LOUISIANA NATURAL AREAS REGISTRY
Quarterly Newsletter

June 2010

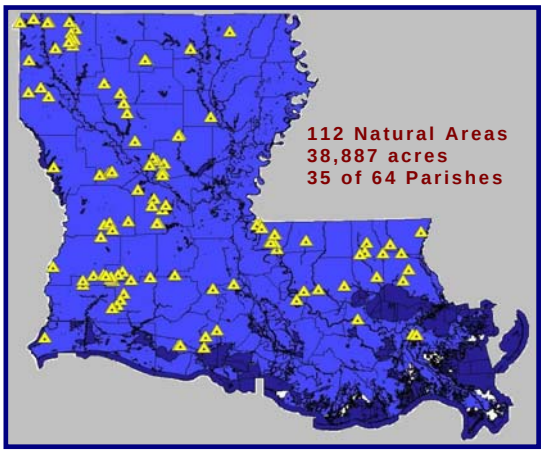
Volume 7 Number 4 of 4

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

http//www.Louisiana.gov/experience/naturalheritage/naturalareasregistry/

Can you name this flowering plant? See Page 4 for answer.

NATURAL AREAS UPDATE



The Natural Areas Registry Program is steadily growing and includes 112 Registered Natural Areas comprising 38,887 acres (indicated by the yellow triangles on the map to the right). We are working with one Registry landowner from Lincoln Parish to establish the first Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) servitude which will provide permanent protection for the site. The Louisiana Natural Areas Preservation Committee approved the nomination of this site by the Natural Heritage Program in 2009. High quality sites that are nominated for LDWF servitudes do not have to be an existing registered Natural Area. Please contact Judy Jones at jjones@wlf.la.gov (225) 765-2822 or Amity Bass abass@wlf.la.gov (225) 765-2975 if you are interested in being considered for nomination and/or if you would like more information about a LDWF servitude.

We are recognizing landowners of three new Natural Areas this quarter: Beckwith Creek, Boeuf Prairie Farm, and White Oaks Refuge. These areas capture 146.4 acres in three parishes (Beauregard, Franklin, and Lincoln). The owners of Beckwith Creek Natural Area have five sites in the Natural Areas Registry Program. Chris Reid, Louisiana Natural Heritage Program botanist, found the federally endangered American chaffseed (*Schwalbea americana*) in June this year on their Cow Creek Natural Area. American chaffseed (shown below on the left) is fire dependent and southeastern United States records are from well-drained longleaf pine communities.

BECKWITH CREEK NATURAL AREA is a 110-acre site owned by David and Mary Ann Daigle in Beauregard Parish. It supports excellent examples of Western Longleaf Pine Savannah and Flatwoods Pond communities. Western Longleaf Pine Savannahs are floristically rich, herb-dominated wetlands that are naturally sparsely stocked with longleaf pine *Pinus palustris*. Wet savannahs occupy the poorly drained and seasonally saturated/flooded depressional areas and low flats. Flatwoods Ponds are relatively small, natural depressional wetlands embedded within current or historic longleaf

pine flatwoods/savannahs of western Louisiana. They are believed to occupy swales and depressions remaining from ancient Pleistocene (most recent era of widespread glaciation) stream channels, and are often linear in shape, although circular and elliptic ponds are common. Generally treeless, these ponds are vegetated by a variety of obligate and facultative wetland herbaceous species, mainly tall sedges and grasses. Historically, fire maintained both of these plant communities by preventing woody plant encroachment and by rejuvenating the herbaceous ground cover.

BOEUF PRAIRIE FARM NATURAL AREA is a 25.4-acre site owned by the Dailey family in Franklin Parish. It is located in the low lands along Boeuf Prairie in the far southwestern portion of Franklin Parish. Communities of interest include a Macon Ridge Green Ash Pond and

baldcypress swamp. Macon Ridge green ash ponds are small depressional upland ponds that were historically found within hardwood flatwood forests. They collect runoff water and seepage from the surrounding landscape. Little is known about both the historical and current extent of these ponds on the Macon Ridge. The surrounding property consists of agricultural fields that lie between Turkey Creek to the east and Boeuf River to the west.

WHITE OAK REFUGE NATURAL AREA is an 11-acre site owned by Drew and Patricia Jones in Lincoln Parish. It consists of a mixed hardwood-loblolly pine forest dominated by hardwood species such as southern red oak (*Quercus falcata*), water oak (*Quercus nigra*), and mockernut hickory (*Carya alba*). Shortleaf pine (*Pinus echinata*) and loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*) also occur on the site to a lesser degree. The forest has a number of large oaks, as well as large muscadine vines (*Vitis rotundifolia*). Mixed hardwood-loblolly forests are distributed in a variety of ecological settings statewide. They occur on broad ridgetops and gentle side slopes in terrace uplands; on middle and lower slopes between uplands and stream bottoms; and at the heads of drainages along small, intermittent streams. Available pine needle fuel indicates that regular fire was a process essential to maintaining a significant pine component, and without fire, forest succession is toward hardwood dominance. White Oak Refuge Natural Area lies adjacent to two other registered Natural Areas and is therefore protecting a larger part of a contiguous forested landscape.

Common Woodland Plant

Goat's Rue (*Tephrosia virginiana*)

Goat's rue is a beautiful herbaceous native plant that flowers from May to August and prefers well-drained open pine and hardwood communities and prairies. It is found in the Eastern portion of the United States as shown on the map at right. Goat's rue prefers full sunlight and most often grows in sandy soil in Louisiana. This plant has large roots that fix nitrogen and plants can reach 36 inches tall. The pink and white, or pink and pale yellow flowers bunch at the top and resemble bi-colored sweet peas. Goat's rue has compound leaves covered with dense hairs giving it a gray cast. This plant is a host plant for the Southern Cloudywing Butterfly.

Will Stuart

Traditionally, goat's rue was used to treat ailments such as tuberculosis, rheumatism and bladder problems. It is also being studied in cancer research. Seeds are reported to cause nausea. Rotenone is widely used today as an insecticide and to kill fish. Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries is presently using rotenone to remove the exotic fish species, Tilapia, from an area north and south of Port Sulphur along LA Hwy 23 in Plaquemines Parish. The roots are long, thin and tough and are the source of the name "devil's shoestring." The long roots also make this plant drought resistant. This native plant's stems are covered with a silky, silver hair that has caused allergic reactions in some people. At one time this plant was fed to goats to improve milk production. This practice is no longer followed due to the presence of rotenone in the milk

References:

Larry Stritch, US Forest Service, Celebrating Flowers at web site http://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/plant-of-the-week/tephrosia_virginiana.shtml

Easy Living Wildflowers at web site http://www.easywildflowers.com/quality/tep.virgi.htm

Native Bird Johnson Wwildflower Center at web site http://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=tevi

Common Woodland Bird

White-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis*)

White-breasted nuthatches are a common feeder bird with clean black, gray, and white markings. They are active, agile birds with an appetite for insects and large seeds. They get their common name from their habit of forcing large nuts and acorns in between tree bark and then hacking them with their sharp bill to "hatch" out the seed from the inside.

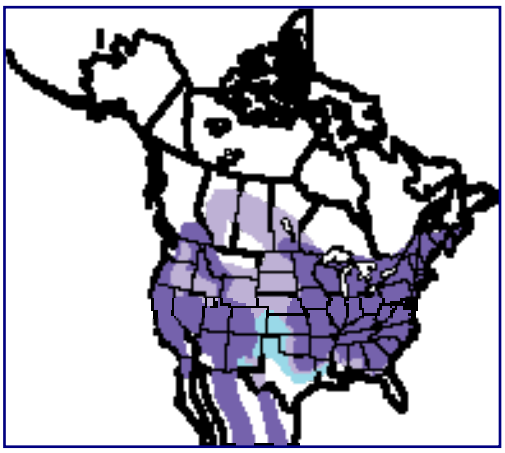
Identification This is the largest nuthatch but it is still a small bird that has a large head and almost no neck. The tail is very short with black and white patches, and the long, narrow bill is straight or slightly upturned. White-breasted Nuthatches are gray-blue on the back, with a frosty white face and underparts. The black or gray cap and neck frame the face and make it look like this bird is wearing a hood. The lower belly, under the tail, and flanks are often chestnut and their feet are large with long claws. White and black patches are seen in the underside of wings. Both sexes are 5.1 to 5.5 inches long, have a wingspan of 7.9 to 10.6 inches, and weigh 0.6 to 1.1 ounces. White-breasted nuthatches are larger than a red-breasted nuthatch and smaller than a tufted titmouse. Look for White-breasted Nuthatches along the main branches of large deciduous trees. They'll likely be moving quickly at odd angles to the vertical stems of a tree. In winter you can find them in small flocks of chickadees and titmice. If you see one in a flock, there's a good chance that the bird's mate is in the flock as well.

Behavior: White-breasted Nuthatches are agile birds that creep along trunks and large branches, probing into bark furrows with their straight, pointed bills. Like other nuthatches, they often turn sideways and upside down on vertical surfaces as they forage. They don't lean against their tails the way woodpeckers do.

Songs: Male White-breasted Nuthatches sing in late winter and spring with a rapid, nasal, fairly low-pitched *wha-wha-wha* that lasts 2-3 seconds. Their song is made up of a half-dozen to a dozen nearly identical notes. Males sing these songs at two rates, with the faster version packing in twice as many notes in the same amount of time. The fast version is thought to be the main one used for mate attraction.

Interesting Facts

- The White-breasted Nuthatch is normally territorial throughout the year, with pairs staying together. The male has to spend more time looking out for predators when he's alone than while he's with his mate. That's the pattern for most birds, and one reason why birds spend so much time in flocks.
- In winter, White-breasted Nuthatches join foraging flocks led by chickadees or titmice, perhaps partly because it makes food easier to find and partly because more birds can keep an eye out for predators. One study found that when titmice were removed from a flock, nuthatches were more wary and less willing to visit exposed bird feeders.
- If you see a White-breasted Nuthatch making lots of quick trips to and from your feeder – too many for it to be eating them all – it may be storing the seeds for later use in the winter by wedging them into furrows in the bark of nearby trees.
- The oldest known White-breasted Nuthatch was 9 years 10 months old.



Range and Habitat: White-breasted Nuthatches occur in North America and are found in mature deciduous forests but can also be found in coniferous forests (where Red-breasted Nuthatches are more likely to be found). You can also find them at woodland edges and in open areas with large trees, such as parks, wooded suburbs, and yards.

Food: White-breasted Nuthatches eat mainly insects, including weevil larvae, wood-boring beetle larvae, other beetles, tree hoppers, scale insects, ants, gall fly larvae, caterpillars (including gypsy moths and tent caterpillars), stinkbugs, and click beetles, as well as spiders. They also eat seeds and nuts, including acorns, hawthorn fruit, sunflower seeds, and sometimes crops such as corn. At birdfeeders they eat sunflower seeds, peanuts, suet, and peanut butter.

Nesting- Nest Description: A female builds the nest on her own, lining the nest cavity with fur, bark, and lumps of dirt. She then builds a nest cup of fine grass, shredded bark, feathers, and other soft material. White-breasted Nuthatches often reuse their nest holes in subsequent years.

Nest Placement: White-breasted Nuthatches typically build their nests in natural tree cavities or abandoned woodpecker holes. They sometimes enlarge these holes but rarely excavate them entirely on their own (as Red-breasted Nuthatches often do). Nuthatches are smaller than woodpeckers, and White-breasted Nuthatches don't seem bothered by nest holes considerably larger than they are. Despite their association with deciduous woods, they nest in both

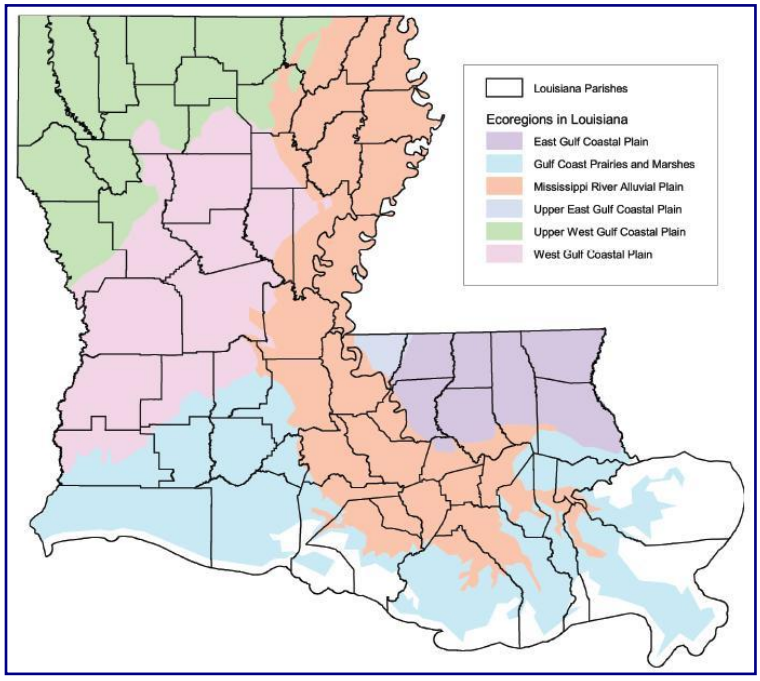
coniferous and deciduous trees. White-breasted Nuthatches sometimes use nest boxes.

References:

White-breasted Nuthatch at The All About Birds by The Cornell Lab of Ornithology web site http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/White-breasted_Nuthatch/

Progress Report for Longleaf Pine Savannah Survey

Last year LNHP was awarded a State Wildlife Grant to conduct a status survey of longleaf pine savannahs in the state. Longleaf pine savannahs are sparsely wooded grasslands and occur on flat, poorly drained, acidic soils and were historically maintained by fire. Currently, much area within the range of longleaf pine savannah is very thickly wooded and the vast majority of this acreage does not experience fire. Thus, the community and some of its characteristic animal and plant species are very rare. Longleaf pine savannahs occur on the East Gulf Coastal Plain and the West Gulf Coastal Plain (see ecoregions map below).



The purpose is to determine the current extent and condition of longleaf in the state to aid in future conservation and restoration efforts. We also provide technical assistance and management plans to landowners. Louisiana Department of Wildlife & Fisheries is currently looking for land protection opportunities in Gulf Coastal Plain ecoregions and data from this survey will aid in this process. The data will also be used to aid in the land protection efforts of other conservation organizations as well.

We are in the early stages of our survey. Currently we are focusing on southwest Louisiana. Most of our pine savannah records in that region are in Allen and Beauregard Parishes. We anticipate completing the survey by late fall of this year.

Mystery Plant

The mystery plant from the front page is a native North American grass called pineywoods dropseed, (*Sporobolus junceus*). Pineywoods dropseed is a bunch grass that has densely tufted needlelike evergreen leaves that are primarily basal. Pineywoods dropseed flowers from September to November and occurs in upland longleaf pine forests and calcareous and coastal prairies in Louisiana. Pineywoods dropseed often responds to environmental changes such as fire or unusual rains by flowering. Photo above displays the whorled panicle branches. Flowering stems are about two to three feet tall.

References:

Pinellas Chapter of the Florida Native Plant society at web site http://pinellas.fnpschapters.org/grassesforlawns.html

Sporobolus junceus Page at web site http://alabamaplants.com/Grasses/Sporobolus_junceus_page.html

LNHP. 1986-2004. The natural communities of Louisiana. Louisiana Natural Heritage Program, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Baton Rouge, LA.

Previous Newsletter, March 2010, Vol. 7, No. of 4. We covered the intermediate marsh plant community and an associated plant species – saltmeadow cordgrass (*Spartina patens*), Gulf Coast Joint Venture, and the mystery plant was the prairie blazing star (*Liatris pycnostachya*).

Louisiana Natural Heritage Program Staff
Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
2000 Quail Drive; P.O. Box 98000; Baton Rouge, LA 70898-9000

Amity Bass – Program Coordinator / Community Ecologist
(225) 765-2975, abass@wlf.la.gov

Blain Cerame – Technician
bcerame@wlf.la.gov

Jeff Boundy – Herpetologist
(225) 765-2815, jboundy@wlf.la.gov

Connie Dunn - Administrative Assistant
(225) 765-2811, cdunn@wlf.la.gov

Beau Gregory – Zoologist
(225) 765-2820, bgregory@wlf.la.gov

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

Keri Landry - Field Biologist
(225) 765-2809, klandry@wlf.la.gov

Nicole Lorenz - Data Manager
(225) 765-2643, nlorenz@wlf.la.gov

Carolyn Michon - Assistant Data Manager
(225) 765-2357, cmichon@wlf.la.gov

Chris Reid – Botanist
(225) 765-2828, creid@wlf.la.gov

Michael Seymour - Nongame Avian Biologist
(225) 763-3554, mseymour@wlf.la.gov