How about birding? If you've never been on a birding trip it may be time to give it a try. Birding trips are offered year-round through the Lafayette Natural History Museum and are led by two experienced birders who work at the Nature Station.

Bill Fontenot, natural science curator, has been birding for five years and Paul Conover, naturalist, has three years of birding experience. Fontenot and Conover are gearing up for a full schedule of summer birding trips.

Shorebirds in Cameron Parish is offered Saturday, June 13. The expedition will explore the nearshore waters of Cameron Parish in search of gulls, terns, wading birds such as Egrets and Herons, ducks and other seabirds. Cameron Parish is the ultimate deep south birding hotspot during the spring, fall and winter months. Oddly, this birding refuge is almost completely ignored during the summer months.

Bird species and plants will be studied at a Naturalist's Tour of Chicot Park on June 26 from 6:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. In an awesome Beech-Magnolia Transitional Forest on northern Evangeline Parish, the Chicot State Park encompasses habitats that range from Cypress-Tupelo Swamps to dry Hickory Ridges. A visit to the Louisiana State Arboretum is included. This trip is led by Bill Fontenot and is for adults.

Other birding trips presented by the Lafayette Natural History Museum include Bird Walks and Wildflower Tours which are held on the first Saturday of each month at 8 a.m. Participants will be guided through the Nature Trail at the Acadiana Park to observe flowering plants and nesting bird species. These tours are free, but reservations are required.

Birds of Acadia is a workshop for ages 6 and up (parent welcome) that will answer these questions: How do birds fly? What makes them so colorful? Why do they sing? And more. Videos, natural artifacts, live specimens, and a hike down the nature trail at Acadiana Park are included. Bill Fontenot will lead this workshop which takes place Tuesday, July 14 from 2:30 p.m. at the Nature Station.

If you are interested in participating in any of these workshops call (337) 269-5844 for more information and to register. Over 40 different types of workshops are offered for children and adults this summer.

Birdwatching can be an interesting hobby, especially here in Louisiana. The state's coastal marshes and plains help make Louisiana one of the richest bird habitats in the U.S. More than half of the birds known to regularly occur in the U.S. have been recorded in Louisiana.

The novice birdwatcher should know a few of the basics and possess some basic tools when getting started. A field handbook that lists bird families and species is essential. A pair of field glasses, a note pad, birdcallers and insect repellent are also handy. A basic knowledge of the bird families is a good starting point. Learn at least one species in each family. Become familiar with general features such as posture, body shape and behavioral characteristics.

As you gain more experience and knowledge you will notice the less obvious features that distinguish various species such as unique markings, tail and bill shape, call notes, songs and behavioral characteristics. These details will help you identify the birds you see in the field.

Soon the novice birdwatcher becomes a seasoned watcher. A basic knowledge is no longer enough to satisfy your curiosity. At this point, eye masks, emarginate tails, and other markings are noted and become common language.

Bird topography, the external parts of the bird, is a technical, yet important part of your study. It is a proud day for the birdwatcher when he uses the field manual to confirm a sighting rather than to identify a sighting.

Birdwatching is enjoyable for many and some make it a lifelong hobby. Shown here are some of the coastal birds you can find in Louisiana.

The Laughing Gull is strictly a coastal species. It is the only gull that breeds in the state. The bird is about 16 inches long.

The Canada Goose is a well-known bird known also as the "Canada Honker." The Canada Goose is a large bird, about 35-40 inches long.

The Pied-Billed Grebe is better known to most by its nickname "Hell-dive." This expert diver and swimmer is 12-15 inches long.

The Great Blue Heron is the largest of the Heron Family, standing four feet tall.

The American Bittern is a marsh dweller. The 24-inch bird is very secretive and freezes when threatened.

The Laughing Gull is a very noisy gull. Its nickname is "Hah, hah, hah."