



**A SPRING 2019 RELEASE**

# Adventures of a Louisiana Birder

One Year, Two Wings, Three Hundred Species

**MARYBETH LIMA**

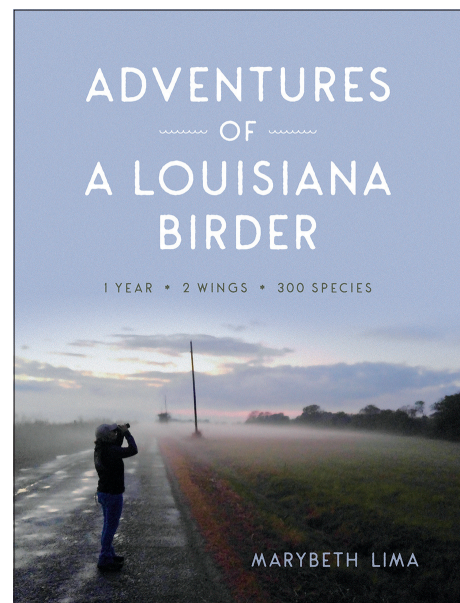
This candid and humorous chronicle shows how one woman goes from casual observer to obsessive bird nerd as she traverses Louisiana's avian paradise. In *Adventures of a Louisiana Birder*, readers follow Marybeth Lima across her adopted state in search of 300 species of birds. Bisected by the Mississippi flyway and home to 400 miles of coast, Louisiana has a variety of habitats, which serve as a beautiful backdrop to this remarkable journey.

In birding circles, some devotees attempt what is known as a "big year," a bird-sighting challenge to identify as many bird species as possible in a particular geographical area over the course of one year. Lima's initial effort amounted to 11,626 miles in sixty-one road trips to log an impressive 280 species. But on a subsequent quest to exceed her record, she endures elusive birds, embarrassing misidentifications, and hungry insects in an effort to reach her goal. In the midst of these obstacles, Lima celebrates the camaraderie and friendly competition among fellow birders, from novices to a world-renown ornithologist. Requiring both mental focus and physical agility, birdwatching becomes an active sport through Lima's narration. She vividly conveys the elation over a rare species seen or heard and the disappointment when one is narrowly missed. An appendix provides the location and date of every species she identifies.

Lima's personal experiences are interwoven with the excitement of tracking down one intriguing species after another. She faces a near-fatal burn accident to her spouse, end-of-life care for her mother-in-law, and Louisiana's great flood of 2016. In the midst of these situations, her devotion to birding provides a much-needed outlet.

"Somewhere in the roiling confluence of birds, locales, and human personalities," writes Lima, "the center of my heart sings with utter abandon." *Adventures of a Louisiana Birder* is the author's call to a deeper passion for and awareness of Louisiana's unique natural beauty and vulnerability.

Professor of biological and agricultural engineering at Louisiana State University, **MARYBETH LIMA** is author of *Building Playgrounds, Engaging Communities: Creating Safe and Happy Places for Children* and coauthor of *Play On! Evidence-based Playground Activities* and *Service-Learning: Engineering in Your Community*.



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## Q&A with Marybeth Lima

**As a professor at LSU, you have a background in agricultural engineering. How did this vocation lead you to a passion for birding?**

I think that my passion for birds is rolled up into my life-long love of nature, my sense of wonder, my love of bird sounds, and the connections that birding has allowed me to make—with people, with communities, and with the ecosystem. But one of the often-used basic sciences in my field is biology, so with that I already had some understanding of the life cycles of birds. Also, as an engineer, I love numbers—much of birding involves counting and tracking data. But my passion runs deeper than that. I have vivid memories of birds from childhood. I remember my parents stopped on the side of the road at a scenic overlook in Letchworth State Park in upstate New York, and my mom showed me the rouge hue of red-tailed hawks. From that vantage point, looking down into the gorge, I was struck with amazement at the chance to see these birds from a different perspective.

**This book captures the yearlong quest to see at least 300 species of birds that live in or migrate through Louisiana. What were some of the most elusive birds? How did you keep your spirits up when they were difficult to find?**

We saw a number of birds that are rare in Louisiana. Memorably, Charlie Lyon, a fellow birder, took us out on his boat on Cross Lake near Shreveport to see a Mew Gull he found, which was the first-ever sighting of this species in the state; we had to search for this single gull that was mixed in with a flock of about 5,000 ring-billed gulls. It took a dozen birders aboard two boats about half an hour to find this elusive bird. It can be frustrating to search for a bird and not find it. When I am thwarted in my quest, I always remind myself that any day I can bird is a great day. I enjoy every bird I see. A missed bird is a challenge, and I'm always up for that.

**You mention that birding is also an opportunity to observe people, especially fellow birders. Who are some of the memorable people you've met while pursuing this hobby?**

That's a hard question to answer because there are so many memorable people! Louisiana is home to some of the best birders in the country—people like Van Remsen, Donna Dittmann, and Steve Cardiff. Jane Patterson is Louisiana's "birder of the people," as her birding basics education and leisure classes have introduced hundreds of people around the state to the pastime. One great thing about birding is that the memory of birders is carried on by others, even after those birders are gone. George Lowery was a professor of zoology at LSU and was largely responsible for putting Louisiana birding on the map. He wrote a book on Louisiana birds in 1955 and made lasting research contributions to ornithology, especially in bird migration. Although he has been gone for more than forty years, his name still evokes awe.

**More and more, climate change and environmental problems complicate your quest. In the short and long term, how do birders cope with these challenges?**

Climate change and environmental problems indeed impact birding in Louisiana and beyond. Networks of birders in the state do a pretty good job of staying in touch on issues that affect birds and birding in the short and long term. A great resource is the climate report ([www.climate.audubon.org](http://www.climate.audubon.org)) published by the National Audubon Society, which shows the impact of climate change on bird populations. Birders can also contribute by putting their birding checklists into eBird ([www.ebird.org/home](http://www.ebird.org/home)). This site is run by Cornell University and provides a platform that allows researchers to use data collected by birders throughout the world to learn more about birds and their response to climate change and environmental impacts.