JANUARY MEETING
When: Tuesday, January 8, 2013, 6:00 p.m.
Where: LSUS, Science Lecture Auditorium

Our speaker for the January 8, 2013, meeting of the BSG will be Richard Pruitt. His presentation will be “Bombs to Birds”, a documentary about the transition of an Army munitions plant into the Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge. Help spread the word and bring your friends. See the link http://photographyblog.dallasnews.com/2012/10/bombs-to-birds-caddo-lake-national-wildlife-refuge-documentary.html/ for more information.

The program is free and open to the public. For more information or directions to the party, call us at 318-797-5338.

LOS Winter meeting, Shreveport
January 25-27, 2013

Friday, January 25, 2013:
Meeting & Evening Program (Jacob Kraemer)

Saturday, January 26, 2013:
All-day or half-day field trips
Banquet & Evening Program (Dr. Mia Revels)

Sunday, January 27, 2013:
Morning Field trips

For details and registration info: http://losbird.org/2013_winter_meeting.pdf

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The young are fed a protein rich diet of insects, not available after the onset of cold winter conditions, so Red-breasted Nuthatches are totally reliant on the coniferous tree seeds.

Since the cone seed crop in Ontario province has failed this year it is likely we are truly in an irruptive year for this species, and likely other northern forest seed cone eating species such as crossbills.

The graph below was adapted from eBird and shows the frequency of sightings in the United States in 2012. **Red-breasted Nuthatches** are showing up on birders’ checklists up to ten percent of the time!

http://ebird.org/ebird/GuideMe?cmd=quickPick&speciesCode=&bMonth=01&bYear=1900&eMonth=12&eYear=2013&getLocations=northAmerica&reportType=species&speciesCode=rebnut&continue.x=43&continue.y=9
Their joyful actions cause me to want to leap for joy along with them.

Shown here feeding on northern forest cone-bearing tree seeds, which have totally failed in most of Ontario province.

Red-breasted Nuthatch Behavior

Red-breasted Nuthatches move quickly over trunks and branches probing for food in crevices and under flakes of bark. They creep up, down, and sideways without regard for which way is up, and they don’t lean against their tail the way woodpeckers do. The Red-breasted nuthatch seems to be saying, “You don’t have to turn my world upside down, it already is. Sometimes I wonder if I can fly upside down too.” Their flight is short and bouncy.

They nest in holes like all nuthatches, male and female and often a helper all attend the chicks in the nest.

Watch your feeders to observe the quick darting flight, the indecision about which direction in which to depart, the lack of cooperation with others, and the adaptation to our seed sources. My birds like black-oil sunflower, hard seeds, and peanut butter mix inserted in holes.

The following images/ information are from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, All About Birds website. [http://www.allaboutbirds.org/Page](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/Page).

Red-breasted Nuthatch, Adult
- Black and white striped head
- Bluish gray back and wings
- Reddish underparts (brighter in males, paler in females)
- Short, stubby tail

BSG Membership
Dues were due
January 1st
Red-breasted Nuthatch, Adult male
- Bright orange-red underparts
- Short black tail with white bars
- Often forages upside-down on trees

Red-breasted Nuthatch, Adult
- Dark grayish cap and eyestripe (black in males)
- Pale reddish underparts (darker in males)
- Bluish gray back and wings
- White face and throat

Red-breasted Nuthatch, Adult
- Bright orange-red underparts (paler in females)
- Black cap and eyestripe (grayer in females)
- Long, sharp, slightly upturned black bill

Red-breasted Nuthatch, Adult
- Small and stubby shape
- Black and white striped head
Red-breasted Nuthatch, Juvenile
- Like adult but with yellow on bill

Red-breasted Nuthatch, Adult
- Bluish gray back and wings
- Black and white striped head
- Reddish underparts (brighter in males, paler in females)

Red-breasted Nuthatch, Adult male
- Bright orange-red underparts
- Black cap and eyestripe
- Bluish gray back and wings
- Sharp, slightly upturned bill

Red-breasted Nuthatch, Adult
- Often seen on feeders and tree trunks; may feed upside-down or right-side up
The Debate on Playback - Part 2 of 2
By John Dillon

In last month’s newsletter, I took a favorable stand on the use of playback as it pertains to a birder’s skilled use of locating and/or identifying bird species. In summary, I said that a skilled use of playback involves a judicious approach so that the playback is similar to what the birds themselves are actually doing and that continuous, blaring playback is not only obnoxious but unnecessary in attracting birds. I also quoted Dr. Van Remsen as saying that any stress resulting from playback is unlikely to “make the top 1 million causes of death of birds,” and that, compared to other reasons for stress in birds, any stress from playback is “immeasurably minute.” This month, I want to extend the conversation to include other aspects of playback, good and bad, for birds and birders. And out of respect for the birds, I’ll start with them first.

Most of the year, I use a screech-owl call (myself, not a tape) to call in birds. And I believe birders use screech-owl calls for the same general reason they use birdsong playback: to find birds. But there are obviously 2 differences concerning birds’ responses. First, if I play an Eastern Towhee song, it’s reasonable to assume that any towhee that responds doesn’t do so because it considers the rival towhee (i.e., my iPod) a physical threat for the same reasons it may consider a screech-owl to be physical threat. I say this is reasonable to assume because, if you play an Eastern Towhee song, you’ll probably only get towhees to respond. Whereas if you whistle a screech-owl call, you may have 15 species or more respond. Obviously, birds see the latter as a potential threat of predation, and not as one involving mates or food sources or what have you; if birds generally considered a towhee song as a predatory threat, you’d get 15 species responding to your towhee song, too.

The second difference is that birds tend to respond more slowly to a screech-owl call than to their own songs, at least in my experience. Play Hooded Warbler once or twice, and you’ll likely get an almost instantaneous response. Whistle screech-owl once or twice, and you may get absolutely nothing. There are obviously exceptions to this, but I often have to whistle screech-owl and pish for 4 or 5 minutes before I start seeing and hearing several birds, sometimes longer.

Now, I suppose these 2 aspects of using a screech-owl call, that it may be seen by birds as a potential predatory threat and that it may take several minutes to get results, may be off-putting to some overly cautious birders. Some may say the call overly stresses the birds or that they’re not responding because they’re afraid. But referring to Dr. Remsen’s answer to my questions, he also states, “In my experience, once birds can’t find the source of the sound, they basically ignore it and go back to business . . . they don’t go belly up and die.” I think this statement is certainly worth considering. First, if you’ve ever used a screech-owl call or seen a birder use one, what Dr. Remsen describes is absolutely true. Once the call stops, and often while the call is being used, the birds disappear. Pete Dunne talks about this in his book The Art of Pishing, saying, “...birds soon realize that the loudly touted disruption to their peace and security boils down to you, and, frankly, you aren’t worth bothering further with.” At that point, Dunne talks of having to “reboot” the birds’ responses because they’ve all disappeared.

Fairly recently (August 25), I was giving a screech-owl call, and there were a few species buzzing around. Then, a screech-owl flushed from its roost and perched in front of me. The birds went crazy. I instantly found a few more species as they
came in closer to the owl. It flew to a more concealed spot, and the birds calmed a bit. Then, a second screech-owl flushed and perched, and literally only 1 bird bothered to mob it and gave up in about 2 minutes. It got so quiet, I got bored and walked away. Verdict? I have to go with the birds here: it just wasn’t worth dropping dead for. Using a screech-owl call isn’t the avian equivalent of seeing a terrorist outside your window armed with an RPG. Perhaps it more akin to a papercut - you yell, maybe curse, tell the nearest person, “Papercut!” as if to warn anyone else in the vicinity to be wary of rogue paper, and in 2 minutes, you’ve completely forgotten about it.

Now, don’t think that I’m saying every birder can use a screech-owl call carte blanche. Skilled use of the call is still required, just as with birdsong playback. First, just to get results, you need to know what you’re doing when you crank up an owl call. Personally, I like the method of mixing my owl call with my pishing and my iPod. Second, even though a screech-owl is something birds deal with naturally, and even though playback isn’t a contributor to bird deaths, most birders know there are times and places you shouldn’t use an owl call. For starters, I’d feel like a jerk doing that to birds close to nesting locations during nesting season. It’s not so much that it stresses the birds as much as it is that the birds are busy raising young. They’ve already got serious business to tend to. Why is my agenda more important than theirs? So, I say if you’re reliant on a screech-owl call during nesting, learn the birds’ songs and calls; that’s when they sing the most anyway, and you’re sure to have good results just listening.

Another birder faux pas is using screech-owl calls and playback around other birders. Whip out an iPod at Peveto Woods about mid-April and play Cape May Warbler and see what happens. It’s quite possible the only thing you’ll see is stars. I also spoke with Steve Cardiff at LSU for these articles. Cardiff doesn’t use playback himself, but he does pish, squeak, and whistle screech-owl. Concerning popular birding location, Cardiff says, “Certainly, if we are talking about a relatively small but heavily visited area, then playback should be banned. I believe that in such situations it must have a ‘numbing’ effect on the birds and could make certain birds less detectable for others.” Given Cardiff’s feelings, there are really two issues at stake concerning the use of playback in heavily birded areas. First, it’s misleading to other birders, and, second, it may be used so often that it could alter some birds’ natural behavior. The good news here, though, is that I rarely see anyone using playback at these types of places. And the reality is that the birders who are around to witness it will put a stop to it pretty quickly.

Another poor choice for playback is when birders use it for their own entertainment rather than to identify a species or for the purposes of a survey. Cardiff addressed this point, as well, expressing his irritation, “when an observer sees and identifies a bird and then uses playback on it anyway.” As I mentioned last month, once you’ve identified the bird, your job is done. In my opinion, the only instance this is advisable is when you have reason to believe that there are greater numbers of the identified species and that playback will give you a more accurate number to report. There have been plenty of times I’ve seen or heard 2 or 3 sparrows of a given species, then played the call and had 20 or 30 pop up, often more. But skilled use still applies here because simple pishing may get the same response. Furthermore, if you’re in a situation in which you expect 20 or 30 or more birds pop up, they’re likely species that respond quite readily, so there’s no need at all to play and play and play. Rule of thumb here? If you’re using playback just for your own entertainment, you’re probably doing something wrong. So, yeah, that 400mm lens is really nice and cost $3000, but do the birds a favor and set up a drip hose and a pop-up blind if you want to be that close for that long.

In the same vein, there are some species that respond so vehemently to playback that birders should take extra caution in overuse and against overstimulation. Louisiana Waterthrush and Painted Bunting are 2 good examples. Granted, I happen to live in an area where any idiot can find a Louisiana Waterthrush. But in the last few years, I’ve gotten to where I almost never play for them. This is a species that darts around like an angry, feathered bullet when it hears a rival bird, and I’ve seen them continue to “chase away” their rival for several minutes after I’ve stopped the playback. A few years ago, I irresponsibly put the Painted Bunting song on repeat, reached through the sunroof, and set the iPod on the roof of my vehicle. I got distracted by something and forgot about the
iPod for about a minute. Next thing I knew, a male Painted Bunting had become so responsive to the iPod that it was sitting on the edge of my open sunroof and almost flew into the vehicle with me. I felt terrible, and that’s when I started realizing that, for some species, playback may not be the best option. About the only time I use playback for either species anymore is when I’m startled that I haven’t heard one singing in a place where I almost constantly hear them or if I’m doing a survey in an unfamiliar area. But as soon as I get a response, I shut it off immediately.

All the issues discussed here still favor a skilled use of playback as opposed to no playback. But it is important to remember that no playback should be preferred to irresponsible use of playback. I hope the articles sufficiently addressed the topic, and I would like to thank both Dr. Remsen and Steve Cardiff for their input. More than anything else, I hope any readers who are strongly opposed to playback or who constantly rely on non-stop playback can reflect on their views and realize that an individual’s skills involved in responsible birding is often only as good as his willingness to learn the difference between fact and fiction.

2013 Laredo Birding Festival

2013 Laredo Birding Festival, scheduled for February 6-9. We have a terrific line-up of events and trips that feature the best of our birding hotspots and scenic South Texas ranches. Don’t miss the opportunity to spot our prized bird, the White-Collared Seedeater, and hundreds of other avian beauties that nest throughout our unique river ecosystem.


Should you have any questions, please call us at (956) 718-1063 or email us at laredobirdingfestival@rgisc.org.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

NOTICE Regarding BSG Membership Dues

All memberships are for a calendar year beginning January 1. Memberships for 2013 are due now.

Benefits of Membership in the Bird Study Group

1. You are a part of one of the most active birding groups in Louisiana.
2. Memberships support conservation efforts that affect birds in Louisiana.
3. Memberships support student research and study of bird biology.
4. Memberships provide for a small honorarium for out-of-town speakers.
5. Memberships support the widely acclaimed web site of the BSG (www.birdstudygroup.org).
6. Memberships support the refreshments for the BSG meetings.
7. Members participate in the Christmas Bird Counts, the North American Migration Count, the North American Hawk Watch, the Backyard Bird Count, and the Big Sit.
8. Memberships support the bird library at the Museum of Life Sciences.
9. Members can easily participate in the online Bird Alert email List Server (to sign up email: birdalert@birdstudygroup.org).
10. The BSG Newsletters are online and access is not restricted.

You get all of the above benefits for the modest annual membership cost of: $15 for one membership, $20 for a family membership, and $35 for a sustaining membership.

Any Suggestions for the BSG?

Your Board of Directors is trying very hard to improve the Bird Study Group and make it more attractive to new birders. Give us your suggestions about how to grow the BSG.
## BSG Board of Directors & Committee Chairpersons

### BSG BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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- **President** – Larry Raymond (3) 929-3117 (H), 929-2806 (W)
- **Vice-president** – Mac Hardy (2) 687-6738 (H), 797-5338 (W)
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*Numbers in parentheses are years remaining of a 3-year term.*

### COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS

- **Beginning Birders** – Dennis Forshee 797-2473 (W)
- **Bird Alert Service** – Rosemary Seidler 424-2972 (H)
- **Bird Hot Spot** – Larry Raymond 929-3117 (H), 929-2806 (W)
- **Bird Records** – Mac Hardy 687-6738 (H), 797-5338 (W)
- **Field Trip Coordinator** – open
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Direct inquiries to the Editor, Amanda Lewis, at (318) 797-5215.
Join/Renew the BSG!

The Bird Study Group of Shreveport invites you to become a member. Renewals, please update information below.

Name(s)__________________________________ Address _____________________________________

City _____________________________ State ______ Zip __________________________

Email ___________________________ Phone (Home) _______________ Work ____________

☐ Yes, please add me to the email Bird Alert ☐ Leave me out of the BSG member directory

Membership Levels: ☐ Regular ($15.00) ☐ Sustaining ($35.00) ☐ Family, One Newsletter/One Address ($20.00)

Names of Family Members:

Donations: Library ☐ Refuges ☐ Refreshments ☐ General ☐

Make check payable & mail to: SSNS- Bird Study Group
Museum of Life Sciences, One University Place,
Shreveport, LA 71115-2399

BIRD STUDY GROUP PHONE NUMBERS AND MORE

Bird Study Group meets the second Tuesday of each month, September through June, 6:00 p.m. To be placed on the list to send & receive emails, email birdalert@birdstudygroup.org.

Contact the BSG by email: lhardy@lsus.edu or phone (318) 797-5338.

Visit us on the web at http://www.birdstudygroup.org