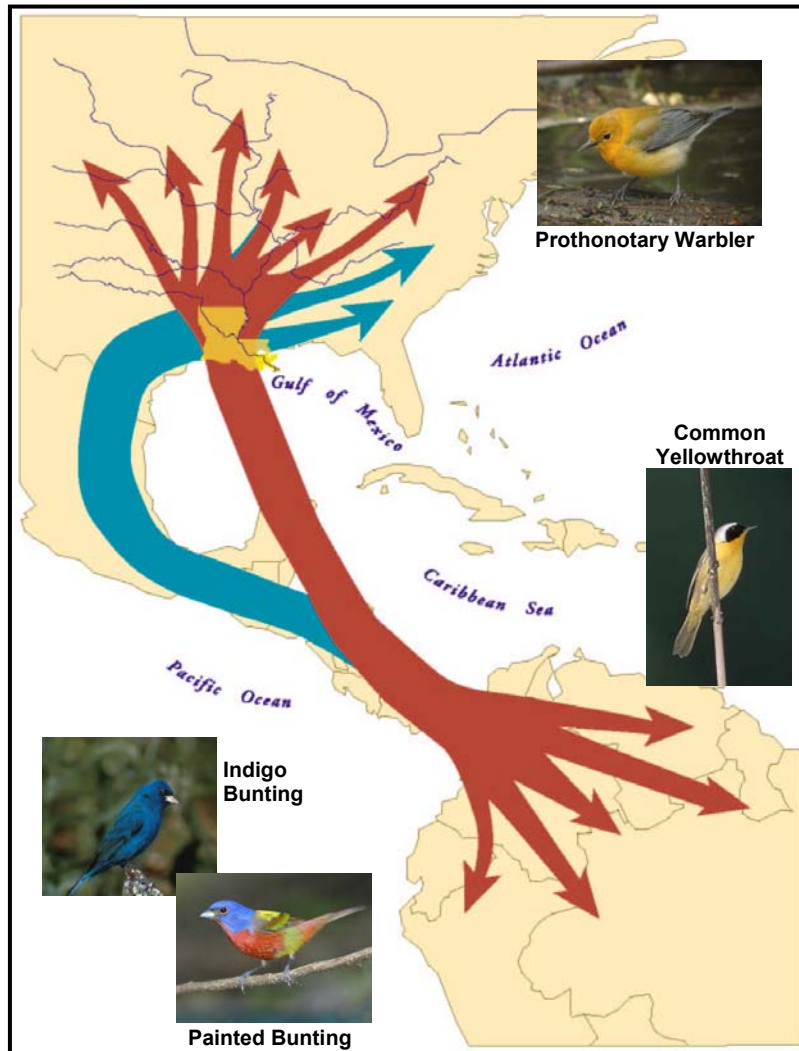




A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words: Birds: Beautiful Migrants



The Barataria-Terrebonne estuary is critical to several species of migratory birds. Several of these birds are neotropical birds, such as the Prothonotary Warbler, Indigo Bunting, Common Yellowthroat and Painted Bunting. They migrate from South America across the Gulf of Mexico to and from their breeding grounds in South America. Barataria-Terrebonne's barrier shorelines are especially important for these birds because they are the first land area the birds approach after crossing the Gulf of Mexico. This area serves as an important resting and refueling stop for these visitors.

When these birds fly over land at the Louisiana shoreline they virtually fall out of the sky from exhaustion from their long flight. When this occurs Barataria-Terrebonne's coastal habitats provide rest, food and refuge for them especially during stormy weather. Most birds stay in the southern portions of the estuary for a short time and then continue their migration north to forests where many nest and raise their young.

Getting there from here...

When migrating, most migrants fly at low altitudes, usually below 7,400 feet, but they may travel as high as 20,000 feet. The speed of flight depends largely on the species and the type of terrain they fly over. Did you know that birds fly faster when migrating? Birds also seem to fly faster in spring migrations than in the fall. Migrant birds also fly faster over water than over land. One thing is certain...every bird is different. When migrating, most birds cruise at about 20-40 mph. Common Loons are some of the fastest flyers at nearly 70 mph and Woodcocks are some of the slowest at 10 miles per hour. When flying over water, birds fly non stop until they reach land and while migrating over land they may make several stops for food and rest.

- The map above depicts the general flyway routes that neotropical migratory birds take each spring and winter. Consider the map of migratory routes. What would the advantages for a bird to fly over land (blue route) compared to over the Gulf route (red route)?
- On a map with a scale, choose a point on the Louisiana portion the map near your school and a point in a South American country of your choosing. Estimate the total distance a bird would have to fly from South America to its Louisiana destination. Estimate the distance the birds have to fly over the Gulf of Mexico
- With the distance you have determined over the Gulf of Mexico calculate the number of hours the bird has to fly without stopping if its flight speed is 30 mph. Convert that number into days.