LNHP

LOUISIANA NATURAL AREAS REGISTRY

Quarterly Newsletter

Vol. 2, No. 4 June 2005

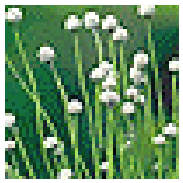
Working with landowners towards conservation of Louisiana's ecologically sensitive lands.

Natural Areas Registry Update

We are acknowledging 6 new Natural Areas Registries this quarter totaling approximately 1,382 acres. We have been working closely with the new staff of Kisatchie National Forest during the past year to assess the quality and management needs of their 10 registered Natural Areas and to register 3 new areas in Rapides Parish: Brushy Creek/Magnolia Ridge, Fleming Glade, and Palustris Prairie. We have registered 2 new areas in the Tunica Hills of West Feliciana Parish that consist of southern mesophytic hardwood forest. The first of these is McGaw's Axcuk Sa (Sun Dog) Nature Preserve. Harry McGaw contacted Patti Faulkner in March after reading the "Louisiana's Natural Areas Registry" article in the July/August 2004 issue of the "Louisiana Conservationist" magazine. The second is Dream Catcher Natural Areas owned by Allan and Judy Jones.

Brushy Creek / Magnolia Ridge Natural Area is a 432-acre small stream forest with a well-developed floodplain and an old-growth hardwood slope forest. It is located on Kisatchie National Forest in Rapides Parish and owned by USFWS. It is dominated by tree species such as American beech (FAGUS GRANDIFOLIA) and Southern magnolia (MAGNOLIA GRANDIFLORA), generally found in old-growth forests. This Natural Area also contains two rare plant occurrences: Southern lady's-slipper (CYPRIPEDIUM KENTUCKIENSE) shown at left, is critically imperiled in Louisiana; and Nodding pogonia (TRIPHORA TRIANTHOPHORA) shown at right is imperiled in Louisiana. Southern Lady's Slipper picture taken from www.rockbridgelaboratoryservices.com and Nodding pogonia by Royal Botanical Gardens, Dr. Donald Gunn Image Collection.

Fleming Glade Natural Area is a 129-acre, high quality Fleming glade that is unique for its unusual and diverse assemblage of wetland and xeric plants. Fleming Glade community in endemic to Louisiana and develops on outcropping sandstone in pine forests, chiefly in a belt running from northeast to southwest across central Louisiana. Fleming Glades are critically imperiled community type in Louisiana due to its extreme rarity. It is located in on Kisatchie National Forest in Rapides Parish and owned by USFWS. This glade is associated with the Fleming Formation (Tertiary-Miocene) in central-western Louisiana. The herbaceous flora is very diverse and is dominated by Hair awn muhly (MUHLENBERGIA CAPILARIS). Typical wetland species that occur are: Yellow-eyed Grasses (XYRIS spp.), Beak rushes (RYNCHOSPORA spp.), Bog Buttons (LACHNOCAULON spp.) shown above by University of Florida, Butterworts (PINGUICULA PUMILA), White-topped Sedges (DICHROMENA LATIFOLIA), and (PLATANTHERA DILATATA). Species typical of xeric conditions are: Rayless Goldenrod (BIGELOWIA NUTTALLII), Lichens (CLADONIA spp.), and Birds foot Violet (VIOLA PEDATA) shown right by Daniel Reed.



Palustris Prairie Natural Area is a 5.3-acre Fleming calcareous prairie within a longleaf (PINUS PALUSTRIS) forest. Fleming Calcareous Prairie community is typically a small, naturally treeless area occurring on calcareous substrata in the

uplands of central, western, and northwest Louisiana. They are critically imperiled communities in Louisiana due to its extreme rarity. It is located on Kisatchie National Forest in Rapides Parish and owned by USFWS. This prairie is associated with the Fleming Formation (Tertiary-Miocene) in central-western Louisiana. The soil is composed calcareous clay with calcareous concretions called limestone nodules. The herbaceous flora is very diverse and is dominated by Little Bluestem (SCHIZACHYRIUM SCOPARIUM), Compass Plant (SILPHIUM LACINIATUM) shown above left by Dan Musemeyer,

Rattlesnake Master (ERYNGIUM YUCCIFOLIUM), White Prairie Clover (DALEA CANDIDA) shown left by Dave's Garden, and Blazing Star (LIATRIS SP) shown right.

The following two new natural areas, **McGaw's Axcuk Sa (Sun Dog) Nature Preserve** and **Dream Catcher Natural Area**, are located in the Tunica Hills of West Feliciana Parish. The community type is a rare Louisiana habitat known as Southern Mesophytic Hardwood Forest that develops on deep, fertile, loessial deposits that have eroded over thousands of years to form a characteristic highly-dissected landscape of high, narrow ridges, steep slopes, and deep ravines that usually have intermittent to permanent streams. These dissected hills have sustained localized populations of some Appalachian species, primarily herbaceous, thought to have originally migrated south ahead of advancing glaciers in the past ice age.

McGaw's Axcuk Sa (Sun Dog) Nature Preserve is owned by Harry and Denise McGaw. Their 800-acre natural area includes a excellent example of an southern mesophytic hardwood forest, considered a rare habitat type in Louisiana, along with larger areas of regenerating forest that were select cut 4 years earlier. One of our rare tree species, Pyramid Magnolia (MAGNOLIA PYRAMIDATA), occurs on this Natural Area. Harry and Denise named their area after their yellow lab, Tick.

Dream Catcher Natural Area is a 3.87-acre southern mesophytic hardwood forest that is surrounded by contiguous forest. It is owned by Allan and Judy Jones. A long-tailed weasel (MUSTELA FRENATA) was seen chasing something under Judy's truck in the fall of 2003.

Secretary's Column

By Dwight Landreneau - LDWF Secretary; from May/June 2005 Conservationist

Wildlife and fisheries biologists in every state work daily to ensure the health and growth of a variety of species that inhabit the woodlands and waterways of this country. Game species garner most of the outdoor news coverage generated on a continuing basis to inform sportsmen and women on the status of their particular species of interest. Commercially harvested species, including alligators, crabs, shrimp and oysters, are tracked in business news reports that inform readers and viewers on the status of industries vital to our economy and way of life.

Non-game species monitoring and management also fall within the scope of responsibility of state fish and game agencies. And that responsibility has always been part of the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries' mission to manage, conserve and promote wise use of Louisiana's renewable resources.

This agency is in the midst of a planning process that will produce a **Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS)** for use by the department in the application for State Wildlife Grant (SWG) funding provided by the federal government. This strategy planning must be completed by Oct. 1, 2005, and – upon approval – it will allow Louisiana to continue to receive SWG funds for implementation of management plans developed for the CWCS. SWG funds are federal dollars derived from the Land and Water Conservation Fund and distributed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service/Dept. of Interior. These funds have been available and distributed proportionally, based on each state's geographic and population size, since 2002, but with the caveat that each state develop their plan for long-term use of continued funding.

State Wildlife Grant program funds provide for the research and program solutions for wildlife species that are not hunted, fished or trapped. The goal for state-level action developed by SWG fund use is to prevent more species from becoming listed on the threatened or endangered species list. That designation, as you may or may not know, brings strict federal land and water usage regulation that restricts private property use and development.

The success stories are already in place in this state -- from the brown pelican to the Louisiana black bear to the pallid sturgeon – it has been proven that wildlife species can be brought back from the brink of extinction with sound wildlife management practices. There is more work to be done, however, and the funding must be secured to continue that work.

In coming months you will be hearing more about the **Teaming With Wildlife** initiative (*www.teaming.com*). This effort is a coordinated public information campaign to raise awareness about the work being done to prevent non-game species' numbers from dwindling to the point where federal-level intervention is needed. This department, along with all other state fish and wildlife management agencies, wants you to be aware of what's being done to preserve species at risk, as well as those that are thriving and often publicized to a greater extent.

LDWF is seeking public input, as we finalize our strategy, to enlist a consensus of support/agreement for the plan. We need to hear from hunters, fishermen, anglers, environmentalists, farmers and ranchers, and those who own or manage land. To learn more, visit our website at www.wlf.louisiana.gov and click on **Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy** -- under ABOUT LDWF -- on the home page.

Cajun Prairie

By Larry Allain, USGS, National Wetlands Research Center

When Europeans arrived in southwest Louisiana, they discovered a vast expanse of tall grass prairie extending from the Atchafalaya River basin in the east to the Sabine River basin in the west. This seemingly endless grassland was bisected into smaller prairies, or coves, by gallery forests that formed along bayous and streams. Settled first by the Acadian's, expelled from Nova Scotia, this area is now referred to as the Cajun Prairie. In the late 1800's Midwestern immigrants arrived by railroad and quickly converted the nearly 2.5 million acres of Cajun prairie to rice, sugarcane, and forage.

Today less than 1,000 acres of Cajun prairie remain, mostly in narrow strips along railroad tracks and some marsh fringing sites. Picture at right of Eunice Prairie Natural Area.

Soil type, fire, rainfall, grazing, and other factors combine to create the conditions necessary for the establishment and maintenance of prairie. A

dense clay layer below the soil surface, regular fires, competition from aggressive perennials, and perhaps other factors exclude woody plants, preventing prairies from becoming forests. Cajun prairie is dominated by grasses with little bluestem (shown page 3 on left – fall color), slender bluestem, big bluestem (shown left – fall color), Indian grass, eastern gammagrass, and switchgrass being the more common species. All but slender bluestem are also the common grass species of the Midwestern United States Prairies. A profusion of over 350 species of wildflowers produce a bewildering display of colors from early spring to fall. The clear yellow flowers of partridge pea, false wild-indigos (shown right), coneflowers, and goldenrods buzz with bees on warm mornings. Butterflies flit between milkweeds, purple blazingstars (shown above), and several species of aster. Beetles, wasps and even flies visit the white flowers of button snakeroot and cluster bushmint, while dozens of species of grasshopper munch the numerous grass leaves. All the while dragonflies, preying mantis, and green tree frogs lay in wait. This plethora of small animals provides a food source to a great variety of other animals including grassland birds, considered to be in rapid decline.

Many plants and animals once common in southwest Louisiana are now gone from this critically imperiled ecosystem, including the Louisiana prairie vole, Attwater's prairie chicken, bison, antelope, elk, red wolf, Louisiana Indian paintbrush, etc. Before the few remaining remnants are gone, federal and state agencies as well as citizen groups and non-profit organizations are attempting to rescue the parts (species) and reassemble them in restorations. Scientists are working to gather ecological data and develop restoration methodology and infrastructure before this most endangered ecosystem is lost. Several restorations are now underway in Louisiana and many important and rare species (such as wand blackroot – shown at left and prairie parsley – shown at right) have been successfully established. In the few short years since the establishment of these plantings numerous grassland birds, reptiles, and insects have appeared. To find out more about Louisiana's vanishing prairies and the efforts to save it, visit the Cajun Prairie Habitat Preservation Society's website at www.cajunprairie.org, and U.S. Geological Survey, National Wetlands Research Center's website at http://www.nwrc.usgs.gov/prairie/index.htm

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher

(***Tyrannus forficatus***) Length 13" Photo by Larry Ditto
www/birdbuzz.com/site/backyard_birds by Deborah Griffith
http://www.photomigrations.com/articles/0406600.htm by Bill Horn

There is almost no mistaking the scissor-tailed flycatcher. The male's nine-inch-long tail and the female's slightly shorter one proclaims their identity whether seen in good light or in silhouette, flying or perched. Except for the fork-tailed flycatcher of the American tropics (an extremely rare vagrant north of the Mexican border), no other North American bird has such a long, narrow tail compared with its body size. The scissor-tail's predominant is pale gray approaching white on the face and breast. The wings are blackish, the tail black and white. Scarlet "armpits" are mostly concealed while the bird is perched, and a scarlet crown patch is almost always hidden. The flanks and belly are flushed salmon pink, which can vary in brightness from individual to individual.

The migratory scissor-tailed flycatcher breeds from extreme northeastern Mexico (generally within a short distance of the Texas border) north through southeastern New

Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, extreme southeastern Colorado, most of Kansas, western Missouri, Arkansas, and much of western and northern Louisiana. Their bulky, stick nest contains up to 5 creamy brown-spotted eggs and is lined with soft materials placed in a solitary, isolated tree. Over the past few decades the scissortail has expanded its range significantly. In Missouri the species has moved north to, and even beyond, the Missouri River. Its Arkansas range has moved northeastward across the state toward the Mississippi River. In Louisiana the scissortail has moved eastward from the Red River area across the northern part of the state nearly to the Mississippi. Scissortails have successfully nested in western Tennessee several times since 1983.

Look for scissortails in nearly any kind of open country with scattered trees, such as prairies, pastures, cropland, and even residential areas with large, open lots. Scissor-tailed flycatchers are often seen perched on utility wires or fences. They are quite approachable most of the time and especially when nesting. Photographing them from a vehicle provides the best opportunity for bird photographers. As with most birds, they are less intimidated by vehicles than by humans. They consume a great number of grasshoppers, crickets, spiders, and other ground-dwelling insects making them economically important and popular with farmers and ranchers. Their song is a low-pitched *pidik pek pik pik pidEEK*. Its common call is a low, flat *pik*, also *pik-prrr* or a higher, sharp *kid*.

No other North American Songbird is as long-tailed as these flycatchers. Males begin their famous "sky dance," during spring, a popular site along roadsides during spring and early summer. After climbing about 100 feet in the air, the male makes a series of V-shaped flights, then plunges down in an erratic zigzag course often somersaulting while uttering a rolling, cackling call. The performance has been described as "an aerial ballet of incomparable grace." The common name is derived from its former Latin name - Muscivoria forficata, meaning "flying"-"scissors" and "to devour." The principal threat to scissor-tails is poaching. A great number of birds have been killed by poachers who wanted only the bird's tail.

Ornate Box Turtle (*Terrapene ornata Agassiz)*

By LNHP and Judy Jones

The Ornate Box Turtle gets its name from its beautifully decorated domed carapace (top shell), dark brown or black and boldly patterned with wide, yellow stripes radiating outwards. Their domed carapace is flat on the top and smooth along the edges. Their plastron (bottom shell) has a divided gular scut, with a hinge between abdominal and pectoral scutes. This hinge forms two movable lobes (See picture below) capable of enclosing the entire body within the shell. The plastron is also dark brown and has a pattern of yellow lines. These small turtles will only grow to slightly more than 6” long and can live for 50 years; average life span is 30 years. Female and male Ornate Box Turtles can be identified by their irises; Male’s are red and Female’s are yellow or brown.

These box turtles are found throughout the midwestern states including Indiana, Iowa, and Wisconsin, southward through Texas and the eastern edge of Louisiana to the Gulf Coast. The subspecies *Terrapene ornata Agassiz* inhabits Louisiana. They prefer open areas dominated by grasses and brushy vegetation such as prairies, grasslands, and sandy plains. However, they are occasionally found in forests. Ornate Box Turtles forage through the herbaceous layer for arthropods such as beetles, caterpillars, and grasshoppers. They are adept at catching insects as they fly or walk by. They also like to eat berries if available, some vegetation, and carrion (dead animal matter).

Unfortunately, Ornate Box Turtles are greatly imperiled and declining in Louisiana (state rank – S1) for a number of reasons: collected for pet trade, habitat destruction, pesticides, and accidents with cars or lawn mowers.

Male Ornate Box Turtles mature at 7 years and females mature at 8 years of age. They typically mate in early spring and the females will dig their nests between May and July to burry 2 - 8 eggs at dusk in open, dry areas. Young Ornate Box Turtles start digging themselves out after hatching during October. Juveniles are rarely encountered in the wild because they spend most of their time in abandoned burrows. When above ground the juveniles are often covered with mud or cow dung, making them blend in with their environment. Please contact LNHP at 225-765-2820 if you encounter an Ornate Box Turtle in your area.

References:

Conant, R. and J. T. Collins. 1991. A Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians: Eastern and Central North America. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, Massachusetts.

Dundee, H. A., and D. A. Rossman. 1989. The Amphibians and Reptiles of Louisiana. Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Ernst, C.H., J.E. Lovich, and R.W. Barbour. 1994. Turtles of the United States. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington D.C.

Wilson, L. A. 1995. Land Manager's Guide to the Amphibians and Reptiles of the South. Nature Conservancy, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

www.angelfire.com/.../ Ornate_Box_Turtle.html Picture of Plastron

http://www.sfws.auburn.edu/samuelson/dendrology/magnoliaceae_pg/pyramid_magnolia___magnolia_pyra.htm Picture of Pyramid Magnolia

http://homestudy.ihea.com/wildlifeID/057longtailedweasel.htm Picture of Long-tailed Weasel

Louisiana Natural Heritage Program (LNHP) Staff

Program Coordinator
Gary Lester (225) 765-2823
glester@wlf.louisiana.gov

Administrative Assistant
Brandy Williams (225) 765-2821
bwilliams@wlf.louisiana.gov

Zoologist
Ines Maxit (225) 765-2820
imaxit@wlf.louisiana.gov

Plant Community Ecologist
Patti Faulkner (225) 765-2975
pfaulkner@wlf.louisiana.gov

Botanist
Chris Reid (225) 765-2828
creid@wlf.louisiana.gov

Data Manager
Jill Kelly (225) 765-2643
jkelly@wlf.louisiana.gov

Assistant Data Manager
Steve Carpenedo (225) 765-2357
scarpenedo@wlf.louisiana.gov

Natural Areas Registry Coordinator
Judy Jones (Contractor)(225) 765-2822
jjones@wlf.louisiana.gov

Judy Jones – Natural Areas Registry
Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
P.O. Box 98000
Baton Rouge, LA 70898-9000