



LNPS Annual Conference, Feb 23rd-25th 2024 Speakers & Topics



Christina Calcaterra was born in St. Louis and began her career in botany at the University of Minnesota where she studied plant ID on the prairies and oak savannas at Ceder Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve. Her broad interest in botany led to work in landscaping, ecotourism, and regenerative agriculture. Following graduate work in bioinformatics, and teaching at Colorado State University, she spent 2 yrs with the National Ecological Observation Network, collecting vegetative data for public use in Alabama and N. Dakota. Since 2021, she has been at Fort Johnson (previously Ft Polk) as the Subject Matter Expert in botany, monitoring vegetation and prescribing management actions to conserve its unique flora.

Conservation on Fort Johnson: *Fort Johnson, in West Central Louisiana, harbors many quality examples of disappearing plant communities of the Gulf Plains. Under the Sikes Act, an Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan is in place for the consideration of these natural resources amid military development and operations. Many rare plants can be found thriving in the pockets of bogs, deep sandy woods, and baygalls of the Kisatchie National Forest and adjacent military lands. This presentation will take us through the unique flora found in these and other communities of Fort Johnson.*



Braden Doucet was born and raised in Maurice, Louisiana. He attended the University of Louisiana at Lafayette for his undergraduate degree in Biology. During his undergraduate years, Braden was a student researcher studying drought resistance adaptations in *Mimulus guttatus*. Braden is currently in his second semester of his Master's, where he is investigating the putative local adaptation in two Cajun Prairie grasses: *Panicum virgatum* and *Schizachyrium scoparium*.

Grassland Gumbo: Investigating Local Adaptation to Spice Up Cajun Prairie Restoration: *Braden will discuss some of the potential problems for Cajun Prairie restoration that result from its unique history, as well as how his research is working to enable more informed decision making for Cajun Prairie restoration.*



Kimberly Hamm is a third-year graduate student at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette in the Louisiana Native Bee Lab under Dr. Mark Genung. She received her M.S. in Ecological Restoration from the University of Florida, with a focus on prairie restoration and reestablishment, and is a current member of the Acadiana Master Naturalists, the Acadiana Native Plant Project, and the Cajun Prairie Habitat Preservation Society.

Can Urban Bees Take the Heat? Effects of Urban Warming on Plant-Pollinator Interactions: *Conversion of land into urban areas increases impervious surface cover, leading to greater heat retention and warmer temperatures, a phenomenon known as the urban heat island effect. Understanding how ectothermic animals like native bees respond to these novel environments is necessary given the intensification of urbanization, climate change, and concerns about native bee decline. Kimberly was awarded an LNPS Grant in 2021 to study possible changes in native bee behavior, morphology, and thermal tolerances resulting from these environmental pressures and will summarize her research to date in this presentation.*



John Hartgerink and his wife Cindy signed on as volunteers at Bluebonnet Swamp after they both retired from Exxon Mobil 20+ years ago. Hartgerink has been documenting the flora and fauna there ever since. Hartgerink was BREC's first Volunteer of the Year in 2008 and is still actively volunteering and loves teaching others about this special place.

Learning Nature's Stories through the Windows on Bluebonnet Swamp Bluebonnet Swamp is often referred to as an "island" surrounded by urban "Baton Rouge." John and his wife live close by this 100 acre park donated by the Nature Conservancy to BREC in 1997. Hartgerink has come to know every corner of the property and its inhabitants — which include plants, frogs, turtles, snakes, birds, insects and mammals. He considers himself a self-taught naturalist and has taken over 800,000 photos of the natural wonders of the park. This talk describes the lessons learned from the diverse fauna and flora as they lived their lives, reacting to each other and to changes around

them including how to find them, how to ID them and how to learn more about them and finally how to teach others about them. John describes the battle there against invasive species, which ones they are dealing with and how.



Aaron Pierce is the Nursery and Coastal Restoration Manager for Resource Environmental Solutions, one of the largest ecological restoration companies in the country founded in Baton Rouge in 2007. Aaron manages the propagation at RES' 40-acre nursery in Montegut, LA where coastal and other native plants are produced for vast restoration projects.

Coastal Plant Propagation and Restoration Work

RES has managed over 37 mitigation sites in Louisiana and Texas, restoring over 20,000 acres of wetlands, streams barrier islands, swamp, marsh and other habitats. Aaron will describe the different types of native plants grown by RES from Black Mangrove to Coastal grasses to Dune plants...and the massive nursery where these thousands of plant propagules are grown which includes a saltwater well, 15 ponds and much more and how they are transported to these difficult sites.



Dr. Aimée K. Thomas is an Asst. Professor of Biological Sciences at Loyola University in New Orleans. Recent projects have focused on spider communities in Belize, New Orleans City Park, and Jean Lafitte National Park, insect pollinators in urban landscapes, using urban landscapes as a learning lab, and STEM education in informal learning environments. Dr. Thomas currently serves on the Board of Directors for the Louisiana Master Naturalists of Greater New Orleans and co-hosts and produces a local podcast for Louisiana PBS "The Southern Naturalist" which explores wild areas of Louisiana with fellow scientists and naturalists.

How Native Plants in Louisiana and Spiders Weave a Vital Web of Life

Embark on a fascinating journey through the rich biodiversity of Louisiana's native flora and the intricate relationships that exist within this ecosystem. Louisiana, with its diverse landscapes, plays host to an incredible array of plant species, and it's these native plants that serve as the foundation for a web of life teeming with a remarkable array of creatures, including spiders. Explore the interconnectedness of the natural world as we delve into the vital roles that native plants play in maintaining ecological balance, from providing sustenance for pollinators to offering shelter for countless wildlife species. The discussion will shed light on the often underappreciated yet essential role of spiders in Louisiana's ecosystems. These eight-legged marvels contribute significantly to pest control and the overall health of local habitats. Leave with a newfound understanding of the importance of preserving native plants and the vital role that spiders play in weaving the intricate web of life in Louisiana.