numerous articles to encourage people to connect more with nature by observing the small things around them. She exhibits a true joy in sharing all of the above with students, teachers and the general public. Linda is truly dedicated to promoting beneficial insects and enriching our natural environment. We congratulate her!

But just who is Paul Percy Viosca Jr. and what makes an award bearing his name such a distinction among naturalists? Born in New Orleans on June 24, 1892, Viosca was a preeminent naturalist of his day. After earning his master's of science degree, he taught at Tulane as a student assistant through 1916 and set up the Southern Biological Supply Company, which supplied specimens of crayfish and other aquatic life for research and commercial use. Viosca's publications, about life in the swamps and marshes of Louisiana, proved invaluable for posterity. By the end of his life, his remarkable contributions were acknowledged, earning him the title "Mr. Marine Biologist, the dean of Louisiana biologists". -Janell Simpson and Bill Van der Meer

Well Deserved Recognition

LMNGNO wishes to thank the following outgoing board members for their service to the organization. We appreciate your contribution of time, energy, and leadership. Your volunteer spirit is the backbone of our organization. They are:

Ann Butcher, Rene Guas, Dinah Maygarden and Carol Rice

Meetings Calendar:

Board of Directors Meetings (5:30 pm)

Also open to all members in good standing

LMNGNO Resource Room
STEM Library
3011 N I-10 Service Rd.
Metairie, LA 70002

Exec. Committee Meeting: October 11

Board of Director's meeting: October 19

General Membership Meeting(s)

Social Hour begins at 5:30pm
Business meeting and seminar begins at 6:30pm

Loyola University
Miller Hall, Room 114

October 26

Special Event!

Winter Gathering at Bogue Chitto State Park Dec.1-3

The Louisiana Master Naturalists of Greater New Orleans is a community of citizens interested in engaging with the natural environment through education, stewardship and volunteering.

[Visit us on the web](#)

Meet the Naturalist! ... An interview with CPRA Project Manager, Jessica Diez

Coastal Resource Scientist, Jessica Diez, offers her perspective on mitigation strategies designed to address existential threats to Louisiana's coastline and their impacts upon both our human and natural communities. Jessica is Project Manager for the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority of Louisiana (CPRA) and is a certified Master Naturalist from the Baton Rouge Chapter. -Catherine Leftwich

Photo by Bill Van der Meer

What led you to your current work at CPRA? Were you always interested in coastal resource protection and management, or did it come later?

My education started with a B.S. in Zoology/Marine biology and an M.S. in Environmental Toxicology and Disaster Science with a focus on aquatic systems. I've always had a love of the water and the interconnectedness of it with organisms. Following the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill, I really felt a call to be a part of the State's work in coastal issues and bring my background and knowledge to that field. I started working for the Department of Natural Resources in the Office of Coastal Management as a Coastal Resource Scientist in the Field Services Division in 2011. I gained intimate knowledge of the regulatory process of permitting activities in the State's coastal zone. I was able to visit many project sites over the years and see projects both before they were constructed and then after work was completed. But, I wanted to be involved more with the construction process and get to "do the projects" rather than just permit the projects. So, in 2019 I made the jump over to the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA) as a project manager. My love for coastal resource management really started in earnest while working with the Department of Natural Resources, but I'd say has been honed in a whole new way at CPRA working directly with funding agencies, stakeholders, project engineers and all of the folks that make up the project teams to implement the projects.

Which project (or project outcome) has given you the most hope for the future of the Louisiana coast?

I think I'm supposed to say the Mid-Barataria Diversion here, but honestly I'm really excited about some other projects too. There is a long-range, multi-phased approach to recreate a natural landbridge in the Breton Sound in St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parishes. Through a series of projects, they'll provide a solution to land loss in the area and introduce much needed storm surge protection for major cities such as New Orleans, Metairie and Slidell including ports, petrochemical industries and agriculture. These projects will help to mitigate the risk to the residents along with local municipalities embracing smart growth policies, ordinances and rules for new development.

Additionally, the LaBranche Marsh Creation project is about to start construction along the west bank of Lake Pontchartrain and spanning on both sides of the I-10 corridor between Kenner and LaPlace. Anyone driving into or out of New Orleans on I-10 will get to see coastal restoration in action. They are restoring ~1,500 acres of marsh that has been eroding and opening up into open water. This area is a very active fishery and migratory waterfowl nesting ground. It's an exciting project not only for CPRA, but also the citizens of LA that will get to witness the construction. Most of our projects are so far away from everyone that it is hard to get a sense of what we do, the scale and enormity of the benefits. So, this will be really visible to all that pass over and hopefully highlight the importance of what we do.

As a project manager for CPRA, what has been the most challenging project you have worked on?

The most challenging project I'm currently working on is a ridge restoration and canal backfilling project near the Grand Bayou community in Plaquemines Parish. This project was conceived of out of talks with the Atakapa-Ishak/Chawasha Tribe that live in their ancestral village along Grand Bayou. They have had significant losses to their community through the years, exacerbated in 2010 by impacts from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. The project is to restore and create roughly 50,000 linear feet of historical ridge along Grand Bayou and Bayou Grand Cheniere, restore natural hydrology and provide wave and storm surge attenuation to the surrounding community. This project has had to contend with active oyster leases, oil and gas companies, pipeline crossings, coordinating with other projects in construction and a robust cultural resource investigation.

The project scope has had to change so as not to cause or increase the vulnerability of existing cultural sites that were discovered. It is also my first time working with a Tribal community in Louisiana and it has taught me to really listen and pay closer attention to the traditional ecological knowledge of this Tribe, the needs of the community and to slow down from the normal, extremely fast-paced nature of coastal restoration projects. The Tribe has been marginalized in the past, looked over, or not taken seriously. They've been pushed off of their land and forced to deal with a rapidly changing coast, not of their doing, and this has caused a deep rooted mistrust of the government and private interests. It has been challenging to work with all of these factors and still meet the project goals but I think we're getting there.

What inspired you to become a master naturalist of Greater Baton Rouge? How does the work you do tie into your naturalist philosophy?

One of my fellow co-workers is a Master Naturalist in Baton Rouge and put a flyer up on a bulletin board at work that sparked my interest. I've always had a love of biology, nature, aquatic systems and more recently, birding, so it seemed like a good fit for my interests. I didn't know a ton about the organization starting out, but quickly fell in love with the group and I've been in awe of the amount of talent and knowledge base of the members and speakers that taught classes. Naturalist issues are coastal issues and we are working to preserve or create our coastal communities everyday, including the plants and animals that live in them. Some of my favorite CPRA projects are those where we've partnered with other agencies to rebuild coastal bird islands (rookeries), such as Queen Bess Island near Grand Isle. There are several of these bird islands which have helped to bring back the migratory water birds including brown pelicans, royal terns, black skimmers, laughing gulls who once frequented the islands. We've got to be mindful on all of our projects of not only the human benefits, but also the ecological benefits to the natural communities that coexist there.

What can fellow naturalists and citizens do to support the work of CPRA?

Quite literally, speak up, show up and be supportive. Your voice IS heard at public meetings. We do pay attention to what you say and that helps drive projects and design.



Jessica Diez, participating in night time banding of brown pelicans on Queen Bess Island

Nature Walks and Study Groups

What follows are a series of reflections written by members of our Greater New Orleans chapter with respect to their personal experiences and knowledge gained through participation in some recently held nature walks and study groups. We thank leaders, and participants alike for their passion and commitment to nature and community. Please feel free to submit a report about your own group activity for publication in future issues of "the Naturalist". -Bill V.

Mushroom Hunting at Northlake Nature Center

- by Tres Fisher

LMNGNO FUNGI STUDY GROUP NOTE: 4/27/2023 Northlake Nature Center (NNC) 23135 Hwy 190, Mandeville La. 70448; GPS Coordinates: 30°21'4.03"N 90° 2'10.66"W. Rain.

LMNGNO's Fungi Study Group met for our first independent foray at NNC and wandered the Eagle Trail Loop and parts of the South Loop. We started with rain showers and they never let up- but we were inspired with knowledge that the fruiting bodies we so desired likewise needed rain. The areas we traversed were mainly made up of conifers, beech and magnolia. And as is essential for the decomposing fungi, there was plenty of down wood from Hurricane Ida that always makes NNC a special place as the forest adapts to these historical forces.

Some highlights found by our members, Rosa Acheson, Eve Abrahms, Emma Dombkowski and Tres Fisher included *Tulasnella aurantiaca*, *Infundibulicybe gibba*, *Calocera cornea* and many other fungal friends. We're currently working on scheduling an online discussion on categorizing different genera of mushroom and hope to have another foray soon. Email tresfisher@gmail.com if you're interested.



Photo by Emma Dombkowski

Lentinus crinitus



Photo by Tres Fisher

Tulasnella aurantiaca

A Nature Walk at Abita Flatwoods - by Marc Withham

On a warm late Spring morning a group consisting of LMNGNO members and guests gathered at the Abita Creek Flatwoods Preserve. The preserve is an intact long leaf pine flatwood wetland with slash pine, pond cypress woodlands, and bayhead swamps. It's located on LA-435 roughly 5 miles northeast of the Abita Brew works in St Tammany Parish. Coordinated by Jana Wisniewski, the preserve was chosen because of the convergence of three types of ecosystems including wetland bogs, dry woodland and savanna.

Led by Dr. Janelle Simpson and Dr. Donata Henry, we split up into two groups and headed out along a roughly one mile dirt and wood plank trail. In addition to the unique woodlands we were able to observe a wetland bog containing numerous carnivorous pitcher plants and crayfish chimneys. A small stream courses through the property.

Participants observed Blue Gray Gnatcatchers (*Polioptila caerulea*) who build nests of lichen and spider webs that stretch as the hatchlings grow. Some folks were fortunate enough to identify a swallow-tailed kite (*Elanoides forficatus*) circling overhead. Known to nest in the area, swallow-tailed kites are commonly seen plucking insects in flight but have also been observed perched on branches feeding on hornet larvae.



Most impressively, we saw the famous Long-Leaf Pine (*Pinus palustris*). Known for their unique adaptation of releasing the seeds from their cones during naturally occurring fires, only 3% of



Dr. Donata Henry explains strategies used to attract red cockaded woodpeckers to the pines.



All photos by Dr. Janna Wisniewski

Dr. Donata Henry displays leaf structure on a long-leaf pine sapling.

original North American long-leaf pine ecosystems still exist. Long-Leaf Pine played an important role in greater South Louisiana's ecosystems. We were shown how the shape of the needles are designed to retard fast, high-intensity fires. The outer part of the needles may burn somewhat but leave mature trees and saplings to survive and grow.

In addition to its role in the release of seeds, fire plays the role of snuffing out competing plants with minimal scarring to the species itself. These frequent but low intensity fires are critical to the Long-Leaf Pine ecosystem, which harbors one of the richest and most diverse ecosystems in the world.

Seashells and Beachcombing by Nicole Green

The Seashell and Beachcombing Study Group is a small but enthusiastic collection of Naturalists meeting monthly since the start of this LMNGNO initiative. We are led by Dr. Bob Rogers, and Anne Rogers is our group "secretary" who coordinates our meetings and keeps us on track. Sometimes, we are joined by Dr. Bob Thomas, so this is quite a family affair. Most of the group—not all—have little or no knowledge of conchology other than a life-long delight in beachcombing, so Bob is patiently introducing us to this new study beginning with its taxonomy.

Bob Rogers has a large collection of shells which are already organized according to classes and to the beach on which they were found—not the organisms' actual place of origin which might be many hundreds of miles away. We have begun studying and identifying the bi-valves, differentiating one from another. One month, Bob and Ann hosted us at their house and we viewed his personal shell collection found on Sanibel Island beach over fifty years ago. Next month, we will be challenged to identify a random collection of bivalves. Our goal is to organize and catalog the LMNGNO seashell collection and produce a pamphlet for future Master Naturalist classes. Of course, we are all looking forward to a beach-combing field trip in the fall.

In class, this week Bob noted that shell identification is as much an art as a science, so I am learning that the pleasure of "reading" a small seashell to identify its species is very much like the pleasure of reading a complex poem.



Photos by Dr. Mary Gubala

Dr. Bob Rogers (on left) leads the Seashell study group at STEM's LMNGNO Library



A plethora of Gastropods collected by Dr. Rogers on Sanibel Island, FL

Coastal Issues Study Group Field Trip - A Three Hour Tour!

by: **Bill Van der Meer**

On the morning of June 24th, a group of sixteen master naturalists arrived at the UNO Coastal Education and Research Facility (CERF) for a guided tour of the eastern portion of the New Orleans East Land Bridge. Separating the waters of lakes Borgne and Pontchartrain, this isthmus is so called because it serves as a nearly thirty-mile long natural barrier against storm surges from the Gulf.

Organized and conducted by Dinah Maygarden, the goal of this first live event of the newly formed Coastal Issues Study Group was to provide participants with an introduction to the geomorphology of the land bridge through the lens of geology and historical insight. Our tour began with an instructional slide presentation and concluded with a debriefing and Q&A session.

The vantage point of CERF's second story balcony enabled us to trace the eastward trending outline of Bayou Sauvage, which was once a major distributary of the Mississippi River known as the St. Bernard Delta Complex (active between 4,500 - 1,000 yrs. BP). Our eastbound convoy then made a stop at Island Marina, which revealed several ongoing



Photo by Bill Van der Meer

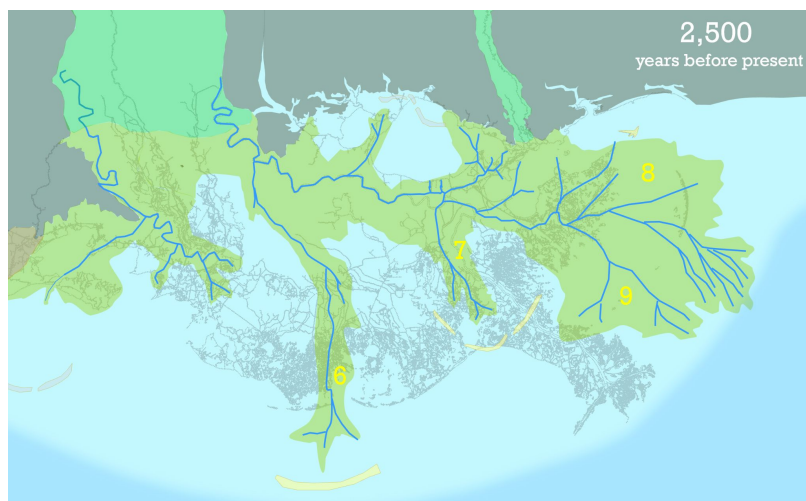
Coastal Issues Study Group pauses at Island Marina on the NO East Land bridge to observe several marsh creation projects in progress.

marsh creation projects on either side of Highway 90. Fortified with concrete matting along their edges, these newly constructed barriers or “speed bumps”, as they are often called, are designed to offer an additional degree of protection from storm surge along this especially narrow segment. It was here in 2005 where all but a few structures were swept away by hurricane Katrina's twenty-foot high storm surge.

A dock at the public boat launch near Fort Pike provided an ideal platform for our group to peer out over Lake St. Catherine as Dinah pointed out a distant pine topped sandy exposure adjacent to Lake Borgne. This landform is part of a massive east to west trending ancient set of barrier islands, formed during the mid to late Holocene and geologically identified as the “Pine Island Trend”. Subsequent burial by river sediments deposited during the St. Bernard Delta Complex make up the present day land bridge.

There were several more points of interest visited, which when taken all together will serve as a backdrop for investigating other sites and mitigation efforts with respect to their impacts on Louisiana's coastline.

For more information see the article on current marsh creation projects in the [May-August 2021 Issue of the Naturalist newsletter](#).



Graphic courtesy of Chris McLindon

** The Bayou Sauvage river channels that underlie New Orleans are part of the St Bernard Delta Complex that once supported cypress swamps and extended eastward beyond the Chandeleur Islands. Numbers denote historical river lobes. Yellow commas represent barrier island remnants left behind upon the river's abandonment of previous deltas.*

** (source papers by Kulp and Frazier available upon request)*

Sankofa, Right Down the Way!

Bug Walk at an Urban Wetland Park and Nature Trail

by: Maureen Missavage

Photo by Bill Van der Meer

On the steamy Saturday morning of June 10th, 2023, visitors to the Sankofa Wetland Park and Nature Trail in the Lower Ninth Ward were encouraged by Tricia LeBlanc of Sankofa Community Development Corporation, and Rachel Denny of the Mosquito, Termite and Rodent Control Board to identify the pollinators and macroinvertebrates of Sankofa's ecosystem.

Lately, we have been witnessing the restoration of wetlands at Sankofa. Set your driving app for 6407 Florida Avenue where street parking is plentiful. A collaborative effort between the Sewerage and Water Board and the Sankofa Community Development Corporation has resulted in the creation of a unique habitat.

The preserve includes an eight million gallon stormwater retention pond where local elders and young ones have returned to fishing in a neighborhood where hundreds of recently planted bald cypress trees thrive on the pond's shoreline. Should you expect to find wildlife? Yes. And while the reptiles along with indigenous and migratory birds might not be as evident in the heat of the day, it's without much effort that the insects are revealed.

Pick up a log and count the millipedes sharing a damp spot with aphids scurrying away from the midges. The dragonflies with blue, green and red costumes patrol the surface of the pond, distracting your eyes away from the stickbugs. And when volunteers were set up with their dip nets, they were keen to borrow an identification key to uncover what aquatic insects the season supports. Young people are encouraged to replace any unfounded fears about living with nature with observation and curiosity. Neighborhood children and environmental groups wandered around, wondering what it was they discovered with every moved sedge or decomposing

log. Their questions were as valued as those posed by adults. Enthusiasm was evident despite the heat and threat of storms.

To feature the possibilities of this urban wetland, Master Naturalists may be called upon to help advertise its potential and expand its footprint. In addition to the cypress more native plants will find their home there. Using Sankofa's Nature Trail even in its early phase for informal education is how we demonstrate the value of wetlands and stormwater retention. Sankofa is encouraging camp leaders and teachers to choose their space for active science learning. To consider how you might benefit from the value of this urban wetland, visit <https://sankofanola.org>.

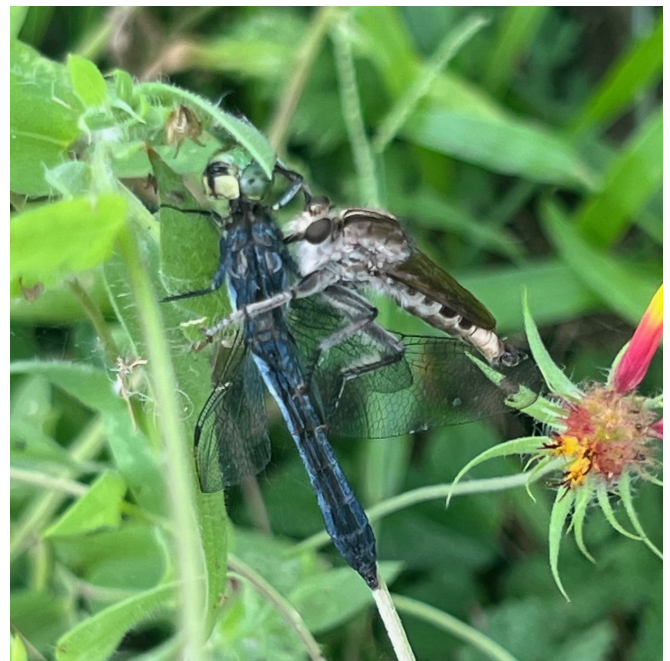


Photo and caption by Dr. Janna Wisniewski

The grey insect on the right is a Triorla interrupta, a type of robber fly, predating on what may be a blue-eyed darter dragonfly