



The

Spoonbill

January 2000
Volume 49, No. 1

MEETING CHANGE: Please read this FIRST!

In February and March, we will meet with the Houston Audubon Society at their regularly scheduled meetings. This means a change in meeting day and location.

February Meeting Program

Wednesday, February 9, 2000 7:00PM
Houston Zoological Gardens
Brown Education Center
Gate 5

Chasing Warblers by Bob and Vera Thornton

After experiencing their first fallout at High Island, bird photographers Bob and Vera Thornton were hooked on photographing warblers every spring at the migrant traps along the coast. Inspired by their success, they took on the fun and challenge of photographing all 52 species of wood warblers nesting in the US. For most of 10 years, Bob and Vera chased warblers all over the United States, Canada and Mexico. The resulting book, *Chasing Warblers*, is dedicated to the core principles of conservation and to those who are

committed to preserving critical habitat necessary to the health and continued survival of American songbirds. Tonight we will hear about their experiences in this pursuit - climbing mountains, wading through marshes, and encountering local color and culture - as well as enjoy their superb photography. Join us for a preview of the spring migration, sponsored jointly by Houston Audubon Society and The Ornithology Group of the Outdoor Nature Club.

Change the date, then save it!

Social at 7:00PM. Meeting starts at 7:30PM

Chairman's Message

David Sarkozi

I'd like to start by thanking all of you who came out for the Houston Christmas Bird Count. At the countdown dinner that night, 165 species were reported and about forty counters were there. That might be the best turnout in number of species and counters in ten years. Thanks again for making *your* Christmas Bird Count a big success.

Made any New Year's resolutions yet? How about learning more about birds? Pick a species or family and study a little of its life history. There are many good books available on the market today focused on one bird or a family of birds. Knowing more about a bird makes seeing and observing it so much richer.

How about sending your first report to the Ornithology Group Clearinghouse? We've made it easier than ever. Mike Gremilion still accepts data the good old fashion way by mail, but you can also send data to him directly via the OG website. No stamps needed. Any data the clearinghouse gets is

good data. There is no need to spend your whole birding day counting every Red-winged Blackbird you can find. Just once a month, count one of your favorite birding spots for a couple of hours.

How about becoming a volunteer for the birds? Anahuac NWR, Brazoria NWR, and Brazos Bend State Park all have active volunteer programs. Time and hands can make a big difference to these organizations.

I'm sure you can think of other resolutions. Pick one and do something extra for the birds this year.

Beginning Birding **Identification, Gather Them in Groups**

Don Richardson

The man who started me out in birding, my mentor, said to me, "You know Don, there are two sides to every field guide, the picture side and the writing side", and he was right. There is a wealth of information presented on the writing side. It is from that written material in your field guide that you can glean much of the coordinating information you need to develop the processes I am about to suggest. He taught me to organize a process for identifying birds, and once I got some organization into that process, identification became more orderly and much easier.

One thing to do to organize is to place birds in categories. Field guides have already done much of this for you since most guides are arranged in taxonomic order. This means that orders, families, and genera are grouped. Grebes are together, herons and egrets are together, tanagers are together, and so on. As you identify birds, if you can first get them into a group, you will be more able to nail down the species. Let's take a look at the general group called hawks (the order *Falconiformes*) to see how this works. This order includes all our hawk-like birds (except vultures).

Most folks know a hawk when they see one, but have a difficult time after they have reached that point. There are three groups in this order which make a great example of the "grouping" I am referring to. The three groups are actually genera and they are the genus *Accipiter*, accipiters are the woodland hunters; the genus *Buteo*, the soaring hawks; and the genus *Falco*, or falcons, the sleek fighter pilots of the hawk world. These three genera include most of the hawks we see.

Look now in your National Geographic field guide, at the brief description at the beginning of the accipiters. It tells us

"Comparatively long tails and short, rounded wings give these woodland hawks greater agility. Flight is several quick wingbeats and a glide". If we learn to look for the things mentioned here, we can recognize a hawk as an accipiter and narrow the field considerably for further identification. As we continue to examine the accipiters we discover, by studying the range maps that accompany each bird, that here on the Upper Texas Coast (UTC), we might expect two species, Coopers Hawk and Sharp-shinned Hawk. Separating these two can be a bit tricky and will probably provide the meat for a whole future article, but deciding that a hawk is an accipiter isn't too tough.

Preceding the falcons, in the same field guide, you will see the description "Long wings, which are bent back at the wrist and, except in the Crested Caracara, are narrow and pointed". It is easy to separate the falcons from the accipiters above, because the accipiters have a completely different shape to the wing. Falcons, like the accipiters, have a long tail. You'll also learn, by reading the introductory material, that "Falcons use their notched beaks to kill prey by severing its spinal column at the neck". Mean critters, those falcons. We see three of these "pointed wing" falcons on the UTC with the smallest being the ubiquitous American Kestrel, along with the Peregrine Falcon and the Merlin. Prairie Falcons occasionally wander to areas just to our west. The Crested Caracara is also a member of the genus *Falco*.

The genus *Buteo*, makes up most of our hawks and you will often see them hunting by soaring high in the air. Clark and Wheeler have written a book named "Hawks". Their book is in the Peterson series of field guides and it is not very expensive. If you intend to do much with hawks, I highly suggest this book. Their introduction to the Buteos tells us that "Buteos are all characterized by robust bodies, long broad wings, and tails of short to medium length. All soar and many hover". Our most common buteo on the UTC is the Red-tailed Hawk. The Red-shouldered Hawk nests here, and there are several other species in the *Buteo* genus present.

The point of all this, as I said, is to place birds into recognizable groups. The three genera of hawks above can be so placed by examining the general shapes of tails and wings. Accipiters have short, round wings and long tails. Buteos have long rounded wings and short to medium length tails. Finally, falcons have long pointed wings that are swept back at the wrist.

Here's an exercise. Look, if you will, at pictures of the raptors we have discussed, and find the accompanying drawings that show them in flight. See if you can pick out the wing and tail characteristics we have mentioned, and try to differentiate between them. This grouping step can be an important and helpful one. Once you have placed your hawk

in the proper group, you will have taken a big step towards its identification.

Read about similar characteristics for other bird groups. Find differences that will help you categorize the groups. Look at vireos and compare them with warblers. You'll see that there are differences in the structure of the bills and in the way they move about. Once warblers and vireos are separated, the identification of the species is much easier. Look, for example, at how much the Philadelphia Vireo, the Warbling Vireo, and the Tennessee Warbler look like each other. Knowing, at least, to separate the warbler from the two vireos will certainly help. We'll be looking at more groupings later on. You'll find that the *Myiarchus* flycatchers have a different look than other flycatchers. There are several genera among the sparrows, some with a fairly high number of species. Grouping those can cut your identification tasks by a big margin. As I said, we'll get into those as time goes on. But for now, try to think in terms of grouping birds, use the hawk discussion as an example, practice, and read.

Grouping birds into their assigned families and genera is a big help, but there are other ways to group birds to narrow down the process of identification. That leaves us with lots to talk about later on.

Don is a regular writer and lecturer about birds and teaches a beginning birding field course in conjunction with the Houston Audubon Society. Contact him at (281) 997-0485 or cdplace@concentric.net

This is the third in a series of articles that he has generously agreed to do for the Spoonbill and for our beginning birders. The first was in the October/November 1999 issue. They have followed monthly after that. With Don's permission, we will be posting these articles on the OG web-site within 30-60 days after each has appeared in our newsletter. Don appreciates your comments on these articles.

Birder of the Year

David Sarkozi

I would like to start a birder of the year competition this year. Idea is simple – the one who find the most species of birds on the Upper Texas Coast in 2000 wins "Birder of the Year". Cheryl Philips has designed a really handsome certificate. Certificates will also be awarded to the birder with the highest total for each county on the Upper Texas Coast.

The Upper Texas Coast for this competition is Brazoria, Chambers, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, and Jefferson

Counties. All birds you claim on your list have to be turned into the OG Clearinghouse. If your sighting requires notes, then you must turn those notes into the Clearinghouse.

How many birds can you find on the Upper Texas Coast in a year? That's a question I've always found interesting and want to put to the test. A quick count of the 8th edition of *A Birders Checklist of the Upper Texas Coast* lists 319 species that can be expected at least once a year on the Upper Texas Coast. Can a birder expect to find almost 320 species in the Southeast corner of Texas in just 365 days. Lets try!

BIRD WALKS ANNOUNCED! **BRAZOS BEND STATE PARK**

Robert Thacker, John Billard and Anne Shelton, volunteers at Brazos Bend State Park, are conducting birdwalks on specific **Saturdays at 9:00AM**. We meet at 40 Acre Lake restrooms. We walk to the observation tower and show and discuss the birds seen on the way. The hikes will be held on the following dates:

January 22, 2000
January 29, 2000
February 5, 2000
February 19, 2000
March 4, 2000
March 18, 2000

Bring binoculars. No children under 12 years of age, please

CONSERVATION CORNER **MAGIC RIDGE**

Brent Ortego

We Need Your Help to Conserve an Important Area for Birds & Birders

An exciting opportunity is available to help the Texas Ornithological Society purchase 70 acres of Tamaulipan scrub and marsh along the central coast at a key Neotropical Migrant Passageway, and stop it from being sold as 200+ lots for a subdivision. Magic Ridge is an old shell ridge about 300 yards inland from Lavaca Bay and about 15 miles south of Port Lavaca. It is currently subdivided into hundreds of lots and is available for sale by local realtors. The TOS has

obtained a 12-month option to purchase the best portion of the ridge in one block. Its major habitats are Tamaulipan scrub community which makes up almost half of the property and the remainder being a tidal marsh which supports such rarities as Black Rails. Hundreds of acres of tidal flats used extensively by waterbirds can be viewed from the ridge during low tide.

Many of you may remember this site as "Magic Road" or "Zimmerman Road" that was the location of several field trips during the TOS spring meeting held in Port Lavaca several years ago. Many neotrops were reported from the site during the meeting and even a stray Hooded Oriole was located there.

WHAT IS MAGIC ABOUT THE RIDGE? Picture a flock of neotropical migrants that have just spent all night flying across the Gulf and the first land they see is Matagorda Island. It is a very welcome sight but contains almost no trees. They fly northward along the island in search of suitable woodland habitat and then encounter another large water body, Lavaca Bay. Rather than fly across this water in daylight they continue along the shoreline westward across the Matagorda Island J-hook and arrive at the mainland. A few more miles of flying takes them to Magic Ridge and many land in the thick brush for rest and refueling. This event is repeated thousands of times each spring. What is also magical about the site is its location. Its bordered by tidal marshes on the east that contain a variety of rails and water birds, and extensive tidal flats on the west which are used by thousands of shorebirds and waterbirds daily in appropriate seasons. All of this can be viewed from the property.

This site is one of the northernmost tracts of Tamaulipan scrub that can be accessed by the public. It contains resident populations of Long-billed & Curve-billed Thrashers, and Bewick's Wren. Buff-bellied Hummingbirds frequent the abundant wild flowers during spring and fall, and recently it appears that White-fronted Doves may be trying to breed on site.

THE CHALLENGE. The Texas Ornithological Society is trying to raise about \$60,000 to purchase this property. **Mark Elwonger, Lily Engles, Brent Ortego, Brush Freeman, and Petra & Ladd Hockey** think enough about this project that they have pledged to match dollar-for-dollar donations from the Texas birding community up to \$15,000 to buy this property. Local industry is being approached to try to match a portion of the money produced by birders, and grants will be sought to match this large amount of private funds produced.

Let's meet this challenge and help preserve critical habitat. Any amount is welcome, but we are asking that you give as much as you can to buy Magic Ridge!

Checks should be made payable to the Texas Ornithological Society regarding Magic Ridge and sent to:

Linda Valdez
203 Simpson Road
Victoria, TX 77904

If you have any questions contact:

Brent Ortego
202 Camino Drive
Victoria, TX 77905
361-576-0022 Work
361-572-9848 Home
bortego@viptx.net

Just a reminder to get your money in the mail as soon as possible. Brent will be giving us an update on the progress toward saving this important site in a later Spoonbill. Let's help ensure that the news is good!

Clearing House Electronic Submissions

David Sarkozi

You may now submit data to the Clearing House directly on-line via the OG web site. Go to and click on "Add Records to the Clearing House"

Now, you no longer need to fill out a sighting sheet and mail it to the Clearing House editor. No stamps, nothing to mail! If you were sending in data via e-mail you don't have to type up the data, just fill in the date, county, location, and your name, then add the counts for each species in the blank by the species and click on submit.

You may also search the database from the web site.

The Clearing House data sheet may also be downloaded now from the web site.

I will be adding a form to allow you to send notes for those species that need them by the web site also. The notes will be automatically e-mailed to the Clearing House Editor and the the Checklist Committee. That should be up and running by the time *The Spoonbill* is published this month.

October 1999 CLEARINGHOUSE

Thanks to everyone who submitted these records:

CR: Cecelia Riley
DB: Dick Benoit
DLR: Don/Lee Richardson
DS: David Sarkozi
DV: Don Verser
MJA: Mike/Jan Austin
WB: Winnie Burkett
MG: Mike Gremillion
SM: Stuart Marcus
BG: Bob Galloway
DM: David Marrick
JB: J.W. Buckman
MM: Mark Magruder
BS: Bill Saulmon

Please continue to get those observations to:

Mike Gremillion
3304 Rice Blvd
Houston, TX 77005
e-mail: mgremillion@houston.rr.com

Via e-mail in this format: species, date, county, location, count, observer. Clearinghouse submission forms are available at the meeting or for download from the OG web page at <http://texasbird.simplenet.com/hog>

Pied-billed Grebe birds=17 reports=7
Eared Grebe 10/3 Brazoria() 1 DS
American White Pelican birds=150 reports=3
Brown Pelican birds=320 reports=4
Double-crested Cormorant birds=41 reports=3
Neotropic Cormorant 10/1 Galveston() 25 JB
Neotropic Cormorant 10/7 Galveston(Galveston) 15 JB
Neotropic Cormorant 10/17 Chambers(Anahuac) 3 DS
Neotropic Cormorant 10/23 Galveston() 5 JB/MM
Anhinga birds=5 reports=2
American Bittern birds=2 reports=2
Least Bittern 10/3 Chambers(Anahuac) 1 DS
Least Bittern 10/9 Chambers(Anahuac NWR) 1 DS
Least Bittern 10/17 Chambers(Anahuac) 1 DS
Great Blue Heron birds=40 reports=8
Great Egret birds=240 reports=9
Snowy Egret birds=61 reports=8
Little Blue Heron birds=11 reports=4
Tricolored Heron birds=16 reports=4
Reddish Egret birds=13 reports=2
Cattle Egret birds=16 reports=5

Green Heron birds=4 reports=4
Black-crowned Night-Heron birds=16 reports=4
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron birds=4 reports=1
White Ibis birds=106 reports=8
White-faced Ibis birds=3,055 reports=3
Roseate Spoonbill birds=21 reports=4
Black Vulture birds=238 reports=22
Turkey Vulture birds=929 reports=31
Black-bellied Whistling-Duck 10/3 Fort Bend(Brazos Bend SP) 3 DS
Black-bellied Whistling-Duck 10/9 Chambers(Anahuac NWR) 15 DS
Fulvous Whistling-Duck birds=18 reports=2
Greater White-fronted Goose birds=206 reports=2
Snow Goose birds=130 reports=2
Wood Duck 10/23 Galveston() 1 JB/MM
American Wigeon birds=1 reports=1
Mottled Duck birds=31 reports=3
Blue-winged Teal birds=15,313 reports=6
Northern Shoveler birds=29 reports=2
Green-winged Teal birds=2 reports=1
Osprey Birds = 24 reports = 17
Swallow-tailed Kite 10/10 Chambers(Smith Point) 1 WB
White-tailed Kite birds=28 reports=17
Mississippi Kite birds = 48 reports = 9
Bald Eagle 10/2 Chambers(Smith Point) 1 DB
Northern Harrier birds=363 reports=35
Sharp-shinned Hawk birds=1,887 reports=32
Cooper's Hawk birds=719 reports=31
Red-shouldered Hawk birds=14 reports=12
Broad-winged Hawk birds=6,438 reports=29
Swainson's Hawk birds=98 reports=20
White-tailed Hawk 10/3 Brazoria() 1 DS
White-tailed Hawk 10/3 Colorado(Attwater NWR) 2 DS
White-tailed Hawk 10/25 Chambers() 2 DS
Red-tailed Hawk birds=114 reports=24
Rough-legged Hawk 10/26 Chambers(Smith Point) 1 KM
Golden Eagle 10/20 Chambers(Smith Point) 1 MG
Crested Caracara 10/1 Chambers(Smith Point) 1 KM
Crested Caracara 10/27 Chambers(Anahuac) 2 DS
American Kestrel birds=1,338 reports=36
Merlin 10/1 birds = 20 reports = 13
Peregrine Falcon birds = 30 reports = 14
Clapper Rail birds=15 reports=5
King Rail 10/3 Chambers(Anahuac) 1 DS
King Rail 10/3 Brazoria() 1 DS
Sora birds=4 reports=1
Purple Gallinule 10/3 Fort Bend(Brazos Bend SP) 2 DS
Common Moorhen birds=72 reports=5
American Coot birds=9 reports=3
Black-bellied Plover birds=34 reports=5
American Golden-Plover 10/23 Chambers() 2 JB/MM
Snowy Plover 10/1 Galveston() 20 JB
Snowy Plover 10/23 Galveston() 5 JB/MM

Wilson's Plover birds=4 reports=1
 Semipalmated Plover birds=104 reports=4
 Piping Plover birds=15 reports=3
 Killdeer birds=46 reports=6
 American Oystercatcher 10/3 Brazoria() 1 DS
 American Oystercatcher 10/7 Galveston(Galveston) 4 JB
 American Oystercatcher 10/23 Galveston() 4 JB/MM
 Black-necked Stilt birds=13 reports=3
 American Avocet birds=150 reports=2
 Greater Yellowlegs birds=22 reports=7
 Lesser Yellowlegs birds=6 reports=3
 Solitary Sandpiper 10/3 Fort Bend(Brazos Bend SP) 1 DS
 Willet birds=15 reports=3
 Spotted Sandpiper birds=3 reports=3
 Whimbrel 10/5 Chambers(Smith Point) 1 BS
 Long-billed Curlew birds=24 reports=5
 Marbled Godwit 10/1 Galveston() 3 JB
 Marbled Godwit 10/7 Galveston(Galveston) 4 JB
 Marbled Godwit 10/23 Galveston() 8 JB/MM
 Ruddy Turnstone birds=8 reports=3
 Red Knot 10/3 Brazoria() 1 DS
 Red Knot 10/23 Galveston() 2 JB/MM
 Sanderling birds=12 reports=3
 Western Sandpiper birds=101 reports=2
 Least Sandpiper birds=112 reports=5
 Pectoral Sandpiper 10/3 Chambers(Anahuac) 1 DS
 Dunlin birds=7 reports=2
 Short-billed Dowitcher 10/1 Galveston() 2 JB
 Short-billed Dowitcher 10/7 Galveston(Galveston) 4 JB
 Short-billed Dowitcher 10/23 Galveston() 3 JB/MM
 Long-billed Dowitcher birds=25 reports=2
 Common Snipe birds=17 reports=5
 Laughing Gull birds=300 reports=3
 Ring-billed Gull birds=59 reports=3
 Herring Gull birds=20 reports=1
 Gull-billed Tern 10/23 Chambers() 1 JB/MM
 Gull-billed Tern 10/25 Chambers() 1 DS
 Caspian Tern birds=60 reports=3
 Royal Tern birds=152 reports=3
 Sandwich Tern birds=7 reports=2
 SCommon Tern birds=1 reports=1
 Forster's Tern birds=12 reports=3
 Least Tern 10/1 Galveston() 2 JB
 Black Skimmer birds=1,152 reports=3
 Rock Dove birds=15 reports=1
 White-winged Dove birds=8 reports=4
 Mourning Dove birds=81 reports=7
 Inca Dove birds=2 reports=2
 Yellow-billed Cuckoo birds=2 reports=2
 Barn Owl birds=1 reports=1
 Eastern Screech-Owl birds=2 reports=1
 Great Horned Owl birds=1 reports=1
 Barred Owl birds=1 reports=1
 Common Nighthawk birds=2 reports=2

Chuck-will's-widow birds=1 reports=1
 Chimney Swift birds=18 reports=2
 Ruby-throated Hummingbird birds=52 reports=3
 Rufous Hummingbird 10/23 Galveston() 2 JB/MM
 Belted Kingfisher birds=23 reports=8
 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker birds=2 reports=1
 Northern Flicker 10/23 Galveston() 1 JB/MM
 Eastern Wood-Pewee birds=1 reports=1
 Yellow-bellied Flycatcher birds=1 reports=1
 Least Flycatcher 10/3 Galveston(High Island) 1 DS
 Eastern Phoebe birds=28 reports=4
 Vermilion Flycatcher 10/1 Galveston() 1 JB
 Vermilion Flycatcher 10/1 Chambers() 30 JB
 Vermilion Flycatcher 10/1 Galveston() 5 JB
 Vermilion Flycatcher 10/3 Galveston(High Island) 1 DS
 Scissor-tailed Flycatcher 10/9 Chambers(Anahuac NWR) 25 DS
 Scissor-tailed Flycatcher 10/17 Chambers() 12 DS
 Scissor-tailed Flycatcher 10/23 Galveston() 2 JB/MM
 Loggerhead Shrike birds=73 reports=10
 Red-eyed Vireo birds=1 reports=1
 Blue Jay birds=8 reports=3
 American Crow birds=8 reports=2
 Horned Lark birds=6 reports=3
 Tree Swallow birds=5 reports=1
 Northern Rough-winged Swallow birds=28 reports=4
 Cliff Swallow 10/30 Chambers(Anahuac) 2 DS
 Barn Swallow birds=16 reports=4
 Carolina Chickadee birds=1 reports=1
 White-breasted Nuthatch 10/11 Chambers(liberty) 1 SM
 Carolina Wren birds=5 reports=2
 Bewick's Wren 10/18 Galveston(Bellaire) 1 DM
 House Wren birds=8 reports=4
 Sedge Wren birds=25 reports=1
 Marsh Wren birds=8 reports=4
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet birds=12 reports=7
 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher birds=15 reports=8
 Veery 10/31 Harris(Houston) 1 MJ
 Swainson's Thrush 10/16 Harris(West U.) 1 MG
 Wood Thrush 10/3 Galveston(Galveston) 1 DS
 Gray Catbird birds=6 reports=5
 Northern Mockingbird birds=60 reports=8
 Brown Thrasher birds=20 reports=7
 European Starling birds=144 reports=4
 Orange-crowned Warbler birds=2 reports=1
 Nashville Warbler birds=2 reports=1
 Northern Parula birds=1 reports=1
 Yellow Warbler birds=2 reports=2
 Magnolia Warbler birds=1 reports=1
 Yellow-rumped Warbler 10/23 Chambers() 6 JB/MM
 Yellow-rumped Warbler 10/23 Galveston() 10 JB/MM
 Black-throated Green Warbler birds=1 reports=1
 Black-and-white Warbler birds=2 reports=2
 American Redstart birds=4 reports=2

Membership Renewal

Mail your check and this completed form to:

Outdoor Nature Club

P.O. Box 270894

Houston, TX 77277-0894

*Many thanks to this month's contributors.
This newsletter would not have happened
without you!*

Happy New Year to All!

Name

Street Address

City

State

Zip

Phone (please include the area code)

e-mail address

New Rejoining Renewal

ONC Annual Dues (payable to ONC)

Regular \$8 Family \$15

Supporting \$40 Life \$100

Ornithology (\$14 per person in addition to ONC dues)

Total ONC/OG Dues \$ _____ |

Other Donation \$ _____ |

Total Amount Enclosed \$ _____ |

*Botany, Entomology, Conchology and Photography Group dues (\$2.00/year/group) are paid separately to group treasurers at the monthly meetings.

Northern Waterthrush birds=1 reports=1
Common Yellowthroat birds=3 reports=3
Hooded Warbler 10/3 Galveston(High Island) 1 DS
Wilson's Warbler birds=3 reports=3
Spotted Towhee 10/26 Harris(West U) 1 MG
Savannah Sparrow birds=14 reports=5
Le Conte's Sparrow 10/25 Chambers() 2 DS
Seaside Sparrow birds=152 reports=3
Swamp Sparrow birds=2 reports=1
White-throated Sparrow birds=1 reports=1
Northern Cardinal birds=10 reports=3
Rose-breasted Grosbeak 10/1 Galveston() 1 JB
Indigo Bunting birds=7 reports=3
Red-winged Blackbird birds=115 reports=4
Eastern Meadowlark birds=12 reports=6
Common Grackle birds=2 reports=1
Boat-tailed Grackle birds=9 reports=2
Great-tailed Grackle birds=205 reports=4
Brown-headed Cowbird birds=55 reports=2
BOrchard Oriole 10/9 Chambers(Anahuac NWR) 4 DS
House Sparrow birds=6 reports=2

Rare Bird Field Notes:

Swainson's Thrush: Cardinal sized bird. Head, nape back and tail grayish brown. Throat, lower breast, belly and undertail coverts buffy. Dark stripes on sides of throat. Upper breast heavily spotted with dark spots. Buff eye ring, buff on lores. Bill dark, inside of mouth bright yellow. Bird moved around in bushes, coming to waterfall to drink several times providing excellent views through scope. Similar Species: Hermit Thrush has rufous tail and lacks buff on lores. Gray-cheeked thrush lacks buff on lores, Veery is redish brown above.

An **immature Golden Eagle** was sighted above Smith Point on Oct. 20. The lighting conditions were: Bright sunlight, blue sky. Optical equipment: 10x40 Zeiss binoculars. Distance to bird: 300ft. Duration of observation: 5 minutes. Description: Very large black bird, larger than turkey vultures with which it was soaring, with long almost rectangular wings. There were white patches at the base of the primaries of both wings and a white patch at the base of the tail. The rest of the underparts were solid black. The bird was observed soaring above Smith Point with Turkey vultures and Broad-winged hawks. Similar species: Immature Bald eagles have white on the belly and no patch at the base of the primaries. Turkey vultures were flying nearby for comparison. Previous experience with this and similar species: Kyle McCaarty has seen several at Hawk Mountain.

A **Common Nighthawk** was heard in Houston on Oct. 21. Light conditions: just before dawn, about 6:00 am. Optical equipment: heard only. Distance to bird: was close. Habitat: residential neighborhood. Description: Heard only from second floor of the the building. The bird was close and heard well giving the characteristic 'whreep' call. How were similar species eliminated? Call distinctive, no other nightjar makes similar call in this area.

A **Spotted Towhee** was seen in West University in a residential yard on 10-26. Description: Robin sized bird. Head, nape,throat and upper breast black. Back black with irregularly shaped white spots. Long black tail edged in white. Wings black with broken-white wing bars. Sides flanks, and under-tail coverts reddish. Lower breast, belly and vent white. Bill dark and short. Eyes orange-brown. How were similar species eliminated? Eastern Towhee has no white on back, no wing bars and tail is tipped white.

A **Rough-Legged Hawk** was spotted at Smith Point on 10/26. At 9:25 today a hawk approached the Smith Point observation tower from the East. For a second I thought it was a harrier, they often take an approach south of the tower just over the water like that and this bird was long-winged and flapping. However, I quickly realized by its size and shape that it was a buteo. Grabbing my binos I uttered a few words of confusion as I picked out fields marks until suddenly it hit me. This was a rough-legged hawk. The wrist patches and the dark, thick band across the belly were unmistakable. Whitish mottled head, brownish appearing grayish above, very light underneath, with a dark trailing edge to the wing and wingtips, a juvenile bird. It flew by at eye level and the only thing I did not see well was the tail which was folded in. It never stopped flapping (a light, easy stroke), did not soar, and flew directly to the very tip of Smith Point. It then performed a very un-buteo-like behavior and started to cross the bay. This last action was amazing to watch. After seeing so many of the more thermal-dependent buteos turn back to go around the water it was nice to see one go across without hesitation.

An **immature male and a female Rufous Hummingbird** were seen at the Hummingbird Garden in the Smith Oaks Sanctuary at High Island on Oct. 23, 1999. Description: The male had a rufous tail tipped black. The back was a true green and rufous spotted mixture, with the rufous more pronounced on the edges. The rufous was noticeably and extensively replacing the green on the upper back. The crown was green and the wings blackish-green. The gorget consisted of a series of coppery-rufous lines with an oval patch, 1/8"-3/16", of the same color in the center. Underparts

were extensively rufous from axillaries and flanks across breast and belly. There was some white on the upper breast extending in a thin, elongated "V" onto the center of the breast and belly. The female had a mainly rufous, unspotted tail. The upperparts were much greener than the male's. The underparts were less extensively rufous than the male's. The gorget consisted of coppery-rufous lines. The bills of both birds were black, essentially straight, and about the same length as that of a nearby Rubythroat's. Allen's hummingbird was not explicitly eliminated, but is considered to be a very remote possibility.

November 1999 CLEARINGHOUSE

Thanks to everyone who submitted these records:

CR: Cecelia Riley
 DB: Dick Benoit
 DLR: Don/Lee Richardson
 DS: David Sarkozi
 DV: Don Verser
 MJA: Mike/Jan Austin
 WB: Winnie Burkett
 MG: Mike Gremillion
 SM: Stuart Marcus
 BG: Bob Galloway
 DM: David Merrick ←
 JWB: J.W. Buckman
 MM: Mark Magruder
 BS: Bill Saulmon
 DB: Daniel Brooks
 JH: Jean Harwell
 BH: Bill Harwell
 RT: Rob Thacker
 JB: John Billard
 AS: Anne Shelton
 RW: Rick Wilson

Pied-billed Grebe birds=23 reports=5
 American White Pelican birds=900 reports=4
 Brown Pelican birds=310 reports=5
 Double-crested Cormorant birds=131 reports=6
 Neotropical Cormorant 11/7 Chambers(Anahuac) 1 DS
 Anhinga birds=1 reports=1
 American Bittern birds=1 reports=1
 Great Blue Heron birds=28 reports=10
 Great Egret birds=30 reports=10
 Snowy Egret birds=14 reports=5
 Little Blue Heron birds=10 reports=3

Cattle Egret birds=5 reports=1
 White-faced Ibis 11/6 Brazoria(Quintana) 1 RT
 Black Vulture birds=131 reports=8
 Turkey Vulture birds=409 reports=15
 Black-bellied Whistling-Duck 11/6 Fort Bend(Brazos Bend) 25 RT
 Black-bellied Whistling-Duck 11/6 Fort Bend(Brazos Bend) 4 RW
 Black-bellied Whistling-Duck 11/20 Fort Bend(Brazos Bend) 10 RT/JB/AS
 Greater White-fronted Goose birds=117 reports=2
 Snow Goose birds=2,397 reports=4
 Canada Goose birds=5 reports=1
 Wood Duck 11/6 Fort Bend(Brazos Bend) 1 RT
 Mottled Duck birds=4 reports=1
 Blue-winged Teal birds=25 reports=2
 Northern Shoveler birds=32 reports=4
 Green-winged Teal birds=150 reports=1
 Ring-necked Duck 11/6 Fort Bend(Brazos Bend) 14 RW
 Ruddy Duck birds=31 reports=2
 Osprey 11/1 Chambers(Smith Point) 2 KM
 Swallow-tailed Kite 11/6 Chambers(Anahuac) 1 DB
 White-tailed Kite birds=18 reports=6
 Bald Eagle birds=2 reports=2
 Northern Harrier birds=112 reports=21
 Sharp-shinned Hawk birds=71 reports=13
 Cooper's Hawk birds=86 reports=11
 Red-shouldered Hawk birds=7 reports=7
 Broad-winged Hawk birds=41 reports=9
 Swainson's Hawk birds=5 reports=2
 White-tailed Hawk 11/9 Chambers(Smith Point) 1 KM
 Red-tailed Hawk birds=136 reports=20
 Rough-legged Hawk 11/9 Chambers(Smith Point) 1 KM
 Crested Caracara birds=2 reports=1
 American Kestrel birds=107 reports=18
 Merlin 11/1 Chambers(Smith Point) 1 KM
 Merlin 11/2 Chambers(Smith Point) 1 KM
 Merlin 11/4 Chambers(Smith Point) 1 KM
 Merlin 11/9 Chambers(Smith Point) 1 KM
 Merlin 11/28 Waller() 1 JH/BH
 Peregrine Falcon 11/3 Chambers(Smith Point) 1 KM
 Peregrine Falcon 11/24 Galveston() 1 JH/BH
 Northern Bobwhite birds=5 reports=2
 Clapper Rail birds=4 reports=1
 King Rail 11/24 Galveston() 1 JH/BH
 Sora birds=2 reports=1
 Common Moorhen birds=86 reports=4
 American Coot birds=57 reports=4
 Sandhill Crane 11/6 Fort Bend(Brazos Bend) 6 RT
 Sandhill Crane 11/20 Fort Bend(Brazos Bend) 2 RT/JB/AS
 Sandhill Crane 11/24 Galveston() 5 JH/BH
 Black-bellied Plover 11/11 Galveston() 1 JH/BH
 Black-bellied Plover 11/23 Galveston() 1 JH/BH
 Semipalmated Plover birds=1 reports=1

Killdeer birds=11 reports=7
 American Oystercatcher 11/11 Galveston() 2 RT
 Black-necked Stilt 11/6 Brazoria(Quintana) 5 RT
 Black-necked Stilt 11/7 Chambers(Anahuac) 6 DS
 Black-necked Stilt 11/10 Galveston() 1 JH/BH
 Black-necked Stilt 11/11 Galveston() 1 JH/BH
 Black-necked Stilt 11/23 Galveston(E. Bch.) 4 RT
 American Avocet birds=1 reports=1
 Greater Yellowlegs birds=12 reports=4
 Lesser Yellowlegs birds=6 reports=2
 Willet birds=11 reports=2
 Long-billed Curlew birds=7 reports=2
 Marbled Godwit 11/23 Galveston() 4 RT
 Ruddy Turnstone birds=21 reports=2
 Sanderling birds=42 reports=3
 dowitcher species birds=31 reports=2
 Common Snipe 11/28 Harris() 1 RT
 Laughing Gull birds=104 reports=5
 Franklin's Gull birds=1 reports=1
 Ring-billed Gull birds=4 reports=4
 Herring Gull birds=1 reports=1
 Gull-billed Tern 11/24 Galveston() 4 RT
 Caspian Tern birds=10 reports=4
 Royal Tern birds=9 reports=2
 Sandwich Tern 11/6 Brazoria(Quintana) 1 RT
 Forster's Tern birds=7 reports=3
 Black Skimmer birds=3 reports=3
 Rock Dove birds=1 reports=1
 Eurasian Collared-Dove 11/6 Fort Bend(Brazos Bend) 1 RW
 White-winged Dove birds=1 reports=1
 Mourning Dove birds=11 reports=7
 Inca Dove birds=1 reports=1
 Common Ground-Dove 11/28 Harris() 2 RT
 Eastern Screech-Owl birds=2 reports=1
 Great Horned Owl birds=1 reports=1
 Barred Owl birds=1 reports=1
 Common Nighthawk 11/8 Harris(Houston) 1 DS
 Buff-bellied Hummingbird 11/6 Brazoria(Quintana) 1 RT
 Belted Kingfisher birds=10 reports=5
 Red-headed Woodpecker 11/28 Waller() 1 JH/BH
 Red-bellied Woodpecker birds=7 reports=3
 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker birds=2 reports=1
 Downy Woodpecker birds=5 reports=3
 Northern Flicker birds=2 reports=1
 Pileated Woodpecker birds=1 reports=1
 Eastern Wood-Pewee 11/11 Galveston() 1 JH/BH
 Eastern Phoebe birds=29 reports=8
 Vermilion Flycatcher birds=5 reports=1
 Loggerhead Shrike birds=13 reports=7
 White-eyed Vireo birds=1 reports=1
 solitary vireo species 11/24 Galveston(HI) 2 JH/BH
 Yellow-throated Vireo 11/24 Galveston(HI) 1 JH/BH
 Blue Jay birds=8 reports=3
 American Crow birds=27 reports=5

Horned Lark birds=2 reports=2
 Carolina Chickadee birds=11 reports=2
 Tufted Titmouse birds=12 reports=4
 Brown Creeper 11/11 Galveston(HI) 2 JH/BH
 Carolina Wren birds=8 reports=3
 House Wren birds=2 reports=2
 Sedge Wren birds=30 reports=1
 Marsh Wren birds=2 reports=1
 Golden-crowned Kinglet birds=2 reports=2
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet birds=13 reports=4
 American Robin 11/6 Fort Bend(Brazos Bend) 1 RW
 Gray Catbird birds=1 reports=1
 Northern Mockingbird birds=7 reports=7
 Brown Thrasher birds=2 reports=1
 European Starling birds=155 reports=6
 Orange-crowned Warbler birds=1 reports=1
 Yellow-rumped Warbler birds=127 reports=8
 Pine Warbler birds=17 reports=1
 Vesper Sparrow birds=25 reports=1
 Savannah Sparrow birds=222 reports=6
 Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow 11/26 Chambers(Anahuac) 6 DS
 Seaside Sparrow birds=15 reports=1
 Swamp Sparrow birds=2 reports=1
 White-crowned Sparrow birds=25 reports=1
 Northern Cardinal birds=66 reports=5
 Indigo Bunting birds=1 reports=1
 Red-winged Blackbird birds=343 reports=6
 Eastern Meadowlark birds=2 reports=2
 Brewer's Blackbird birds=35 reports=1
 Great-tailed Grackle birds=17 reports=5
 Brown-headed Cowbird birds=300 reports=1
 American Goldfinch 11/20 Fort Bend(Brazos Bend) 40 RT/JB/AS

Again, thanks to the people who went to the trouble to send these reports in.

Good Birding! to the people who will send next month's reports in.

Activity Reminder List

(These activities or field trips have been announced in detail in previous issues of the Spoonbill.)

Saturday-Saturday June 10-17, 2000 **CFD**
OG Mexico Field Trip: See July 1999 Spoonbill for details. Contact Michael Delesantro at 956-969-8610 or mdele@worldnet.att.net. Fees.

Ongoing Programs

Winter Raptor Monitoring

This program was described in detail in the July 1999 Spoonbill. Designed and conducted by David Sarkozi, it will provide important information about raptor populations on the Upper Texas Gulf Coast. Participation requires birding a 25 mile route with 50 stops once during the survey period. Surveys will be conducted during the six weeks between January 1 and February 15, 2000.

For more details and to sign-up for this important OG program, call David Sarkozi at 713-520-5906 or e-mail him at dsarkozi@flash.net. All volunteers will be accepted.

December 1999 Meeting of the Ornithology Group Pat Pease, Recording Secretary

An informative and helpful learning corner, conducted by Dr. Marrack, preceded the meeting.

Chairman David Sarkozi conducted the meeting:

Interesting birds seen:

Acorn Woodpecker at Huntsville Stare Park
2 Osprey - Studewood at White Oak Bayou
Henslow Sparrow at Brazos Bend

Xmas Bird Counts – contact P. D. Hulce for specific team information:

Sign up sheets were put out for Freeport CBC on Dec. 19

Houston CBC on Dec. 18

Bill Godley needs volunteers for CBC in Laredo

Next month's OG program will be a slide show by several OG members. If you have interesting slides you would like to share with the group at this meeting, contact Skip Almony.

Question raised concerning sponsorship of a junior team during the Great Texas Birding Classic. Children for 8 – 13 years can participate. They need adult supervisors to assist. Is anyone in OG interested in participating as sponsor or supervisor?

Motion to increase dues by \$2 to cover the additional cost for getting out the Spoonbill.

Discussion: A mail sorting company will be hired to sort and mail. We no longer have volunteers who are willing to take on this time-consuming job. We will probably lose some members if we raise dues.

Motion passed - majority yes, one No

Upcoming Field Trips:

Dec. 11 – Quintana Jetty lead by David Sarkozi

Jan. 8 – West Harris County lead by David Bradford

Program: Willie Sekula, one of our leading authorities on Gulls.

Some good places to look for Gulls: Landfills – Brownsville, BFI landfill at LaMarque (also the racetrack at LaMarque). Inland on the inland lakes.

Peter Grant's book (2nd edition) is best guide for Gulls

Also, *Terns of Europe and North America* by Olsen and Larson.

March Meeting

Wednesday, March 8, 2000 7:00PM Houston Zoological Gardens, Brown Education Center, Gate 5. **Saving the Cranes of the World** by George Archibald, the director of the International Crane Foundation.

2000 MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS *TIME TO SEND THEM IN!*

It's that time again. Time to renew your Outdoor Nature Club and Ornithology Group membership. While you are at it, invite a new member. Please note that Ornithology Group dues have increased by \$2.00 this year to \$14.00 to cover the increased costs of mailing the Spoonbill.

Some people have already sent in their 2000 membership dues using the old OG amount of \$12.00. If this means you: To remedy this situation, please either give Pat Pease your remaining \$2.00 at the next meeting or send it into the address below in the Membership Renewal Form.

About the Ornithology Group

The Ornithology Group (OG) is a member of the Outdoor Nature Club (ONC), a non-profit organization dedicated to providing greater knowledge about the environment and wildlife on the Upper Texas Coast.

The OG is a club of individuals interested in birds, birding, and bird watching. Some members focus on bird identification and listing, some enjoy studying bird behavior and habitat, and some just enjoy watching birds. The OG is organized to accommodate all of these diverse birding interests. Members also benefit from the synergism of getting together to share knowledge and interests during the club's activities. OG activities make learning about birds fun!

Officers:

Chairman	David Sarkozi	713-520-5906
Vice-Chairman	Skip Almone	713-524-4285
Secretary	Pat Pease	713-789-3306
Treasurer	Bob Simmons	713-776-2511
Clearinghouse	Mike Gremillion	713-665-8502
Spoonbill Editor	DK Smith	713-522-7990

To Start or Renew Membership:

Members receive both the Spoonbill and the ONC Nature Notes. Send us a note containing the following information along with \$22.00 annual dues:

Your name
Your address: street, city, state, zip
Your telephone
Your e-mail

Send this to: Outdoor Nature Club
PO Box 270894
Houston TX 77277-0894

You can also enroll from our web site.

OG Website: <http://texasbirding.simplenet.com/hog/>

To add your name to our e-mail list:
Send a message to listserv@listserv.uh.edu. On the first line of the message put: "subscribe HOUSTON-OG your_firstname your_lastname. You will get a confirmation echoed back in a few minutes.

Clearing House List Submissions:

Birds for the Clearing House list can be sent to:

Mike Gremillion
3304 Rice Blvd
Houston, TX 77005
e-mail: mgremillion@houston.rr.com

Clearinghouse submission forms are available at the meeting or for download from the OG web page at <http://texasbird.simplenet.com/hog>

You can also send in sighting information via e-mail in this format: species, date, county, location, count, observer.

Newsletter Submissions

Newsletter submissions can be sent to:

DK Smith
1657 Bonnie Brae #3
Houston, TX 77006
e-mail: smithdk@us.ibm.com

Via e-mail, please send the file in "RTF" format. The Spoonbill uses 10 point Times New Roman font, if you happen to think about it.

Rare Bird Hot Line:

Texas Society Rare Bird Alert: 713-369-9673

**Outdoor Nature Club
Ornithology Group
P.O. Box 270894
Houston, TX 77277-0894**

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