

# Louisiana Natural Resources News

Newsletter of the Louisiana Association of Professional Biologists  
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## Fall Symposium and Business Meeting 2006. Larry Reynolds, LDWF

About 80 professional biologists and students gathered at the Estuarine Habitats and Coastal Fisheries Center in Lafayette for our annual Fall Symposium. Along with the opportunity to renew professional and personal acquaintances, results of 12 graduate studies were presented showcasing recent research on Louisiana's flora and faunal communities. In addition, the impacts of last summer's hurricanes on fish, wildlife, and their associated habitats were detailed by practicing professionals and researchers including current activities to address those impacts. Discussion both during and outside the presentation sessions was lively, especially after a FEMA truck driver crashed his rig into a couple of our vehicles in the parking lot. (I thought those guys were here to HELP us!?) Luckily, Roy Walter of the USFWS was speaking at the time about the hurricane debris and cleanup on Sabine NWR, and Jimmy Ernst of LDWF was listening to him, so only their rides were damaged.

It was my pleasure to present Marie Perkins of the School of Renewable Natural Resources at Louisiana State University the Best Student Paper award. Her research, titled *The Use of Stable Isotopes to Determine the Ratio of Resident to*

*Migrant King Rails in Southwestern Louisiana*, will be valuable in determining the composition of the population in an area where numbers have been declining at a much lower rate than in other states. The quality of her research and symposium presentation narrowly outscored that of a number of other students in an outstanding student session. Kudos to all student participants and congratulations to Marie!

Official results of our election for LAPB officers were announced at the business meeting the first day. Mike Carloss was elected to the office of President-Elect, John Pitre to Treasurer, Mike Perot to Secretary, and Matt Pieron to Newsletter Editor. Along with Jimmy Anthony (President) and Larry Reynolds (Past-President), they will make up the Executive Committee of the LAPB for the next 2 years. We appreciate their willingness to serve. We would also like to express our thanks to Dr. Kim Marie Tolson and David Breithaupt for their willingness to run for office and serve the LAPB, and to Fred Kimmel (departing Past-President) and Dr. Frank Rohwer (departing long-time Newsletter Editor) for their years of service.



Larry presents Marie Perkins with the Best Student Paper award.

There were some notable items discussed at the business meeting including holding the symposium a week earlier to encourage added university participation and publicizing it earlier and more widely. LAPB members are involved in diverse research and management activities across the state, yet the response to this year's expanded poster session was almost non-existent. The late notice may have been the culprit, but know that short of extending the symposium from 2 to 3 days, the Executive committee is looking for ways to expand participation from professionals who work outside the selected focus-session topic.

Lastly, Tony Vidrine proposed that we use our existing surplus to fund a small undergraduate scholarship. Nearly all attendees agreed with that idea, and there was much discussion about the nature of the scholarship. A committee was appointed to generate a full proposal for the spring business meeting, so be looking for that in an upcoming Newsletter.

## A Message From Your New President Elect, Mike Carloss



It is with great pleasure and determination that I transition into the role of President Elect for LAPB. As a longtime member and past Secretary, I have been impressed with the more recent member resurgence in activities, especially in regard to the annual Fall Symposiums. Outgoing President Larry Reynolds and all the LAPB officers have done an excellent job in this area and although much of the attendance increase is due to the current LDWF administration, I believe the quality of the Symposiums has had a great deal to do with this success as well. During my term I will strive to do my best to continue the tradition and also do my best to work toward improving LAPD as needs arise.

The diversity of experiences in my career as well as my hobbies will hopefully help me with the duties of this position. My years of public service in dealing directly with public user groups and the resources they utilize, give me experienced insight into some of the potential issues LAPB may be involved in. I anticipate an increase in coastal restoration activities with the anticipated increases in funding mechanisms in the coming years. My past experience in this area with both a federal agency and in my current position as Program Manager of Coastal Operations with LDWF should assist me in serving LAPB more effectively in this regard.

I look forward to serving LAPB and as always am open to suggestions, especially from those of you who have been around longer than I have. I also encourage input and participation from the newcomers as well or those of you who may not have been very active in the past but have the knowledge and insight to contribute. We all have friends, acquaintances and coworkers we know that are not members for one reason or another. We can all help LAPB by encouraging others to join, thereby effectively strengthening the organization in the future.

## **Gobblers on Sherburne Wildlife Management Area. Blake Grisham, M.S. Candidate, LSU**

In an effort to gain an understanding of various ecological parameters of wild turkeys in Louisiana, the LDWF initiated a research program on Sherburne Wildlife Management Area in the late 1990s. This came after a joint restoration effort in 1991 between the LDWF and the National Wild Turkey Federation on Sherburne. Numerous studies have described ecology of turkeys in pine-dominated systems, yet there is little information on turkeys in bottomland hardwood forests, specifically in the Mississippi Alluvial Valley. Most of the bottomland-hardwood forests in the Mississippi Alluvial Valley were lost to agricultural expansion in the 1960s and 70s; however, current programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) are extending the amount of bottomland-hardwood forests in Louisiana. With the current increase in turkey populations and a growing popularity in turkey hunting throughout the Southeast, it is important to understand the ecology of turkeys in these forests. Since its first spring gobbler season in 1995, approximately 50 birds have been harvested annually on Sherburne, with additional birds being harvested on adjacent private land.

My project is a continuation of the long-term program at Sherburne, and aims to evaluate space use, movements, and survival of wild turkey gobblers. I have captured 33 gobblers since May 2005 using cannon nets on prepared bait sites. All turkeys were banded with a metal leg band and gobblers were fitted with a “backpack” style radio-transmitter. Gobblers were located using triangulation from 2-6 fixed telemetry locations three times weekly in the fall and once daily throughout the remainder of the year. In the spring harvest season, focal run telemetry was used to determine the location of gobblers at 3-6 hour intervals. If mortality was suspected, homing was then used to locate the bird and verify the cause of death (when possible).





Spring gobbler hunts are the primary cause of mortality for gobblers. Other mortality factors in this study have included three deaths due to capture myopathy, four due to mammalian predators (coyote and bobcat), and one illegal harvest. Of those birds harvested, one radio-tagged gobbler was killed by 13-year old Orrin Fontenot of Baton Rouge (Figure 2). No other radio-tagged birds were harvested during the spring 2006 season.

Another objective of my study is to determine the cause of the low band return rate for Sherburne. One possible explanation for low band return data is bird movement on and off the Sherburne complex. Factors such as age, sex, breeding opportunities, and availability of resources influence movement and home-range size. Research conducted at Mississippi State University showed that home-range size for adult males in bottomland-hardwood forest range from 1,250 acres in the winter to 2,005 acres in the spring. The larger home range sizes during the spring can be attributed to courtship and mating behaviors, and may serve to extend the range of the birds beyond management areas to private lands.

During the spring 2006 harvest season, 12 radio-tagged birds had at least one location on private land. The Sherburne complex has approximately 1,902 acres of private land. These inholdings located within the Sherburne complex may act as a refuge for birds during the harvest season; therefore, I hope to assess the impact of the availability of private land on gobbler movement at Sherburne.

This research, along with previous turkey studies on Sherburne, is critical in establishing harvest parameters and management strategies for wild turkeys on Sherburne. Further research is needed to establish overall turkey population dynamics in the Mississippi Alluvial Valley. The researchers would like to thank the Louisiana Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, the National Wild Turkey Federation and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. A special thank you goes to Wild Turkey hunters across the state for their cooperation and contribution to the reintroduction of the Eastern Wild Turkey in Louisiana. Cooperation and financial support are being provided by the Louisiana Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, the Louisiana State University Agricultural Center, and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.

## The LAPB – LOWA Connection. John Pitre, NRCS

In March 2006, the Louisiana Association of Professional Biologists (LAPB) became a supporting member of the Louisiana Outdoor Writer's Association (LOWA). In addition, LAPB also sponsored 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> place awards for the "Excellence in Craft" competition. This is the second year LAPB has contributed to this effort.

For those of us who work in the natural resources field, LAPB's function and the contribution of its members to our natural resources are well know, but much of its efforts are unknown to the majority of the citizens of Louisiana. Affiliation with LOWA will serve as a step in the right direction towards addressing this deficiency. LOWA is an active group that is virtually a 'Who's Who' of outdoor communicators in Louisiana. Over time, the relationship developed between LAPB and LOWA should pay tremendous dividends to the mission of both organizations. Hopefully, we'd all agree that the outdoor public should be better informed on pertinent natural resource issues and made aware of the associated technically sound, science-based solutions and alternatives. The conveyance of this accurate information can lead to positive changes in public knowledge, the casting of votes, filling of political appointments, and ultimately the future status of Louisiana's natural resources.



John Pitre presents "Excellence in Craft" awards.

Unfortunately the 2006 LOWA Annual Conference dates conflicted with the 2006 LAPB Fall Symposium dates so many LAPB members were unable to attend. The LOWA Conference was held August 17<sup>th</sup> through 19<sup>th</sup> in St. Francisville. John Pitre, Marty Floyd, Dave Moreland, and Jimmy Johnson were among the LAPB members who attended the Conference. Jimmy gave the keynote presentation on the impacts of Hurricanes Katrina

and Rita. John presented the "Excellence in Craft" awards on behalf of LAPB. First place went to John Simeone, second place to Todd Masson, and third place to Don Dubuc. All LAPB members are encouraged to become involved with the LOWA.

## Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries' Avian Flu Monitoring. Larry Reynolds, LDWF



In the last Newsletter, I detailed LDWF's plans to take cloacal swabs from long-billed dowitchers, dunlin, pintails, mallards, shovelers, and white-fronted geese as part of the *Surveillance for Early Detection of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza H5N1 in Wild Migratory Birds* program administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). LDWF and USDA are responsible for collecting 1,000 swabs each toward the effort to detect the possible spread of the HPAI H5N1 virus into North America via migratory birds most likely to have mixed on breeding or migration habitats with infected populations primarily from Asia. This virus is responsible for killing 156 people since 2003 in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.



With help from Clint Jeske and Wayne Norling of the U.S. Geological Survey's National Wetland Research Center, LDWF began collecting samples October 5<sup>th</sup> by shooting long-billed dowitchers and dunlin at Catahoula Lake. Over 200

dowitchers and 30 dunlin were collected and sampled during the first 2 weeks, and preparations were made to live-trap pintails on the lake. Jeske and David Hayden of LDWF prepared 4 bait stations and were scheduled to close the traps on October 16<sup>th</sup> when over 20 inches of rain fell in the Catahoula Lake watershed. Water levels rose over 10 feet, making pintail-trapping or any further shorebird collections impossible.

Sampling will continue when the waterfowl hunting season opens. Cloacal swabs will be collected from mallards, pintails, and white-fronted geese killed by

hunters on managed hunts at Sherburne Wildlife Management Area and the White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area. Additional samples will be solicited from birds taken to commercial waterfowl cleaning stations until a desired sample size of 200 swabs per species is obtained. Scouting continues for locations to collect enough dunlin to complete sampling on the shorebird species.



At this time, LDWF and USDA have submitted nearly 600 cloacal swabs to the lab at Louisiana State University School of Veterinary Medicine. Along with long-billed dowitchers and dunlin from LDWF, Wildlife Services of USDA has collected swabs from a number of wood ducks, blue-winged teal, least sandpipers, and Baird's sandpipers. All of the samples have been negative for the HPAI H5N1 virus. Indeed, the nationwide sampling effort is about 50% complete, and that strain of avian influenza virus is yet to be found.