

# LOUISIANA NATURAL AREAS REGISTRY

## Quarterly Newsletter

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March 2007



Working with Landowners towards  
Conservation of Louisiana's  
Ecologically Sensitive Lands.



Can you name the outlined plant? See back page for answer.

## Natural Areas Registry Update

We recognized four landowners this quarter for protecting their ecologically important natural areas totaling 290.01 acres. Robert Ellis contacted the Natural Heritage Program about registering his family's (Robert Ellis, Faith Hurst, and Sandra Hogg) shortleaf pine forest in Lincoln Parish. The family named their registry **Joseph Walker Ellis Natural Area**, in honor of their grandfather, who bought the property in the early 1900's. Another landowner, Virginia Marshall, learned about the Registry Program while attending a meeting with her cousin, Murrell Butler, owner of Oak Hill Natural. Virginia named her registry **Flower Greenwood Natural Area**, in honor of the Flower family who first owned the site in the 1790s.

**JOSEPH WALKER ELLIS NATURAL AREA** consists of 30 acres owned by Robert Ellis, 26.68 acres owned by his sister Sandra Hogg, and 59.33 acres owned by Faith Hurst. Two plant community types occur here that include the state and globally - rare shortleaf pine/oak-hickory forest and a mixed hardwood-loblolly pine forest. Both of these forests exhibit old-growth characteristics including mature trees (some exceeding 100 years old), numerous large vines, "relic" pine tree crowns with flat tops and large branches, and an open understory with scattered shrubs and young trees. Shortleaf pine/oak-hickory forests were once prevalent on the landscape in the Upper West Gulf Coastal Plain. However, only 5 to 10 percent is thought to remain today, and 41 animal species of conservation concern are known to utilize this forest type. Natural stands of mixed hardwood - loblolly pine forests are not as imperiled,



however only 25 to 50 percent remain today, and 45 animal species are of conservation concern are known from this habitat. Prescribed fire is an important tool used to maintain the pine component. A family of otters are seen regularly by the owners on a beaver pond that is fed by several seeps and two creeks. An interesting herbaceous plant shown at bottom left, *Epifagus virginiana* (beech drops), was seen on site. It has no leaves and is a parasite on beech tree roots.

**FLOWER GREENWOOD NATURAL AREA** consists of a 174-acre mixed hardwood - loblolly pine forest plant community that lies on the southern edge of the Tunica Hills and exhibits good structural diversity. This community is found state-wide in the uplands and is variable depending on elevation and moisture regime. *Pinus taeda* (loblolly pine)



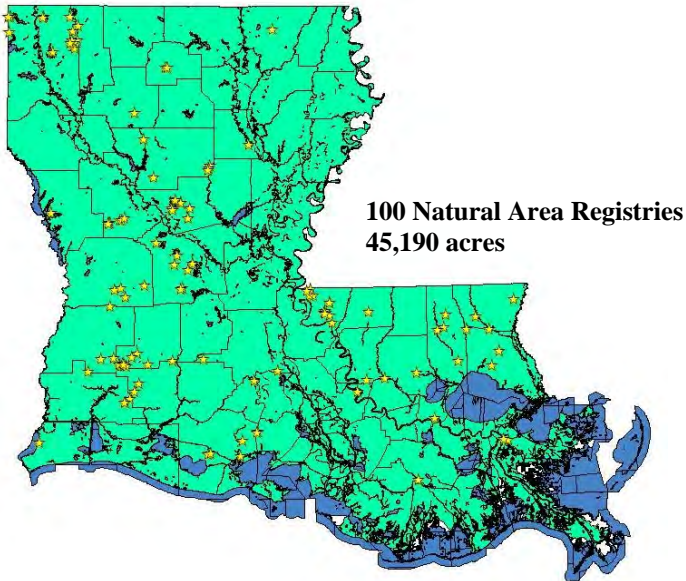
comprises 20 percent or more of the overstory in a mixture with a number of hardwood species. An interesting herbaceous plant (flower above, fruit below), *Podophyllum peltatum* (mayapple), was seen on the property. Succession in this community is strongly toward hardwood dominance, and it may be considered transitional to various hardwood types. There are currently 45 species of conservation concern in this forest type that includes amphibians, birds, butterflies, mammals, and reptiles.



The **Natural Areas Field Week** that was scheduled for April 23 - 27 has been canceled due to low registration. We had selected 5 parishes (Bossier, Beauregard, Rapides, Tangipahoa, and West Feliciana) for the event to visit one or more Natural

Area Registry sites per field day. The purpose of the field week was to give our registry members the opportunity to learn about other plant communities in our state and to see how active land management can improve and conserve their natural areas.

As of this quarter, there are 100 registries in Louisiana's Natural Areas Registry Program. Yellow Stars on the map of Louisiana below represent 100 Registered Natural Areas that comprise 45,190 acres in 32 of 64 parishes.



## Henslow's Sparrow (*Ammodramus henslowii*)

The Henslow's Sparrow, first discovered in 1820 in Kentucky by John James Audubon, was named by him in 1831 in honor of the famous Cambridge University professor John Stevens Henslow.

A species of tallgrass prairies, agricultural grasslands, and pine savannas of the eastern U.S., this small sparrow has declined by more than 80% since 1966. Its native tallgrass prairie breeding habitat has declined by more than 90% and remaining grassland habitats are being lost to both reforestation and sprawl. The species migrates south to spend the non-breeding season in the native pine savanna habitats of the southeastern U.S.-a habitat type that is being rapidly converted to non-native fast-growing tree varieties that the species will not inhabit.

**Identification:** The Henslow's Sparrow is more often heard than seen though its song is nothing more than a short, hiccupped "Tslick," which it may repeat interspersed with a short pause, even throughout the night. Look for it in thick grassland habitats throughout its range though its distribution is normally very patchy and localized. Like other sparrows in its genus, the Henslow's is short-tailed and rather chunky with a flat head and relatively heavy bill. To

distinguish it from related sparrows look for its streaked breast, olive-green face, and rufous-toned back and wings.

**Distribution and Population Trends:** The estimated remaining global population of approximately 50,000 birds now breeds from western New York and Pennsylvania west to southern Wisconsin, eastern Iowa, and eastern Kansas and Oklahoma. An isolated breeding population occurs in eastern North Carolina. Throughout most of this breeding range the birds occur in small, often isolated patches. Henslow's Sparrows formerly bred east to New England and New Jersey where they are now extirpated. An isolated population that once bred in coastal Texas and was considered by some to represent a unique subspecies has since also been lost to development. Breeding Bird Survey data indicate a range-wide decline of more than 80% since 1966. Significant populations remain in tallgrass prairie remnants in eastern Kansas, eastern Oklahoma, and Missouri, in abandoned strip mines in western Pennsylvania; and smaller numbers in agricultural grasslands in the St. Lawrence Valley of New York. Important Bird Areas that support significant numbers of breeding Henslow's Sparrows include New York's Jefferson County Grasslands. In winter the species occurs in a belt extending from North Carolina west to eastern Texas. Important Bird Areas that support significant numbers of wintering Henslow's Sparrows include Florida's Apalachicola and Tates Hell Forests IBA. More IBAs for the species in other states are currently being identified. A Henslow's sparrow was seen recently by LNHP on a saline prairie in Desoto Parish.



**Ecology:** This species has evolved to occupy the unique niche afforded by the ephemeral nature of grassland habitats, breeding only in habitats that are a number of years post fire or disturbance. However, the habitat at a site may be optimal for the species for only a few years before it becomes too dense and the birds will abandon the site unless it is burned or mowed again.



**Threats:** Loss of habitat to agriculture and, in northeastern U.S., to sprawl and succession of grasslands to shrub and forest habitats are the greatest threats on breeding grounds. Wintering pine savanna habitats in southeastern U.S. are rapidly becoming converted to a monoculture of non-native pine plantations for the forest products industry which renders habitat unusable for Henslow's Sparrows.

**Conservation:** Efforts are underway in parts of the Midwest to restore native tallgrass prairie habitat which benefits this species as well as other WatchListed species like the Greater Prairie-Chicken and the Dickcissel.

A priority of Audubon's Policy efforts has been to maintain and increase the conservation provisions of the Farm Bill which pays farmers to leave grassland habitats unplowed and unmowed, eventually providing tens of thousands of acres of excellent Henslow's Sparrow habitat in portions of the U.S. where the species occurs. See <http://www.audubon.org/campaign/latestnews.html#farm> for more information.

**What Can You Do?** Let your congressional delegation know that you want them to support the conservation provisions of the Farm Bill. Check <http://www.audubon.org/campaign/> for the latest news and to find out how to contact your representatives.

Support local land trusts, government agencies, and other organizations working to preserve grassland habitats in your area. Contact your state Important Bird Areas coordinator ([http://www.audubon.org/bird/iba/state\\_coords.html](http://www.audubon.org/bird/iba/state_coords.html)) to find out if there are sites in your area important for Henslow's Sparrows that need increased protection. Audubon's Important Bird Area program is a vital tool for the conservation of Henslow's Sparrow as well as other species. To learn more about the Important Bird Areas

program and how you can help, visit: <http://www.audubon.org/bird/iba/>.

U.S. National Wildlife Refuges provide essential habitat for Henslow's Sparrow, and a great number of other species throughout the U.S. and its territories. Unfortunately, the refuge system is often under-funded during the U.S. government's budgeting process. To learn more about how you can help gain much needed funding for U.S. National Wildlife Refuges, visit: [http://www.audubon.org/campaign/refuge\\_report/](http://www.audubon.org/campaign/refuge_report/)

Volunteers are crucial to the success of programs that monitor the status of populations of Henslow's Sparrow and other bird species. Audubon's Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is one of the longest-running citizen-science monitoring programs in the world and has helped to follow changes in the numbers and distribution of Henslow's Sparrow. To learn more about the CBC and how you can participate, visit: <http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc>.

Information on where Henslow's Sparrows occur and in what numbers is vital to conserving the species. Help in monitoring this and other species by reporting your sightings to eBird. A project of Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, eBird is the world's first comprehensive on-line bird monitoring program: <http://www.audubon.org/bird/ebird/index.html>.

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## Saline Prairie

You can learn more about other Louisiana communities by accessing their fact sheets on the internet at <http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/experiencewildlife/wildlifeactionplan/wildlifeplandetails/>. Two Natural Areas Registries that have saline prairies are Fort Natural Area owned by Estelle Fort Dorman and Weyerhaeuser Saline Prairies Natural Area owned Weyerhaeuser Co. Both are located in Winn Parish.

**Rarity Rank:** S1 – critically imperiled in Louisiana, G1G2 – critically to critically imperiled globally

**Synonyms:** Barrens, Salt Barrens, and Slicks

**Ecological Systems:** CES203.291 West Gulf Coastal Plain Saline Glade



**General Description:** Saline prairie is a natural, mostly treeless natural community currently known from a few scattered sites in central and northwestern Louisiana. Typically only a few acres in size, they may be wet, mesic or dry prairies. The wet variants arise on low flat terraces subject to regular flooding adjacent to or near small to intermediate streams. Wet saline prairies usually grade upslope into mesic or dry saline prairies. In aspect, these prairies are usually a mosaic of variably dense herbaceous vegetation (thick to thin), with interspersed bare soil areas ("slicks"). Shrubs are intermixed to a greater or lesser degree, and may in places form saline shrub thickets.

The soils for all saline prairies have high levels of exchangeable sodium and (at times) magnesium in the subsoil and near the surface horizons that have created extreme conditions for plant growth. Such conditions include relatively high alkalinity, very poor movement of water and air in the soil, resistance to wetting that can induce droughty conditions, resistance to drying once saturated, and sodic horizon in the subsoil that acts much like a dense clay pan and is very resistant to root penetration. The soil, naturally low in fertility, contains relatively high levels of certain water-soluble salts that are injurious to plants and may produce alkali chlorosis and mortality. The principal soils supporting the community in the Upper West Gulf Coastal Plain and Eastern Gulf Coastal Plain are the Bonn and Lafe series. Occurrences on the Lower Western Gulf Coastal Plain are on Brimstone soils. The plant community therefore includes many halophytic (salt tolerant) forbs, grasses and grass-like plants.

#### Plant Community Associates

Common grass and forb species include: *Aristida* spp. (three-awn grasses), *Aster subulatus*, *Atriplex pentandra* (orach), *Bacopa monnieri* (water hyssop), *B. rotundifolia*, *Carex glaucescens* (sedge), *Chasmanthium latifolium* (spikegrass), *Diodia teres* (poorjoe), *Distichlis spicata* (alkali grass), *Eleocharis* spp. (spikerush), *Fimbristylis castanea*, *Geocarpon minimum* (earthfruit), *Heliotropium curassivicum* (heliotropes), *Iris brevicaulis* (lamance iris), *Hibiscus moscheutos* ssp. *lasiocarpus* (hibiscus), *Iva angustifolia* (marsh elder), *Juncus* spp. (rushes), *Ludwigia* spp. (primrose), *Lythrum lineare* (loosestrife), *Panicum virgatum* (switchgrass), *Phyla nodiflora* (frog-fruit), *Pluchea camphorata* (stinkweed), *Polygonum aviculare* (knotweed), *Proserpinaca*



*pectinata* (mermaid-weed), *Rhynchospora corniculata* (beakrush), *Schizachyrium scoparium* (little bluestem), *Solidago sempervirens* (seaside goldenrod), *Spartina pectinata* (prairie cordgrass), *Tradescantia occidentalis* (spiderwort), and *Tridens strictus* (sandgrass).

Common woody species include: *Ampelopsis arborea* (peppervine), *Baccharis hamifolia* (saltbush), *Berchemia scandens* (rattan vine), *Cephalanthus occidentalis* (buttonbush), *Crataegus berberifolia* (barberry hawthorn), *C. brachyacantha* (blueberry hawthorn), *C. virdis* (green hawthorn), *Fraxinus caroliniana* (Carolina ash), *Morella cerifera* (wax myrtle), *Pinus taeda* (loblolly pine), *Quercus lyrata* (overcup oak), *Q. nigra* (water oak), *Q. similis* (delta post oak), *Q. phellos* (willow oak), and *Ulmus crassifolia* (cedar elm).

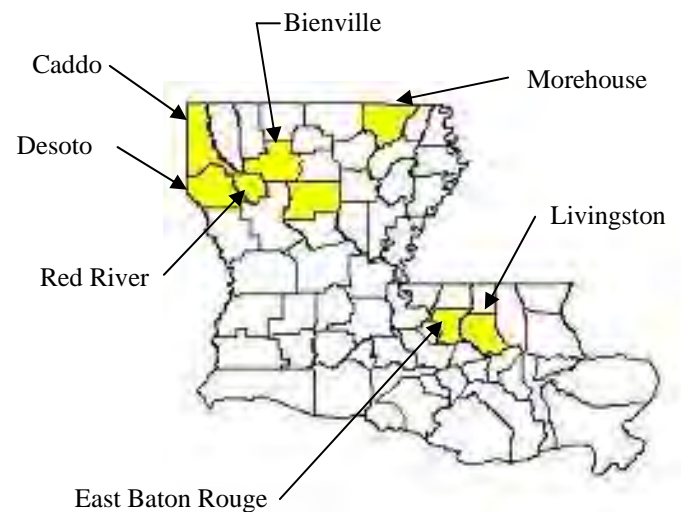
Federally-listed plant & animal species:

*Geocarpon minimum* - Threatened; G2; S1

See picture at bottom left

**Current Extent and Status:** Saline prairies are widely scattered in Louisiana and were not extensive in presettlement times. The estimated presettlement acreage for Saline Prairie is less than 2,000 with an estimated 10 to 25 % remaining (Smith 1993).

There are only three known intact saline prairies in the UWGCP. Two of them are in Red River Parish and one is in southern Caddo Parish. The Red River saline prairies are on



industrial forest land and are being protected. The Caddo prairie is on non-industrial private land and LNHP is just beginning to work with the landowner toward conservation of the site. There are several other saline prairies in Caddo and Desoto parishes that require a field survey to determine their status.

In the Lower West Gulf Coastal Plain there are several high quality saline prairies in southeast Winn Parish. Two of these prairies support the federally listed *Geocarpon minimum* (earth

fruit). Saline prairies are suspected to occur in adjacent Caldwell Parish.

Saline prairies were historically known from Morehouse, East Baton Rouge, and Livingston parishes. However, these prairies have long been extirpated (Smith 1999).

**Threats & Management Considerations:** Saline prairies have mainly been lost to land use changes. Attempts at conversion to agriculture or homesteads represent the greatest initial losses, while oil and gas drilling, construction of roads, pipelines and utilities, off-road vehicle use, physical damage from timber harvesting, contamination by chemicals (herbicides, fertilizers), and invasive and exotic species all threaten remaining saline prairies.

Use of appropriate management activities and developing a compatible management plan prevents destruction or

degradation of this habitat type and promotes long-term maintenance of healthy saline prairies. Such management strategies should include:

- Preventing conversion of existing natural prairies to other land uses (i.e., food plots, oil and gas drilling)
- No bedding or other soil disturbance that may alter natural water flow patterns
- Use of periodic prescribed fire (every 5 to 10 years)
- Prohibiting off-road vehicle use or restricting use to existing trails
- Preventing use of prairie openings as logging sets
- Monitoring for and removal of any invasive or exotic species by prescribed burning, spot herbicide treatments or mechanical means.

#### SALINE PRAIRIE

#### SPECIES OF CONSERVATION CONCERN (6)

##### BIRDS

American Woodcock  
Field Sparrow  
Grasshopper Sparrow

##### MAMMALS

Hispid Pocket Mouse  
Eastern Harvest Mouse

##### REPTILES

Western Slender Glass Lizard

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## Why Save Endangered Species?

(adapted from US Fish & Wildlife Service pamphlet)

Since life began on Earth, countless creatures have come and gone, rendered extinct by naturally changing physical and biological conditions. Since extinction is part of the natural order, and if many other species remain, some people ask: "Why save endangered species? Why should we spend money and effort to conserve them? How do we benefit?"

Congress answered these questions in the preamble to the **Endangered Species Act of 1973**, recognizing that endangered and threatened species of wildlife and plants "are of esthetic, ecological, educational, historical, recreational, and scientific value to the Nation and its people." In this statement, Congress summarized convincing arguments made by scientists, conservationists, and others who are concerned by the disappearance of unique creatures.

Congress further stated its intent that the Act should conserve the ecosystems upon which endangered and threatened species depend.

Passenger pigeons once numbered in the billions but now exist only in museums. Picture by A. W. Schorger

Although extinctions occur naturally,

scientific evidence strongly indicates that the **current rate of extinction**





is much higher than the natural or background rate of the past. The main force driving this higher rate of loss is habitat loss. Over-exploitation of wildlife for commercial purposes, the introduction of harmful exotic (nonnative) organisms, environmental pollution, and the spread of diseases also pose serious threats to our world's biological heritage.

Conservation actions carried out in the United States under the Endangered Species Act have been successful in preventing extinction for 99 percent of the species that are listed as endangered or threatened. However, species loss on a global scale continues to increase due to the environmental effects of human activities.

Biologists estimate that since the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock in 1620, more than 500 species, subspecies, and varieties of our Nation's plants and animals have become extinct. The situation in Earth's most biologically rich ecosystems is even worse. Tropical rainforests around the world, which may contain up to one half of all living species, are losing millions of acres every year. Uncounted species are lost as these habitats are destroyed. In short, there is nothing natural about today's rate of extinction.



Not too long ago, almost one quarter of the trees in the Appalachian forests were American chestnuts. They helped support not only wildlife but the people living among them. Chestnuts were an important cash crop for many families. As year-end holidays approached, nuts by the railroad car were sold and shipped to northeastern cities.

Chestnut timber, strong and rot resistant, was prized for building barns, fences, furniture, and other products. This photograph of the Shelton family (pictured above), taken around 1920, shows the size American chestnut trees once reached.

First detected in 1904, an Asian fungus to which native chestnuts had little resistance appeared in New York City trees. The blight spread quickly, and by 1950 the American chestnut was virtually extinct except for occasional root sprouts that also became infected. Organizations such as the American Chestnut Foundation are working with plant breeders to develop a disease resistant strain and restore it to the eastern forests.

**Benefits of Natural Diversity:** How many species of plants and animals are there? Although scientists have classified approximately 1.7 million organisms, they recognize that the overwhelming majority have not yet been catalogued. Between 10 and 50 million species may inhabit our planet.

None of these creatures exists in a vacuum. All living things are part of a complex, often delicately balanced network called the biosphere. The earth's biosphere, in turn, is composed of countless ecosystems, which include plants and animals and their physical environments. No one knows how the extinction of organisms will affect the other members of its ecosystem, but the removal of a single species can set off a chain reaction affecting many others. This is especially true for "keystone" species, whose loss can transform or undermine the ecological processes or fundamentally change the species composition of the wildlife community.

**The gray wolf is one such keystone species.** Photo by Gary



Kramer with USFWS. When wolves were restored to Yellowstone National Park, they started to control the park's large population of elk, which had been over consuming the willows, aspen, and other trees that grew along streams. The recovery of these trees is cooling stream flows, which benefits native trout, and

increases nesting habitat for migratory birds. Beavers now have willow branches to eat, and beaver dams create marshland habitat for otters, mink, and ducks. Wolves even benefit the threatened grizzly bear, since grizzlies find it easier to take over a wolf kill than to bring down their own elk.

**Contributions to Medicine:** One of the many tangible benefits of biological diversity has been its contributions to the field of medicine. Each living thing contains a unique reservoir of genetic material that has evolved over eons. This material cannot be retrieved or duplicated if lost. So far, scientists have investigated only a small fraction of the world's species and have just begun to unravel their chemical secrets to find possible human health benefits to mankind.

No matter how small or obscure a species, it could one day be of direct importance to us all. It was "only" a fungus that gave us penicillin, and certain plants have yielded substances used in drugs to treat heart disease, cancer, and a variety of other illnesses. More than a quarter of all prescriptions written annually in the United States contain chemicals discovered in plants and animals. If these organisms had

been destroyed before their unique chemistries were known, their secrets would have died with them.

A few hundred wild species have stocked our pharmacies with antibiotics, anti-cancer agents, pain killers, and blood thinners. The biochemistry of unexamined species is an unfathomed reservoir of new and potentially more effective substances. The reason is found in the principles of evolutionary biology. Caught in an endless “arms race” with other forms of life, these species have devised myriad ways to combat microbes and cancer-causing runaway cells. Plants and animals can make strange molecules that may never occur to a chemist. For example, the anti-cancer compound taxol, originally extracted from the bark of the Pacific yew tree is “too fiendishly complex” a chemical structure for researchers to have invented on their own, said a scientist with the U.S. National Cancer Institute. Taxol has become the standard treatment for advanced cases of ovarian cancer, which strikes thousands of women every year. But until the discovery of taxol’s effectiveness, the Pacific yew was considered a weed tree of no value and was routinely destroyed during logging operations.

Some of the most promising natural wonder drugs come from compounds not usually associated with healing: poisons. One pharmaceutical company is marketing a blood thinner based on the venom of the deadly saw-scaled viper. A protein from another Asian pit viper is being studied because it appears to inhibit the spread of melanoma cells, and a compound from the venom of some tarantula species may lead to new treatments for neurological disorders such as Parkinson’s disease.

**Biodiversity and Agriculture:** Many seemingly insignificant forms of life are beginning to show important benefits for agriculture. Farmers are using insects and other animals that prey on certain crop pests, as well as using plants containing natural-toxins that repel harmful insects. These are called “**biological controls**”, and in many cases they are a safe, effective, and less expensive alternative to synthetic chemicals.

Thomas Jefferson once wrote that “the greatest service which can be rendered any country is to add a useful plant to its culture, especially a breadgrain.” It has been estimated that there are **almost 80,000 species of edible plants, of which fewer than 20 produce 90 percent of the world’s food**. If underutilized species are conserved, they could help to feed growing populations. One grain native to the Great Lakes States, Indian wild rice, is superior in protein to most domesticated rice, and its increasing commercial production earns millions of dollars annually. Crossing it with a related



but endangered species, Texas wild rice, could result in a strain adaptable to other regions of the country.

Walker’s manioc (*Manihot walkerae*), shown at left is an endangered plant endemic to the Lower Rio Grande Valley of southern Texas and northeastern Mexico. It is closely related to an important crop plant, cassava, which is a staple food in many parts of the world. Walker’s manioc could contain genes that provide salt,

drought, cold, or disease resistance for strains of commercial cassava.

**Environmental Monitors:** Many individual species are uniquely important as indicators of environmental quality. The rapid decline in bald eagles and peregrine falcons in the mid-20th century was a dramatic warning of the dangers of DDT—a strong, once widely used pesticide that accumulates in body tissues. It hampered fertility and egg-hatching success in these species. In another example, lichens and certain plants like the eastern white pine are good indicators of excess ozone, sulfur dioxide, and other air pollutants. **Species like these can alert us to the effects of some contaminants before more damage is done.** Freshwater mussels are also very effective environmental indicators. The eastern United States boasts the richest diversity of freshwater mussels in the world. These animals are filter feeders, drawing in water and straining out food particles. Their method of feeding helps to keep our waters clean. But because mussels filter material from the water, they are often the first animals to be affected by water pollution. They tend to accumulate whatever toxins, such as chemicals in agricultural and industrial runoff, are present in their habitat. Too much pollution can eliminate the mussels. Other threats to mussel populations include siltation, the introduction of competing nonnative mussels, stream channelization and dredging, and the impoundment of free-flowing streams and rivers. Today, most native freshwater mussel species are considered to be endangered, threatened, or of special concern.

**Ecosystem Services:** As the pioneering naturalist Aldo Leopold once stated, “To keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering.” As we tinker with ecosystems through our effects on the environment, what unexpected changes could occur? One subject of increasing concern is the impacts these effects can have on “ecosystem services,” which is a term for the fundamental life-support services provided by our environment. Ecosystem services include air and water purification, detoxification and decomposition of wastes, climate regulation, regeneration of soil fertility, and the production and maintenance of biological diversity.

These are the key ingredients of our agricultural, pharmaceutical, and industrial enterprises. Such services are estimated to be worth trillions of dollars annually. Yet because most of these services are not traded in economic markets, they carry no price tags that could alert society to changes in their supply or declines in their functioning. We tend to pay attention only when they decline or fail.

Wetlands, like those at the John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge near Philadelphia, clean the water, control area flooding, and provide quality wildlife habitat. An emerging field called phytoremediation is an example of the ecosystem services provided by plants. Phytoremediation is a process that uses plants to remove, transfer, stabilize, and destroy contaminants in soil and sediment. Certain plant species known as metal hyperaccumulators have the ability to extract elements from the soil and concentrate them in the easily harvested plant stems, shoots, and leaves. The alpine pennycress, for example, doesn't just thrive on soils contaminated with zinc and cadmium; it cleans them up by removing the excess metals. In the home, houseplants under some conditions can effectively remove benzene, formaldehyde, and certain other pollutants from the air.

**Other Economic Values:** Some benefits of animals and plants can be quantified. For example, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department calls birding “the nation’s fastest growing outdoor recreation.” It estimates that birders pump an estimated \$400 million each year into the state’s economy. A

host of small rural towns host festivals to vie for the attention of these birders. Nationwide, the benefits are even more amazing. In a recent study (Birding in the United States: A Demographic and Economic Analysis), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimated that wildlife watching—not just bird watching—generated \$85 billion in economic benefits to the nation in 2001.

**Intangible Values:** If imperiled plants and animals lack a known benefit to mankind, should we care if they disappear? If a species evolves over millennia or is created by divine intent, do we have a right to cause its extinction? Would our descendants forgive us for exterminating a unique form of life? Such questions are not exclusive to scientists or philosophers. Many people believe that every creature has an intrinsic value. The loss of plant and animal species, they say, is not only shortsighted but wrong, especially since an extinct species can never be replaced. Eliminating entire species has been compared to ripping pages out of books that have not yet been read. We are accustomed to a rich diversity in nature. This diversity has provided inspiration for countless writers and artists, and all others who treasure variety in the natural world.

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#### Previous Newsletter, Dec 2006, Vol. 4, No. 2 of 4

We acknowledged three new Natural Areas Registries that encompassed 410 acres. Total Registry acreage was 43,585 for 96 Registries in 32 of 64 parishes. We covered “What is a Natural Area”, Ouachita Basin community, Operation Oak Program, and where to get wildflower seed packets.

Yellow Pitcher Plant – *Sarracenia alata* is a perennial carnivorous herb that has basal leaves only that are trumpet shaped with hood arches over the top. Insects are attracted to the trumpet leaves with sweet nectar and then become trapped inside where they decompose in the water inside. Flowers (pictured at right) are yellow and first appear in late winter and

continue into early fall that have five sepals and five petals. Picture on front page taken at Wildfire Bog Natural Area owned by James and Dale Robertson in St. Tammany Parish.

