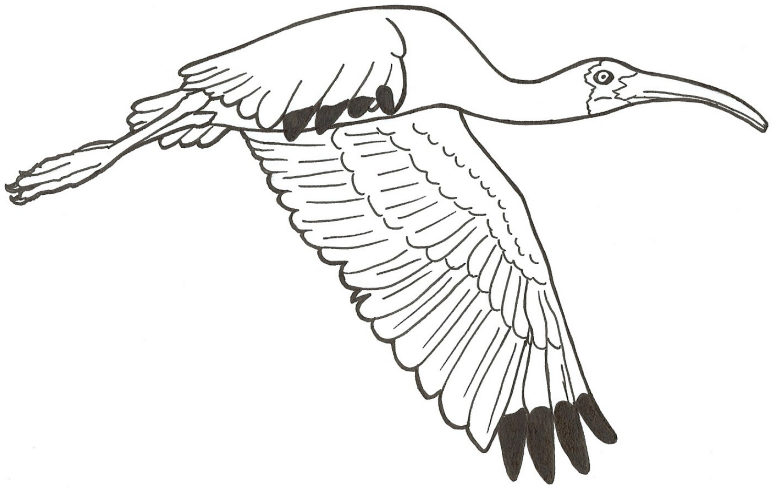


Newsletter of the Orleans Audubon Society. **A Chapter of the National Audubon Society.**

Volume: XXXVIII Issue: 5 **June/July/August 2021**

OAS ZOOM Programs

Common Mosquitoes of Southeast Louisiana

Presenter: James Beck

Monday, June 14, 6:30 P.M. Note that this talk is on a Monday and starts 30 minutes earlier than our other Zoom programs.

James has 35 years of birding experience and has been a member of the Louisiana Ornithological Society since 1993. He has been interested in herps for almost as long. He began volunteering at Audubon Zoo at age 13, thanks to his mom, who encouraged him to pursue it. James spent 10 years there, accumulating experience with working with birds of prey, various reptiles, amphibians, spiders, insects and mammals. He surveyed birds and vegetation for the University of New Orleans in the Summer of 1995. In 2002, he became the General Curator at the Zoo of Acadiana in Broussard, in Lafayette Parish. There he worked with large and small cats, Black Bears, primates, hoofstock and more. In 2006 James left the zoo to work on amphibian ecology and monitoring at the USGS National Wetlands Research Center in Lafayette. Frog monitoring was the main priority, but he also surveyed reptiles within the study sites. He moved from project to project, working on bird foraging behavior, vegetation sampling and Ivory-billed Woodpecker research. He created and served as compiler for the New Iberia Christmas Bird Count from 2002-2014. Currently James is employed with the City of New Orleans Mosquito, Termite and Rodent Control Board and his main responsibilities focus on mosquito population surveillance and monitoring, field collection, species identification and data entry. James resides in Marrero, just outside of New Orleans, with his girlfriend Linda Kingsland.

Registration: To register for this Zoom program, send an email message with "**Mosquitoes**" as the subject line to: OrleansAudubon@aol.com and include your full name in the body of the email. You will then receive email instructions. If participating by phone, also include your phone number. Please register as soon as possible and at least two hours prior to the start of the meeting.

OAS hopes to resume in-person programs and field trips this fall.

Apple Snails Invade Louisiana

Presenter: Casey Greufe

Tuesday, July 20, 7:00 PM

Apple snails are invading aquatic environments in Louisiana and spreading rapidly from New Orleans as far west as Calcasieu, but scientists aren't really sure yet about their effects on the ecosystem. Casey Greufe is a Master's student in the Biology Department at Nicholls State University, studying apple snail population genetics under Drs. Justine Whitaker and Allyse Ferrara. Casey will talk about her research at Nicholls State and how apple snail genetics might contain important information on how to slow (and potentially even reverse) their spread. See Casey's article in this issue for more information.

Registration: To register for this Zoom program, send an email message with "**Apple Snails**" as the subject line to: OrleansAudubon@aol.com and include your full name in the body of the email. You will then receive email instructions. If participating by phone, also include your phone number. Please register as soon as possible and at least two hours prior to the start of the meeting.

An Unexpected Passion for Birds

Presenter: **John Snell**, Anchor, Fox 8 News

Tuesday, August 17, 7:00 PM

FOX 8 Anchor John Snell will share how photography inspired an unexpected passion for birding in South Louisiana. He also details the state's efforts to restore its rapidly eroding wetlands.

Registration: To register for this Zoom program, send an email message with "**Passion for Birds**" as the subject line to: OrleansAudubon@aol.com and include your full name in the body of the email. You will then receive email instructions. If participating by phone, also include your phone number. Please register as soon as possible and at least two hours prior to the start of the meeting.

Apple Snail Invasion

By Casey Greufe

Until I started studying apple snails, I didn't spend much time thinking about biodiversity loss. Even if I had, snails might not have made the list of what I considered significant threats to biodiversity. This much, anyway, has changed. Apple snails are a charismatic and versatile species, native to warm, wet habitats in South and Central America and Florida, but they present a big problem here in Louisiana. Thanks to a rogue aquarist somewhere in New Orleans, the pelican state now has its own burgeoning population of apple snails. Perhaps you have noticed their not-so-subtle existence during the summer, when they begin to paint bright pink egg clutches on canal culverts and cypress knees from Calcasieu to Plaquemines.

You might be asking yourself, what's the big deal? How much harm could a snail really cause? For this respect, it's important to conceptualize these critters not just as individual snails, but rather collectively, and as an invasive species. Invasive species are non-native species likely to cause damage to the environment, agriculture, and public health. Freed from the checks and balances of their native habitats, average creatures can become ecological menaces. Just like the Burmese python, the Asian carp, and nutria, Apple snails check all of these boxes. In south east Asia, South America, Europe, Africa, and Australia, apple snails have eaten billions of dollars' worth of crops (rice in particular), stripped wetlands of crucial plants, brought disease to humans and wildlife, and put pressure on native animals. They're so bad in so many places they've been listed in the IUCNs *Top 100 of the World's Worst Invasive Species.*

The traits that make apple snails so successful (in other words, detrimental) in this, and many other, environments are hard not to appreciate from an evolutionary perspective. Their adaptive behaviors allow them to reproduce and thrive in alien environments. Some of these behaviors and traits include:

In the summer, females can lay 2000 eggs *per week*. Those eggs, bright pink and deposited above the water, are also toxic, which means predation is minimal, if at all. Despite high juvenile mortality rates post hatching, one snail can give rise to 100s of reproducing offspring per year.

When the weather turns from summer to winter, apple snails can aestivate—a fancy term for what is essentially hibernation. This allows them to survive in unforgiving seasonal conditions.

Apple snails have a gill *and* a lung, which is a large part of the reason why they are so successful in aquatic environments. If oxygen levels underwater get too low, apple snails extend their siphon, a built-in biological snorkel, to slurp down air from above. Pretty cool stuff (if you ask me), but it makes them dangerous to wetlands and rice farms.

So far, we've seen apple snails explode on the aquatic scene here in Louisiana, spreading from New Orleans as far west as Calcasieu, but scientists aren't really sure yet about their effects on the ecosystem. There's only been one report of a rice field decimated by snails in all of North America, though quite a few crawfishers have been upset by clogged traps. There have been reports about small ponds and wetlands losing their vegetation, too, though large scale reductions in wetland plants haven't yet been recorded.

Beyond their effects on aquatic plants, apple snails might be eating other snails, small invertebrate critters, and even frog eggs too, though that has not yet been recorded here in Louisiana. We also know they are hosting a dangerous parasite, rat lungworm, that can make people and animals sick. Though we don't yet know the extent of their impact on local biodiversity, what we've seen so far, both here and elsewhere, is enough to warrant some serious concern.

Like most things, there is a not a clean-cut resolution to the problems apple snails present. Various pesticides are effective against the snails, but many of them also damage native plants and animals. The United States Geological Survey and other local agencies are working on some physical removal technologies, including a water cannon to blast eggs into the water, but the extent and density of the snail population makes that kind of removal very time consuming and expensive. Natural control, like predation, isn't occurring at a high enough rate to control snail population growth either (researchers have, however, observed racoons feasting on snails, leaving piles of cleaned out shells behind).

One bright spot in all of this is the emergence of the limpkin as a predator in Louisiana. Historically and geographically, limpkin distributions are tightly linked to natural apple snail populations in South America and Florida, due to their reliance on apple snails for food. With the introduction and expansion of snails in LA, wandering limpkins are finding new habitats and settling down to nest for what might be the first time in Louisiana history. While the new population is small and unlikely to represent a significant control on apple snails, the news is a silver lining to an otherwise bleak story. It also represents an instance of natural resistance to new problems. There is a lot we don't know about how apple snails will affect Louisiana in the long term, but maybe limpkins are a sign that things might not get as bad as we think.

If you're interested in learning more about apple snails and ongoing local research, tune into my Zoom presentation hosted by the Orleans Audubon Society on July 20.

Joelle Finley Receives

Prestigious Swallow-tailed Kite Conservation Award

By Jennifer Coulson, OAS President

The Orleans Audubon Society created the Swallow-tailed Kite Conservation Award in 2013 to honor individuals who have made an outstanding contribution to the conservation of Louisiana's wildlife and wild places.

On Tuesday, May 18th, on the night that would have been the OAS 2021 Spring Banquet, we took a few minutes before the Zoom program to thank and honor one of our own. It is my great pleasure to announce that the 2021 recipient of the Orleans Audubon Society's Swallow-tailed Kite Conservation Award is OAS Vice-President, Joelle Finley!

Joelle's leadership in local environmental organizations is exemplary and selfless. She has served on Orleans Audubon's Board for 15 years, and she has been the Vice-President for thirteen years. She is vital to Orleans Audubon, coordinating our programs and birding field trips, and serving on the City Park and Sanctuary committees. Joelle also serves as an advisor for the New Orleans City Park Birding Corridor and was instrumental in its planning and development. She has also conducted bird monitoring surveys there and elsewhere. Joelle also teaches beginning birding classes for OAS.

Joelle was a longtime leader of the Crescent Bird Club, running field trips and handling membership. The CBC has now merged with OAS. She is Secretary of the Greater New Orleans Chapter of the Louisiana Master Naturalists. She has also served as Secretary for the Louisiana Ornithological Society and coordinated many of the LOS quarterly meetings.

Joelle is also a wildlife photographer and dynamic speaker, and she shares her knowledge and talents by presenting lectures for OAS, LOS, CBC, Northshore Bird Club, Sierra Club and the like. Her talks have taken us to wonderfully exotic birding destinations such as Vietnam, Cuba and Madagascar. She has also helped organize local birding festivals.

Joelle has also been featured and quoted in numerous articles about birds and birding, articles which have appeared in birding magazines, local newspapers, television spots and online blogs.

Perhaps her most important contribution of all is her being an inspiration to countless people in the Greater New Orleans Area who are getting started as birders. For many of us, myself included, Joelle is also a lifelong friend and cherished birding companion.

During the OAS Zoom meeting, Joan Garvey presented the 2021 Swallow-tailed Kite Conservation Award to Joelle in the form of an exquisite original painting of a Green Jay by Joan. Joan had a plaque engraved that was inset on the mat. Congratulations, Joelle, on this well-deserved award, and thank you for all that you do for birds, birding, and the environment!

Photo: Joelle Finley (left) receives original painting of a Green Jay from artist, Joan Garvey (right). Photo by Ken Harris.

OAS News

Election of Officers – Glenn Ousset, Nominating Committee Chair, reports that the membership has re-elected the following slate of officers for the 2021-2023 term:

Jennifer Coulson, President

Joelle Finley, Vice-President

Mary Joe Krieger, Treasurer

Sherry DeFrancesch, Secretary

Glenn wishes to thank these dedicated individuals for agreeing to run for office and serve another two-year term. The next election of officers will occur in the spring of 2023. Glenn would also like to thank Michael Tifft and Dan Purrington for their service on the OAS Nominating Committee.

John Nelson assisting with kestrel banding.

OAS Welcomes New Board Member

– John Nelson joined the OAS Board of Directors on April 6. John volunteers for a number of OAS projects and functions, including Swallow-tailed Kite, American Kestrel and Bald Eagle nest monitoring, wild bird rescue, the beginner birding zine project, and assisting with OAS program meetings. He is a can-do guy who sees a problem and finds a solution.

Born in Batesville, Mississippi, John grew up on his family's farm. His first birding experience was in October of 2018 in New York's Central Park. His second birding trip was in Couturie Forest, with Wendy Rihner as the OAS trip leader. John also met and became friends with Ken Harris and Joelle Finley on that trip, and birding became an obsession. Although relatively new to birding, John is a quick study, and has already mastered the art of birding by ear. John and his wife Madilynn own New Orleans Decorative Finishes, a decorative arts company specializing in custom surface finishes, gilding and restoration. They reside in New Orleans.

OAS leadership thanks Joelle Finley for nominating John, and John for agreeing to serve on the board.

Give NOLA Day THANK YOU – OAS sends out a great big THANK YOU to all who made donations through GiveNOLA day! This year OAS received an additional $500.00 by winning one of the Rock-Around-the-Clock prizes, making the 2021 fundraiser particularly successful.

Bruce Lacoste secures the artificial nest to a shady tree limb while B.J. Patterson holds steady the ladder.

Nestling Hawk Rescue: Keeping the Family Together

By Jennifer Coulson

It had been raining buckets for days when Bruce Lacoste and Lacey Muller of Pearl River, Louisiana, posted on Facebook that they needed advice about a baby hawk that had fallen from its nest. They posted a photo of a water-logged Red-shouldered Hawk that was almost ready to fledge. Well-meaning folks advised them to bring the baby hawk to the nearest wildlife rehabilitation center. If the nestling had been ill or injured, this would have been the right course of action. OAS volunteer Kevin Prince saw the post and put them in touch with me.

I received a call from Lacey and drove over to assess the situation. I met Lacey and Bruce and family members, B.J. Patterson and his sons Braxton and Jonah, who were there to help. Lacey said that both parent hawks had been perched in a tree above the baby all day and had just flown away. The nestling looked rather miniscule and helpless in the middle of the driveway, but its feathers had dried, and its eyes sparkled. I examined it and found no fractures, sprains, or signs of illness. The hawk, which Braxton and Jonah had named Francis, was obviously a male, judging from its smallness. He was a bit on the thin side, and his crop was empty, but he was otherwise healthy. I surmised that the parents had probably had a difficult time finding enough food during the last few days of almost constant rain. I force-fed the nestling a good meal, filling his crop.

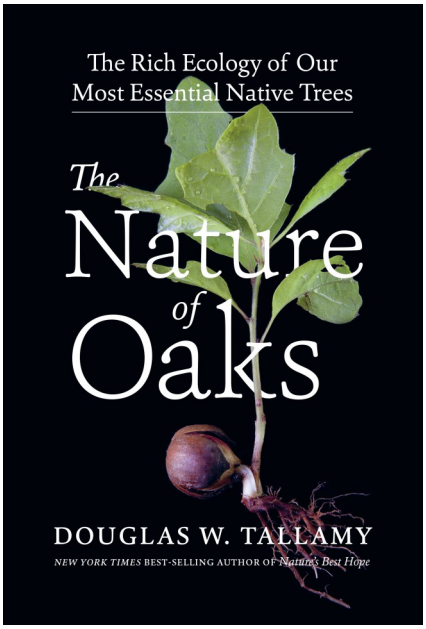
Then I placed the hawk on the lawn to determine what should be done. The nest was too high to access without the aid of a professional tree climber and darkness was fast approaching. Bruce had already assembled the elements of an artificial nest: a plastic crate, a soft, coconut fiber plant basket liner filled with pine straw, some sturdy straps with clamps, and an extension ladder. I selected a sheltered limb of a nearby live oak as the site for the artificial nest, and Bruce and B.J. went to work securing it in place.

Meanwhile, Braxton and Jonah noticed that Francis had mustered enough courage to run and hide behind a water oak. I retrieved the hawk, nestled him into the coconut-fiber planter liner, and put the boys in charge of watching it. I explained that the parents would continue to care for Francis while he was in the artificial nest and that he would be flying soon. I also told them that when a bird is raised by humans it imprints on humans, which means it grows up thinking it's a human, and that is not a good thing for a hawk. Jonah and Braxton were elated when Bruce placed Francis in the artificial nest at dusk. Early the next morning Francis cried out for food, alerting mom and dad to his new location, and the hawk family was reunited.

Nestling Red-shouldered Hawk found on the ground during high winds.

Braxton and Jonah Patterson keep a close eye on the nestling while an artificial nest is being installed in a nearby oak.

Recommended Summer Reading



The Nature of Oaks by Doug Tallamy

Reviewed by Wendy Rihner

Like so many other New Orleanians, I have long marveled at the stately beauty of our Live Oak trees; they once stirred in me a civic pride, but that is as far as the attachment went. Then I started looking at birds through binoculars, and that obligatory civic pride deepened into a love that began to encompass all oak species. Oaks are Mother Nature's work-horses that no birder can overlook. No one knows this better than Doug Tallamy, author of a very important book, ***The Nature of Oaks***.

Released in late March, ***The Nature of Oaks*** is Tallamy's latest effort to encourage Americans to reconsider what they plant in their yards. Written in his characteristically accessible, fluid style, Tallamy focuses on the "rich ecology" of what he considers our "most essential" native trees. The book's organization follows each month of the year and invites readers to delve deeply into the personal lives of oaks throughout the seasons. He opens with the month of October, not because, as Tallamy writes, "that is the most rewarding month for oak-watching, although it is a good one. Rather, it was October when I decided to write this book."

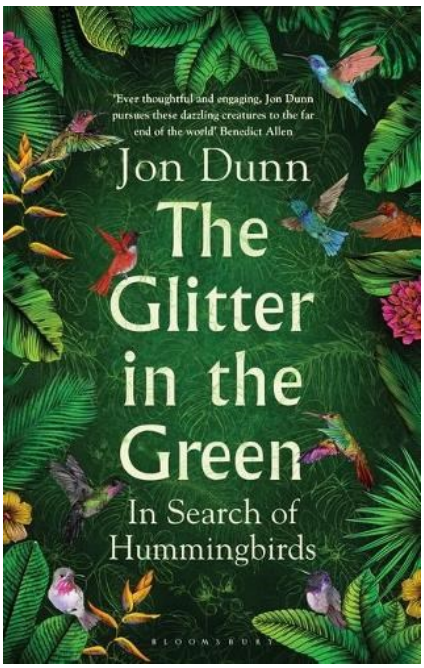
Those familiar with Tallamy's writings on insects and oaks will find some discussions familiar; for example, in the chapter "April", he explores the relationship between Cynipid gall wasps and oak species. He sees the beauty in the wasps, and indeed, in all of the insects that begin to emerge in oaks in the spring. And because Tallamy knows his audience, he can discuss Cynipid gall wasps and not lose a single reader because he avoids scientific or academic parlance that causes many readers to stumble.

Perhaps that is what first drew me to Tallamy's work. He knows that his audience includes birders, gardeners, beginners of all sorts, not necessarily those with entomological or botanical expertise. For instance, he opens "January" by recounting observations of a Golden-Crowned Kinglet (photo included), foraging for caterpillars in an oak on his Pennsylvania property. A bird foraging for insects in a tree in Pennsylvania deep into winter? The surprise he feels upon making this discovery may mirror that of many readers, perhaps even quite a few of us here in New Orleans unaccustomed to oak trees in frosty, snowy winters!

Into each chapter or month, if you like, he seamlessly interweaves information on various oak-related topics as in "July" when he begins with a discussion of mistletoes that naturally occur in oaks and ends with a look at the purposeful designs of acorns. In between those subjects, he guides us through a fascinating examination of the "gregarious feeding" of oakworm caterpillars. Tallamy can be droll, "It is easier to bite through lignified oak leaves with 100 mouths than with one." As a lay person, I appreciate the way he blends in the science and research unobtrusively. Parenthetical information is supplied, but it never interrupts the flow of the writing. I should also note that in "July", New Orleans' own Tammany Baumgarten gets a nod!

Tallamy never closes a book without giving readers lists of suggested species that can be found in their regions of the country ("Best oak options for your area"). The book includes a "How to plant an oak" that precedes the regional list. Practicality is what makes Doug Tallamy such a successful advocate for the environment. He reaches us where we are while emphatically explaining the urgency. "We cannot casually accept the loss of oaks without also accepting the loss of thousands of other plants and animals that depend on them," the author writes. "Fortunately, there is no reason why we *should* accept the loss of oaks as inevitable." Each time an oak is cut down in my neighborhood for a new house, I mourn. If only everyone could look at oaks the way Dr. Tallamy does.

The Glitter in the Green by Jon Dunn



Reviewed by Wendy Rihner

For centuries, hummingbirds fascinated European naturalists, so much so that in 1829, a discovery dumbfounded Dr. William Elford Leach, a zoology curator at the British Museum. The "Harlequin Hummingbird," (*Trochilus multicolour*) celebrated as a new South American species in the 1780s, turned out to be a fraud! Indeed, the "new" species was a composite, a patchwork of pieced together parts of various hummingbird species! This anecdote comes from a most delightful new book by Jon Dunn, a British natural history writer and photographer. Dunn's ***The Glitter in the Green*** is equal parts travelogue, natural history, environmental treatise, and homage to the hummingbird, and entirely enjoyable.

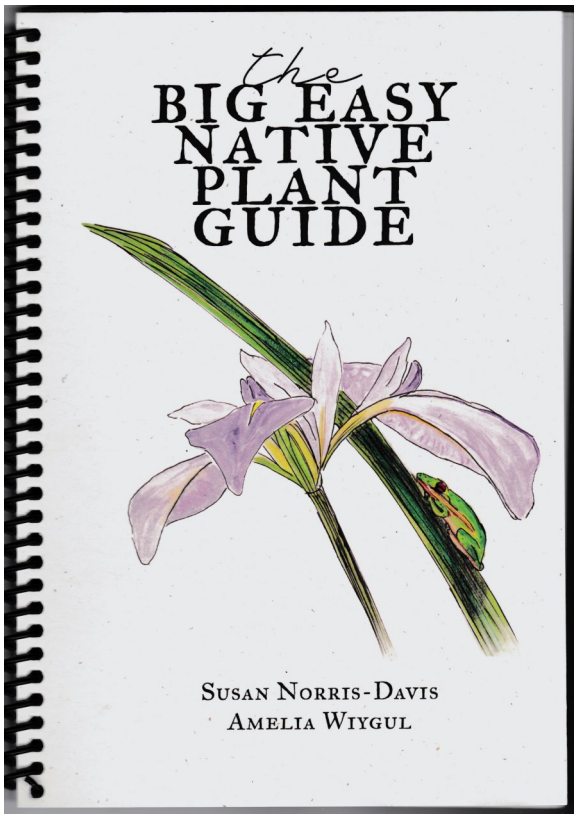
The writer takes us along on his journeys throughout the Americas to find as many hummingbird species as he could: "My journey would take place over a number of years, but here, trapped within the comfortable confines of a narrative, it unfolds geographically, exploring the hummingbirds' world from northern to southern extremities."

However, Dunn is no lister, or shall we say "twitcher" in British lingo; his travels were fueled by the knowledge that "the clock of extinction is ticking loudly" for hummingbirds, for they "might prove to be the most colourful canary in the coal mine." Dunn writes mournfully of the many dangers hummingbirds face: the forest fires in Alaska that threaten the Rufous Hummingbird, the cultural practice of "La Chuparosa" in Mexico, a tradition that kills hummingbirds for amulets for whichever human condition a dead hummingbird hanging on a chain can ameliorate.

Even when writing about manmade threats to hummingbirds, Dunn writes beautifully. Few natural history writers possess a prose style that is at once vivid and lyrical. I enjoy the poetry of Dunn's prose. Writing of the Fiery-throated Hummingbird in Costa Rica: "The male displays a throat that burns in its centre like a red-hot coal; fades to shades of amber and gold. . .and has a crown of electric blue, like a shard of the sky captured in feathers." I could at once relive in perfect detail the moment I, too, first saw a Fiery-throated Hummingbird. Indeed, the beauty of his prose reveals Dunn's deep, undeniable passion for hummingbirds.

The Glitter in the Green also highlights some of the engrossing history surrounding the identification and collection of hummingbirds. According to Dunn, the "Harlequin Hummingbird" fraud occurred not out of a desire for personal fame or advancement, but rather out of a desire to feed the insatiable hunger of museums and wealthy collectors to get the latest new thing, an ornithological game of one upmanship. And what do the 16th Century Spanish explorer Juan Fernández and Robinson Crusoe have in common? A gorgeous, rusty, cinnamon hued bird with an iridescent gold and crimson crown called the Juan Fernández Firecrown. Yet, it is the backstory of this gorgeous bird involving privateers, deserted islands, Alexander Selkirk (the model for Robinson Crusoe), and introduced species that readers need to understand the threats this bird faces today.

As the last Ruby-throated Hummingbirds leave our yards here in New Orleans this spring, I encourage you to purchase ***The Glitter in the Green***. You will enjoy Dunn's obsessive quest to see and celebrate hummingbirds. After all, as he writes in the book's introduction, "I began to realise that these charismatic birds had a host of stories fluttering in their wake every bit as colourful as the birds themselves." We can only hope his telling of these stories brings attention to the fragile state of these birds.



the Big Easy Native Plant Guide

(written by Susan Norris-Davis and illustrated by Amelia Wiygul)

Native plants provide food, shelter, beauty and sense of place. This native plant guide is specifically for the greater New Orleans area. The plants chosen are suited to both the unique environmental character of southeast Louisiana and the overlying urban construct. Includes 47 species for both sun and shade, vetted for ease of growing, suitable for small city gardens, and available locally. Beautifully illustrated and thoroughly researched. Printed locally at MPress in New Orleans on 100% post-consumer fiber recycled paper. Available online at snd-productions.square.site. Also at Pelican Greenhouse, Barber Labs, Delta Flora, and Longue Vue.

Orleans Audubon Society's YouTube Channel

Enjoy OAS programs any time and share them with friends. Please consider subscribing to OAS's YouTube channel. It is free to subscribe. Go to YouTube and type in "Orleans Audubon Society" to find us. If you have difficulty locating a particular program, links are posted on the OAS website [https://jjaudubon.net/events/] under the "Events" menu tab. Recent uploads include:

40 Years in Borneo: Hacking Through the Jungle in Search of Birds

- *Presented by* Dr. Fred Sheldon

The Future Delta and Birds

-*Presented by* David Muth

ECUADOR: Straddling the Equator in Search of Condors to Hummingbirds

- *Presented by* Jennifer Coulson and David Muth

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