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## ‘Feather with a heartbeat’ | Baton Rouge Audubon Society president talks hummingbirds during visit to Freshwater Elementary

David Gray | The News  
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Students in Shannon Seal's class at Freshwater Elementary pose for a photo following a visit from Jane Patterson, president of the Baton Rouge Audubon Society. The visit was organized by Krista Adams as part of her project for the Louisiana Master Naturalists of Greater Baton Rouge's (LMNGBR) fall certification program.

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DENHAM SPRINGS -- To get a sense of how big a hummingbird is, Jane Patterson told the class of second-graders to look at their thumbs.

After that, she passed around a penny for them to place in their palms.

Their thumbs — a hummingbird's size. The penny — a hummingbird's weight.

The students — amazed.

“Whoa!” exclaimed the astonished students in Shannon Seal's class.

The discussion centered around everything hummingbirds during an informative talk led by Patterson, president of the Baton Rouge Audubon Society, at Freshwater Elementary last month.

During the visit, Patterson discussed almost everything there is to know about hummingbirds: their migration patterns, their eating habits, how they sleep, how they protect themselves in the wild, and of course, their size, which Patterson said is smaller than any other bird in the world.

“They’re smaller than your thumb,” Patterson told the students. “If you hold a hummingbird in your hand, it feels like a feather with a heartbeat.”

The visit was organized by Krista Adams as part of her project for the Louisiana Master Naturalists of Greater Baton Rouge’s (LMNGBR) fall certification program. Adams’ project, “Kids Who Bird,” focuses on teaching children about birds and developing a sense of stewardship in the natural environment.

Thanks to Adams, they’ve learned a lot during this school year.

In October, Seal’s class received a visit from representatives of the LSU School of Veterinary Medicine’s Wildlife Hospital. The students were treated to an encounter with “Morty,” the Eastern Screech Owl, and “Scarlett,” the Red-Tailed Hawk.

Though there were no actual birds during Patterson’s classroom visit, there was plenty of bird talk as Patterson flew through one slide after another in her engaging PowerPoint presentation that included pictures, statistics, and short videos.

One bit of information that had the children stumped was the way hummingbirds “hum.” They don’t actually hum like we do, Patterson said. Rather, the sound comes from their wings — which flap up to 70 times a second.

“That’s fast,” cried one student.

Patterson said hummingbirds — which cover more than 340 species worldwide — move their wings in a Figure-8 formation, which allows them to fly in every direction, including upside down, and hover in one place.

“But as fast as they fly, they can’t walk,” she said. “They can only hop.”

She also discussed their eating habits, which can be quite substantial. Patterson said hummingbirds eat anywhere between “one-half and eight times their body weight” every single day.

To give it some context, Patterson compared that to one of the students eating 25-200 pounds of food a day — which can equate to about 800 chicken nuggets on the low side.

“People use the phrase, ‘eat like a bird,’” she said with a laugh. “That is bologna, because birds eat a lot.”

During the visit, Adams also gave each student a pair of binoculars, a compass, and a book about birds. After receiving their gifts, Patterson and Adams took the children outside for some bird watching.

To commemorate the visit, students were also given white "Kids Who Bird" T-shirts, which featured the name of Adams' project inside a pair of binoculars.

Adams said the donations came from friends and family as well as S and K Manufacturing, Quick Reference Manufacturing, Audubon Louisiana, and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.

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**David Gray**

Lifestyle Editor