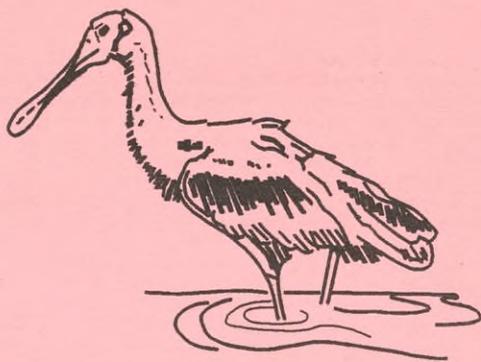


• The Spoonbill



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Judith Mueller Boyce, Editor; Don Richardson, Technical Consultant

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COMING EVENTS

Wednesday, September 4: ONC PHOTOGRAPHY GROUP MEETING. 7:30 P.M. Bayou Manor Auditorium, 4141 S. Braeswood Blvd. Lynn and Mike Noel will present a slide program on the "Birds of Island Continents."

Monday, September 9: ORNITHOLOGY GROUP MEETING. 7:30 P.M. Harris County Bayland Community Center. OG member, Bert du Plessis, owner of Fish Eagle Safaris, will present a program on the birds of southern Africa. His program will compare the birds of Texas and southern Africa--species found in both areas and species pairs such as African/Black Skimmer and Bald/Fish Eagle. A birder for ten years, Bert served in the diplomatic field and in public relations and advertising before starting Fish Eagle Safaris, a travel service specializing in birding trips to southern Africa. Born in South Africa, Bert currently lives in Houston with his wife and two sons. Learning Corner begins at 7:00 P.M.

Thursday-Sunday, September 12-15: THIRD ANNUAL HUMMER/BIRD CELEBRATION. If you missed the last two Hummer/Bird Celebrations held in Rockport/Fulton, you should make a special effort to attend this year. Activities begin Thursday, September 12 with Jesse Grantham speaking at 7:30 P.M. and concludes Sunday, September 15. The four-day extravaganza set during the fall migration of thousands of hummingbirds, includes workshops, programs, field trips, boat trips, booths and certainly, plenty of hummingbirds.

Saturday, September 21: 1991 SIXTH ANNUAL TEXAS COASTAL CLEANUP AND OG FIELD TRIP to Bolivar Flats and High Island. Meet at Bolivar Flats at 7:30 A.M. for some pre-cleanup birding with our leader for the day, Bob Behrstock. We will clean our cherished "Flats" from 9:00 A.M. until Noon. Gloves, sunscreen and water are highly recommended! Here is your opportunity to improve the bird's environment at Bolivar Flats and the chance to show others you a concerned birder. Please join us for this important event. After the cleanup we will bird High Island for migrants.

Monday, October 7: ORNITHOLOGY GROUP MEETING. 7:30 P.M. Harris County Bayland Community Center. Gene Blacklock will present "Dynamic Mysteries of Migration." A self-taught naturalist, Gene is one of the founders of the Colonial Waterbird Society of Texas and former museum curator for the Welder Wildlife Refuge. His program will focus on the "hows" and "whys" of migration as we now understand it.

Saturday, October 19: OG FIELD TRIP TO ANAHUAC NWR, HIGH ISLAND AND CANDY ABSHIER WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA (aka Smith Point). At Anahuac we will view waterfowl and if we're lucky, Wood Storks. We'll look for migrating passerines at High Island and raptors at Smith Point, which opened to the public September 1, 1991. Assisting at Smith Point will be nearby resident, Joe Whitehead. This is a trip not to be missed. Meet our leader, Don Richardson, at White Memorial Park at 7:30 A.M. To reach the park take I-10 East to the Hankamer exit, State Highway 61. Go south to the entrance of the park on your right just south of I-10. Bring food and insect repellent for this full day of birding. Questions? Call David Bradford, 855-2615.

NEWS BRIEFS

AND YARD REPORTS

.....THE 1991 UPPER TEXAS COAST HAWK COUNT will be held at the Candy Abshier Wildlife Management Area (Smith Point) daily from September 20 through October 10. This time period represents peak fall raptor migration along the UTC, and Smith Point is a great place to view the birds as they head south. Our efforts will aid the Hawk Migration Association of North America as it tracks the flow of raptors from Louisiana to the Texas Coastal Bend. Volunteers are needed for both weekdays and weekends. For further information, contact Frank Peace (870-8238) or Gail Luckner (328-6236).

.....THE 1991 TEXAS COASTAL BEND HAWKWATCH will be held at Hazel Bazemore County Park in Corpus Christi at peak migration times of September 19-22 and September 28-29. Officials hope to man the hawkwatch from September 15 through October 15. Volunteers may contact John Economy at (515) 521-7843.

.....CHRISTMAS IN MEXICO! Sam House, who is very familiar with Christmas Count areas in Mexico, has agreed to lead a group of OG members on a birding expedition into Mexico between Christmas and New Year's. We will be involved with some Christmas Counts and will spend the rest of the time searching for Mexican species with Sam. If you are interested in participating, please contact David Bradford at 855-2615 as soon as possible so that the necessary arrangements can be made. Space is limited.

.....Many of you who attend the August program may have gotten the impression that Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks can be distinguished in flight by the shape of their tails (rounded vs. squared). Although our speaker, John Economidy, noted that other characteristics were more reliable. Be aware that this is considered a highly unreliable field mark by some experts. In particular, see the May 1979 issue of American Birds, pp. 236-240, for an excellent discussion of this field mark. Bob Honig

.....Just sitting there, a hummingbird breathes 250 times a minute.

.....TWO BIRD SEED SALES THIS FALL! Piney Woods Wildlife Society holds its annual bird seed sale on October 19. Proceeds are used to benefit environmental projects, such as a \$500 gift in June of 1991 to the Texas Breeding Bird Atlas Project. For information call Connie Blakley in the evening at 358-5407 or Emma Williams during the day at 353-7661. The Houston Arboretum & Nature Center's bird seed sale ends November 2. Orders can be placed with the arboretum until October 11. Proceeds will benefit the nature education and conservation programs of the arboretum. For more information call 681-8433. Both of these bird seed sales offer a variety of quality bird seeds and mixes at competitive prices.

.....Consumer advocate, Ralph Nader, said his mother taught him the value of things. "She took us out in the yard one day and asked us if we knew the price of eggs, of apples, of bananas. Then she asked us to put a price on clean air, the sunshine, the songs of birds--and we were stunned."

IN MEMORIAM

Our friend and fellow birder, Jerry Patrick passed away July 21, 1991. Jerry served as OG Treasurer for three years, and he contributed to The Spoonbill now and then. For several years Nancy and Jerry graciously led the Rockport winter field trips which many of us enjoyed. Jerry was also instrumental in organizing mid-week birding trips for those who were interested and able to participate. Jerry, you were a good friend and you will be greatly missed.

NOEL'S NICHE LOOKING BACK

By Noel Pettingell
10 YEARS AGO/FROM AUGUST 1981 SPOONBILL

BIRD SOUNDS: PART I An Alternate Dimension in Field Identification
by Randy Pinkston

Bird vocalizations are usually categorized as either songs or calls. Songs are generally of long duration and they form a distinct pattern of syllables and notes through time. The Carolina Wren's "tea-kettle--tea-kettle--tea-kettle--tea" and the Cardinal's "birdy-birdy-birdy" are good examples. A bird's song, like a man's deep voice, is a secondary sexual characteristic: it is under the control of male sex hormones and it's functions are primarily reproductive (the analogy has it's limits, of course).

Songs and calls are produced from a structure in the bird's throat called a syrinx, but distinctive sounds may be produced in other ways. No doubt most of us have heard the explosive "whoom" of a male Common Nighthawk in aerial display. The sound reminds me of a quick trumpet blast. It is produced by the sudden rush of air through the wing feathers as he checks his dive. Male hummingbirds of several western species are characterized by strongly attenuated outer wing and/or tail feathers which cut the air to produce distinctive sounds. Consider the woodpeckers. Many species reveal their identity by telltale patterns of drumming on trees. The list of examples could go on and on.

No matter how you categorize and label their sounds, the point is, birds can be identified by sound oftentimes more readily than by visual field marks, and usually with equal certainty. The imitations of mimic thrushes (mockingbirds and allies), starlings and Blue Jays may arouse the curiosity of an experienced listener for a brief time, but they rarely fool anyone completely. Just last month I thought a Kestrel was calling from my backyard. I became suspect when suddenly a Killdeer, and then a White-eyed Vireo called from the same location in rapid succession.

Obviously, the easiest and fastest way to learn birds by sound is to bird with someone who can point them out to you. Even if you are lucky enough to be in that situation though, individual study is necessary. Unlike learning birds by their visual marks, in which you can fall back on a field guide if you forget, to really learn birds by their sounds requires great concentration over a relatively long period of time.

ARTICLES

MINUTES OF AUGUST 5, 1991 OG MEETING
Christine Bourgeois, Secretary

Chairman Bob Honig opened the meeting with the announcement of Peggy Milstead's decision to retire as Membership Chairperson. Sara Griffing has volunteered to take over Membership duties. Bob stated that a new Librarian is needed. Don Richardson offered to build a cabinet to suit anyone who volunteered to be Librarian.

OG Treasurer Ed Lebeau summarized the summer's financial business: In-\$29.00 Out-\$198.45. Total Assets-\$7596.61. Detailed financial statements are available on request.

Ed Rozenburg announced that because of a "bureaucratic glitch," Phillips Petroleum cannot pay for the folding and cutting of the Checklists at this time. The OG will be reimbursed when the situation is resolved. The Checklists have been cut and folded at a cost of \$947.52. Ed made a motion to vote on this at the October 5 meeting. The motion was seconded.

Bob Honig asked if anyone had seen any good birds lately. Noted were three albino crows near the Anahuac exit off of I-10. Sightings of House Finches and their increase were discussed. Wood Storks have been seen south of Shoveler Pond at Anahuac and at the San Jacinto Monument.

John Economidy, Texas Regional Editor for the Hawk Migration Association of North America, presented his program on hawk migration and the status of raptors in Texas. The program was a treat! John's great slides were presented with interesting stories and his enthusiasm was contagious.

A WEEK AT RANCHO DEL CIELO
by Ellen Red

Perhaps like me you have heard birders speaking of Rancho del Cielo. In November there is always someone recruiting participants for a Christmas Count there. Also over the years a number of my friends have gone there on trips led by Fred and Marie Webster of Austin. They have come back marveling over the wonders of the northernmost tropical cloud forest, set in the mountains.

When Caroline Callery called me that there was a last minute cancellation for a trip there in June, I decided it was time for me to see this place. We met the Websters and others in Brownsville, and we all caravanned for two hundred miles into Mexico, ending south of Victoria at Gomez Farias. There we parked our cars in a guarded spot and transferred ourselves and our luggage into two waiting trucks.

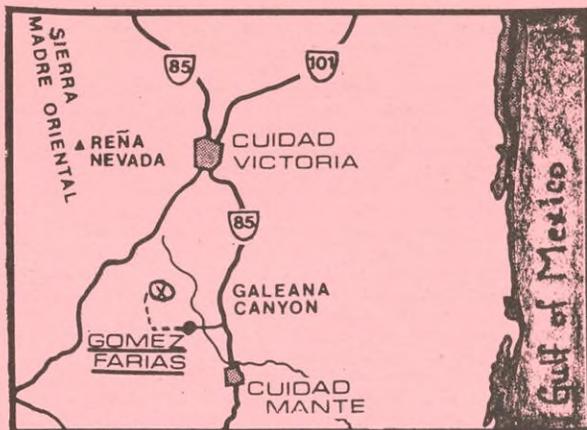
All twenty of us found seating in the trucks, and we were advised to hang on tight. It was only seven miles to Rancho del Cielo. An easy ride, we thought. Wrong! The road was very steep and rocky, through dense forest. We were thrown back and forth, as the truck slowly inched forward over rocks and tree roots. After an hour we stopped for an adjustment to one of the trucks. "Are we almost there?" I asked. "We're exactly half way," answered our young driver. He was a student at Texas Southmost College in Brownsville and was there under the direction of the Gorgas Science Society, which operates the ranch for education and research.

After another hour on that tortuous road, we finally arrived at our destination. A large clearing in the forest revealed some unpainted wooden buildings set around an area interspersed with beautiful hydrangea and blue agapanthas. It was much cooler now that we were at a higher elevation, about 3700 feet. We were immediately assigned to our cabins which were up a slight hill. Caroline and I were to share with four others a house with three rooms, a bath and a porch. There was a large central room with a stove, sink and table with a bedroom on either side. From our porch we could see the dining hall and nearby "Harrison Hall." The latter was used for a library and meeting place. As we surveyed the rustic scene, we noticed a hummingbird feeding on the flowers in front of us. We reached for ours binoculars and discovered a Red-billed Azurecrown. The porch proved to be a great birding spot. Stripe-backed Tanagers and Tufted Flycatchers were nesting in the trees towering above us, and a Rufous-capped Brush Finch perched every morning on a bush right by the porch steps and sang his melodious song.

We gathered for supper and heard some rules. The ranch area was circled by a wide cleared space that was called a "brecha." It was for fire prevention, but it also defined the area. We were not to go beyond it until we had learned something of the area, and then not without at least three persons. It was easy to get lost in these forests. Other rules concerned the use of water. Although there was running water, it was for washing and showering only. Pure water for drinking was provided for each cabin in a bucket with a ladle. The source of all water at the ranch is rainwater collected in a cistern, and we were advised to use the running water sparingly.

The first night I was surprised at how cool it was. The blanket provided felt good. Also, since there are no screens on the cabin windows, I was pleasantly surprised that there are no insects at night. There are mosquitoes in the woods during the day, but they are not active at night.

Breakfast was served at eight, but most of us were out at dawn to explore. Singing quail and Thicket Tinamou could be heard in the underbrush as we walked to the Lookout. There we found a platform where we looked out over the plains far below and watched the sun rise. Later in the day we saw Vaux's Swifts and a Plumbeous Kite from this spot. The quail and tinamou were seen during the week by a few who sat quietly and called them in.



Each day Fred and Marie Webster led field trips around the area. We found a large open space which the original owner had cleared for farming. In the clearing now was an orchard and a profusion of flowers growing in the grass. Birds such as Black-headed Orioles, Blue Mockingbirds and Melodious Blackbirds were seen here, as well as hummingbirds, flocks of Black-headed Siskins and occasionally Mountain Trogons.

Our field trips included walking along some part of the brecha. The Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush could always be heard, and gradually we all saw one. White-throated Robins could also be seen. They were much shyer than the Clay-colored variety, which were everywhere. Often Fred led us on paths to some area beyond the brecha. On one of these trails we found a Blue-crowned Motmot, which sat still for all to see. Another day Marie took us to an overlook, where a prehistoric palm-like plant called a Cycad grows. Looking out over the plains we saw several species of hawks and some White-crowned Parrots.

The trees in these mountains are sweet-gum, magnolia, hickory and walnut at their southernmost limits. Some South American trees such as the Podocarpus and certain orchids and bromeliads are at their northernmost limits. The predominant oak has a jagged, oval leaf and grows to towering heights. Clouds often drift through the forest providing moisture. We also had some rain, but it came at night. I never had to use my poncho.

We often heard a Mottled Owl in the camp. One night Caroline played a tape of its call, and after a time of calling back and forth we all got a good look at it in the beam of a flashlight. She also, on another occasion, called in the Least Pygmy Owl.

The group took one side trip to the dry side of the mountains where some different birds such as the Bumblebee Hummingbird and the Gray Silky-Flycatcher were seen. We had come far away from civilization. We stopped at a small village that used only animals for transportation, no automobiles there at all.

Needless to add, I very much enjoyed my stay at Rancho del Cielo. The meals, which were prepared by the students from Texas Southmost College, were all delicious. Larry Lof, the director, does a superb job of running the ranch. When you remember that all building materials, equipment and food have to come up that primitive road by truck, it seems a miracle that such a wonderful place exists at all. The history of how it came to be is another story. Many folks have invested their lives to save that unique bit of cloud forest. I urge you to go experience it for yourself.

[For information about trips to Rancho del Cielo write or call Fred and Marie Webster, 4926 Strass Drive, Austin, Texas 78731, (512) 451-1669. Two trips are planned for June of 1992. Space is available on one of the trips. Editor]

Bird-watching is almost synonymous with harmless eccentricity, a passion that keeps its practitioners from more destructive vices. There is something faintly comical about a group of people, often middle-aged, standing in field or wood with binoculars raised toward a tree branch on which sits a small, mouse-colored organism of the sort a contributing editor here calls, "Tweety birds." To the movers and shakers, talking into their car telephones as they race to the airport, birders are irrelevant to the real world. Yet these are the meek who may not so much inherit the Earth as change its future. Sensibly dressed kooks are banding together to save the miner's canary; if they succeed, they will ineluctably save the miner as well.

Birders tend to be low profile, and no one is sure how many there are. Only about 50,000 take part in the annual Christmas counts or subscribe to such serious journals as *American Birds*. But 600,000 field guides are sold every year, and birders spend an estimated \$4 billion dollars traveling to where the wildlife is. The 60 million Americans who feed birds spend another \$500 million annually for more than a million tons of birdseed. Like bitterns hiding in the reeds, they are out there.

Birders have spoken up before. At the turn of the century they stopped the slaughter of egrets for their plumes. In the 1930's they saved the ducks before the last one was shot out of the sky. This time the goal is grander, however: nothing less than to save the birds of the world, all hundred billion individuals of the 8,700 or so species known so far.

This time is different, too, because the birders are not alone. People who have zero interest in any bird that is not on a platter are taking a personal interest in what is antiseptically called the "environment": the air we breathe and the gases we have put into it that may change the climate; the water in streams and lakes; the ocean itself, no longer perceived as an infinite sink for anything we throw into it. It is not just a question of esthetics this time around: people are scared. It would be easy to see the birders as an insignificant special-interest group in the much larger campaign to keep the Earth livable. But it is the birders who bring an expertise in practical ecology to the campaign: their goals precisely delineate the things that must be done to solve the larger questions of survival.

A few years ago my friend the physicist and I went down to the coast at Chincoteague, Virginia. He saw only the energy in wind, waves and moving sand until a couple of oystercatchers finally caught his eye with their black-white and red color scheme. He had always belittled campaigns to save unglamorous, seemingly unimportant species (somehow the infamous snail darter always came up). But when I pointed out that saving a piece of habitat for one endangered species meant saving the habitat for any number of other plants and animals, including all those necessary invertebrates we pay so little attention to, he brightened: "Now it makes sense."

When we preserve habitat for a threatened creature, we also inevitably save a piece of what Paul Ehrlich calls our life-support system. It is vegetation that takes carbon dioxide out of the air and puts oxygen in; wetlands that cleanse and store fresh water; saltwater marshes and mangrove swamps that carry marine ecosystems. When we save a swamp, a marsh, a bit of woodland, a wooded stretch along a desert river for the sake of some bird, we are saving exactly what we need to save the planet. When bird-loving suburbanites plant dogwood and Russian olive where lawn used to be, they do the same.

Two blue-ribbon books published in October celebrate birds--and challenge us to do something about them. The first, published in the U.S. by Houghton Mifflin, is forthrightly entitled, *Save the Birds* and is key to the worldwide campaign of the same name. It is a unique publishing venture, the joint product of Pro Natur, a German

conservation consulting firm, and the International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP) in Cambridge, England. In each country of publication, national and local conservation organizations become co-sponsors, and a whole new section concerning the country of publication is included. The U.S. edition is sponsored by the independent Audubon societies of Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Florida and Illinois, and by my home club, the Audubon Naturalist Society of the Central Atlantic States. (The National Audubon Society turned the project down.) Roger Tory Peterson and Walter Cronkite wrote the special section on saving America's birdlife.

The book doubles as an ecological primer. Sections on each of the major biomes are followed by two-page profiles of endangered birds found there. And the book quantifies the arguments for saving habitats. For every species of bird that goes extinct, it is likely that the planet has lost 2 or 3 species of fish, 36 of plants and 90 of insects. For every 2 species of bird, a mammal is lost as well.

The second book, *Lords of the Air: The Smithsonian Book of Birds*, focuses more on the birds themselves and is written by Jake Page and Eugene S. Morton, a research ornithologist at the National Zoo. S. Ripley Dillon, Smithsonian Secretary emeritus, introduces the book by tracing the Institution's intense involvement in bird study and field biology over the years: three of the nine Secretaries have been ornithologists. You know you are in the right place when the text opens with a section titled "Enchantment." The book goes into evolution, distribution, flight, migration, communication and social behavior--not as a textbook but more as a discussion by two people who are themselves fascinated by birds and what we are finding out about them.

Lords of the Air also considers the thousand bird species now endangered, and how what we need to do to save them will save us, the lords of the Earth, as well. As Page and Morton point out, "It is certain that the World Bank is as important to bird preservation as are those organizations with 'bird' or 'nature' in their names." As any ecologist can tell you, everything is connected to everything else. To solve bird problems, we are going to have to solve human problems.

In the long run, measured in centuries, the most important thing we can do for the birds is to arrange prosperity for every citizen of every nation in the world. Prosperous nations go through what demographers call the transition from a high-birthrate, rapidly growing population--the product of economic insecurity--to a low birthrate, steady-state population. And it's population growth, with its attendant habitat destruction, that does in more birds than anything else.

My only quibble with both books is an omission. They leave you wanting more, but neither has references or sources for further information. *Save the Birds*, for example, mentions "sister reserves" in North and South America, established to save the same shorebirds--not just the same species, mind you, but the same individuals that migrate back and forth as their forebears have for millennia. If countries in Latin America are setting up reserves despite their own crushing economic problems, I want to know more.

These two books can only add to the army of eccentrics who care enough about birds to do something. People who work to save whales or jaguars rarely, if ever, see one. But birds pay off directly. When we make a park, clean up a stream, save a swamp, we can see and hear the results. Birds are mobile--they will show up anywhere we make a place for them--and most are highly visible and vocal, to boot.

The good news is that it's not too late. One morning last October a group of us were driving on the dikes of Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge on the Delaware coast. New birders in the van were rightfully excited at seeing their first Hudsonian Godwit, their first Wilson's

Phalarope swimming and spinning like a nervous wreck. I kept looking, too, at each new bird our leader spotted, remembering and learning at an equal pace. But I also kept putting the glasses down and looking up into the sky, where all day long, long wavering lines of Snow Geese had been appearing out of the north, back from their Arctic breeding grounds, coming in to land in the pools before us. The sky was alive with birds, as far as the eye could see. It must have looked like this in Colonial times, I kept thinking. The birds are still here. There is still time.

OG FIELD TRIP REPORT: GALVESTON/BOLIVAR, AUGUST 17, 1991
By John Bregar

An armada of 15 to 20 immature Frigatebirds sailing against a backdrop of building cumulus clouds started the August 17th OG field trip off on an excellent note even before we left our meeting place at the east end of Seawall Blvd. on Galveston Island. Those clouds would shower us with rain off and on until mid-morning, but they would never seriously hamper our birding. A Black-shouldered Kite perched on a distant radio-tower guy wire, and a few White-winged Doves made an overhead pass as our leader, Bill Goloby, explained the trip itinerary and encouraged car pooling.

We enjoyed viewing a large mixed flock of shorebirds at East Beach, our first stop. An American Oystercatcher, Olivaceous Cormorants, Piping Plovers, Black Skimmers and a Reddish Egret were highlights there. Nearby, a Clapper Rail roamed the edge of a marsh in full, close-range view, providing a cooperative target for the photographers in our group.

Rain accompanied our ferry passage of the Houston Ship Channel, but it began to let up when we reached the Bolivar Peninsula. A 20-minute driving tour of Loop 108 in a waning drizzle produced a pair of Solitary Sandpipers (for once, two in the same pond even!), White-faced Ibis, more White-winged Doves and another Clapper Rail.

Bolivar Flats at low tide is usually a memorable experience at any time of year, and it did not disappoint us this time. Wading birds and hundreds of shorebirds, gulls and terns were using the area for feeding and resting. Dozens of Brown Pelicans stood shoulder to shoulder a couple hundred yards distant. We saw Reddish Egrets, Olivaceous Cormorants, Long-billed Curlews, a few Marbled Godwits and another oystercatcher here. In the throng of Western Sandpipers, Sanderlings and Semipalmated Plovers, we found many Wilson's Plovers, a few Least Sandpipers, a Semipalmated Sandpiper and two Snowy Plovers. You wouldn't guess that Piping Plover was an endangered species if you judged from their numbers present on "the Flats." Least Terns were abundant, and we even spotted a few youngsters that indicated successful breeding had occurred. We saw hundreds of Royal Terns, a few Black and Sandwich Terns, but no Forster's or Caspian Terns. Behind us, hunkered down into the sand next to a grass and weed patch, a single Horned Lark stayed in view long enough for most in our party to enjoy it.

The sun broke through the clouds an hour before noon, and it became uncomfortable warm and sticky, soon bringing an end to a successful trip. As we departed, it occurred to me that a birdwatcher cannot come away from Bolivar Flats without being impressed by how important it is to preserve that area for the birds!

ONC PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE
Irene Leslie

During the ten years I have been a member of ONC and OG I have often heard the question, "What is the Outdoor Nature Club and why do I have to pay them dues when I want to join the OG?" That is a reasonable question and it deserves an answer.

Many people are surprised to learn that the ONC was formed in 1923 for the purpose of enjoying and studying nature and to foster an interest in the conservation of natural resources. What a far-sighted group that was! In addition, their purpose was to be involved with the establishment and maintenance of nature sanctuaries and natural preserves.

It was several years later that various special interest groups were formed as part of the club of which the Ornithology Group has become the largest. OG members often describe themselves as specialists and regard those of us who are particularly active in ONC as generalists. But there are many individuals, and I count myself among them, who love birds and birding, but see birds as a small and wonderful part of the whole universe. Birds don't exist in a vacuum. Everything in our environment is interdependent. By learning more about the world we share with our avian friends we will improve our ability as birders and our enjoyment of nature. Most particularly, such involvement will raise our awareness of the dangers that lurk for their well-being. Such are the goals of ONC programs and field trips which cover a broad range of subjects designed to inform and entertain.

Several of the ONC field trips are joint ventures with OG where birding is the prime activity. Others may involve the Botany, Conchology or Photography Groups, and occasionally we go somewhere for the pure scenic pleasure, but always, there is time for birding. Camping, potluck suppers and campfires add to the camaraderie and provide an opportunity to expand our circle of friends within the club.

And then there is the Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary (LTNS), which your ONC dues help support. (See Chairman's Message in August, 1991 Spoonbill) Just one and one half hours drive north of Houston are nearly 700 acres of pristine East Texas woods for you to enjoy. The far-sighted people who started the search for a sanctuary in the 1930's knew that one day in the future, and the future is now, there would be little unspoiled land left within easy driving distance of Houston. Each month there is an "Open House" at LTNS. You can come for the weekend to camp, or just for the day. I guarantee you'll want to return over and over again to enjoy this wilderness area.

I look forward to seeing you there and at many other ONC activities.

Excerpt from...Season at the Point
Birds and Birders of Cape May
By Jack Connor, 1991

ON EAST LAKE DRIVE, PAUL KERLINGER, DIRECTOR OF CAPE MAY Observatory (CMOB), carries boxes of sweatshirts from his truck up the steps of CMOB's headquarters and stacks them in the vestibule, which is already crowded with bird books, posters, brochures, and boxes of visors and T-shirts. Kerlinger has been running errands all morning--mailing off certificates of sponsorship to contributors to the banders' Wind Seine program, picking up slides for the lecture on snowy owls he will give next week, negotiating a group discount at a local motel for the New Jersey Audubon weekend next May, and stopping by the printers to collect the

sweatshirts, which now bear David Sibley's drawing of a golden eagle over the CMBO insignia.

At the end of his second fall as director, Kerlinger finds that much of his time goes to such workaday matters. "My father would die if he could see me. He's an academic. I came here as an academic. Now I consider myself a conservationist--a conservationist who knows money makes the world go round. You can't do research without funding, you can't save habitat without political influence, and--" bam, he drops another box on the stack--"you can't run a bird observatory without selling sweatshirts."

The computer in the main office is printing out mailing labels. Kerlinger and his staff researcher, Dave Wiedner, have just completed a survey of the economic impact of birding in Cape May, which they are now extending into a study of birders' expenditures across the country. Wiedner distributed questionnaires to birdwatchers at the Point this fall, asking their ages, education, occupations, income, and where and how they spent their money while visiting South Jersey. Kerlinger walks to his desk, reaches between several zigzagging piles of letters, bills, and articles, and pulls out a single sheet of figures. "Eight hundred and thirty-five people responded. They'd come from thirty-one states and six foreign countries. They stayed here an average of five days and four nights, and all told, they used sixty-three different motels, twenty-nine bed and breakfasts, fourteen campgrounds, and ate in a hundred and eighteen different restaurants." Kerlinger estimates ninety thousand birders visited Cape May this year and contributed six million dollars to the local economy. "And the politicians and business of Cape May County hardly realize the birders have been here. As far as they know, the money is a six-million-dollar windfall--unsolicited, unnoticed, and unacknowledged."

Birders need to become vocal about what they are doing, Kerlinger believes, more willing to identify themselves, so people in the local community will recognize the economic value of open spaces and other natural habitat. "It's a three-word message we have to broadcast: birding means bucks. Fishermen think nothing of asking a motel manager, 'Where's the fishing been good lately?' And the manager better damn well have the answer, because that's why they're coming to his place. The manager knows he needs those fishermen and if some local project or development threatens a lake or stream up the road from his motel, he's going to squawk. He has a vested interest in that lake; that lake puts money in his pocket. Birders have to start asking 'Where's the birding been good lately?' and expecting the same kind of attention and respect. Until birdwatchers start asserting themselves like that, so locals will notice the money they're spending in the community, the habitat that should be saved won't be saved."

Kerlinger flicks his finger against the page so hard the paper snaps. "This is not a Cape May Point situation. It's nationwide. Birders have not recognized their own economic importance, and they haven't made themselves the political force they could be."

Estimates of the number of birdwatchers in the United States vary widely, depending on how "birdwatcher" is defined. A 1980 census by the U.S. Department of the Interior estimated there were 61 million birdwatchers nationwide, a number nearly equal to the number of hunters (17 million) and fishermen (47 million) combined. A follow-up study, however, determined that fewer than one in fifty of those who enjoyed watching birds could identify more than 100 different species and estimated that "serious birdwatchers" numbered less than a million. Kerlinger believes the second study is misleading. "When you're talking about the economic impact of birdwatching, what matters is not how competent birders are; it's how much money they spend. I run into birders every day in the

Meadows, at Higbee's, up on the platform, who can't tell a kestrel from a peregrine at fifty fee. So what? They're enjoying themselves, enjoying the natural habitat Cape May still has, and they're spending their time and money in southern New Jersey because southern New Jersey has birds to see. Birding means bucks.

Kerlinger and Wiedner's national survey will be based on responses on a questionnaire they are mailing to three thousand randomly selected participants in National Audubon's annual Christmas Bird Count. The intent of the study is to establish how much birders spend annually on optical equipment, airline tickets, car rentals, natural tours, motels, meals, artwork, bird feeders and birdseed, books, magazines, and memberships. "We know already it's in the billions of dollars, and what we're hoping to do is encourage the birding community to use their economic importance as leverage in their arguments to preserve open areas." Most land-use debates come down to emotion, aesthetics, and long-term thinking on the one side, Kerlinger believes, and economics and short-term thinking on the other. "The conservationists say, 'We have to protect this forest because it's beautiful, and we want to save it for our grandchildren.' But the developer says, 'That forest is wasted space. Let me clear-cut it and put up a hundred condos. You'll increase your tax base when the houses are sold and the new families move in.' The developer wins those arguments all the time, even in prime birding areas--because the politicians have to think short-term. But what if conservationists start using economic arguments? 'If he puts up a hundred condos, it's going to cost us money. We have to put in new sewer lines, hire more teachers for the school, improve the roads, etc. And right now those woods are earning us money. We had ninety thousand birders in Cape May this year. They dropped six million dollars in our coffers, and the cost to us in taxes was zero. That forest is not wasted space. It's very profitable space."

[Jack Connor is the author of The Complete Birder A Guide to Better Birding, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988. A Season at the Point is available at Bookstop.]



CLEARING HOUSE

CLEARING HOUSE

July, 1991

Editors: Phyllis and Tony Frank

As always early reports will be appreciated, and August reports are due no later than September 3rd. Even though the meeting is later than usual in September, please try to submit your reports early. The CH format remains the same this month. The listing uses the following format: bird name, early late dates, reports/total and summary by county or detailed listing. The format of the county summary is as follows: county designation - number of reports/number of birds. The detailed listing format is as follows: county-(number of birds) day, observer code. Very rare birds are underlined. Birds with no previous record on date or vagrant status appear in bold. Please remember to submit notes on all those good birds. And with all the reminders completed - on to the birds.

Pelican, Brown	4-27	2/105	GA-2/105
Corm, Olivaceous	27-27	1/6	GA-BF(6)27,LAPG
Anhinga	25-25	1/2	HA-1/2
Frigatebird, Magn	4-27	2/3	GA-BF(2)4,TD; GA-BF(1)27,LAPG
Heron, Great Blue	25-25	1/4	HA-1/4
Egret, Great	25-25	1/6	HA-1/6
Egret, Snowy	7-25	2/17	HA-2/17
Heron, Little Blu	25-25	1/20	HA-1/20
Egret, Cattle	25-25	1/300	HA-1/300
Heron, Grn-backed	25-25	1/20	HA-1/20
Nt-Heron, Yel-crn	6-23	2/2	HA-2/2
Duck, Wood	25-25	1/12	HA-SH(12)25,JF
Mallard	28-28	1/21	HA-1/21
Vulture, Black	25-25	1/15	HA-1/15
Vulture, Turkey	25-31	2/3	HA-2/3
Osprey	25-25	1/1	HA-EP(1)25,JF
Hawk, Red-shouldr	25-25	1/1	HA-1/1
Hawk, Swainson's	25-30	2/3	FB-(2)25,PB; HA-(1)30,PB
Rail, Clapper	27-27	1/1	GA-1/1
Gallinule, Purple	25-25	1/4	HA-1/4
Moorhen, Common	25-25	1/12	HA-1/12
Plover, Blk-belli	27-27	1/2	GA-1/2
Plover, Wilson's	4-27	2/40	GA-2/40
Plover, Semipalm	4-4	1/6	GA-1/6
Plover, Piping	4-4	1/1	GA-BF(1)4,TD
Killdeer	7-28	4/9	GA-1/2 HA-3/7
Oystercatcher, Am	27-27	1/3	GA-BF(3)27,LAPG
Stilt, Black-neck	27-27	1/1	GA-1/1
Avocet, American	4-4	1/1	GA-BF(1)4,TD
Yellowlegs, Less	7-28	2/2	HA-2/2
Willet	27-27	1/7	GA-1/7
Sandprr, Spotted	25-25	1/2	HA-1/2
Curlew, Long-bill	27-27	1/25	GA-1/25
<u>Godwit, Marbled</u>	27-27	1/15	GA-1/15
Turnstone, Ruddy	27-27	1/9	GA-1/9
Sanderling	27-27	1/40	GA-1/40
Sandprr, Least	27-27	1/1	GA-1/1
peep, sp.	7-28	2/8	HA-2/8
dowitcher, sp.	27-27	1/70	GA-1/70
Gull, Laughing	25-27	2/1004	GA-1/1000 HA-1/4
Gull, Ring-billed	25-27	2/6	GA-1/4 HA-1/2
Tern, Gull-billed	27-27	1/1	GA-1/1
Tern, Caspian	27-27	1/2	GA-1/2
Tern, Royal	27-27	1/150	GA-1/150
Tern, Sandwich	27-27	1/3	GA-1/3
Tern, Forster's	25-25	1/2	HA-1/2
Tern, Least	4-27	2/105	GA-2/105
Tern, Black	4-27	3/28	GA-2/26 HA-1/2
Dove, Rock	7-28	3/22	HA-3/22
Dove, Mourning	6-25	2/22	HA-2/22
Dove, Inca	6-25	2/5	HA-2/5
Parakeet, Monk	6-28	2/17	HA-(15)6,28,PM; HA-BU(2)24,PB
Cuckoo, Yel-billd	25-25	1/3	HA-(3)25,JF

Swift, Chimney	6-28	4/41	HA-4/41
Wdpeckr, Red-head	25-25	1/2	HA-1/2
Wdpeckr, Red-bell	6-25	2/3	HA-2/3
Wdpeckr, Downy	7-28	2/2	HA-2/2
Wdpeckr, Pileated	25-25	1/1	HA-1/1
Flycatch, Gr Crst	25-25	1/2	HA-1/2
Kingbird, Eastern	25-25	1/3	HA-1/3
Flycatch, Ss-tail	25-25	1/1	HA-1/1
Martin, Purple	6-28	3/50	HA-3/50
Swallow, Barn	25-25	1/12	HA-1/12
Jay, Blue	1-31	3/14	HA-3/14
Crow, American	6-25	2/12	HA-2/12
Chickadee, Carol	6-25	2/3	HA-2/3
Wren, Carolina	25-28	2/3	HA-2/3
Bluebird, Eastern	25-25	1/1	HA-SH(1)25,JF
Robin, American	6-24	2/2	HA-2/2
Mockingbird, N	6-31	3/39	HA-3/39
Shrike, Loggerhed	7-27	3/6	GA-1/2 HA-2/4
Starling, Euro	6-28	3/33	HA-3/33
Vireo, White-eyed	25-25	1/2	HA-EP(2)25,JF
Yellowthroat, Com	27-27	1/1	GA-BF(1)27,LAPG
Cardinal, Northrn	6-28	3/17	HA-3/17
Sparrow, Seaside	27-27	1/2	GA-1/2
Blackbird, Red-wg	25-25	1/20	HA-1/20
Grackle, Gr-tail	6-25	3/20	HA-3/20
Grackle, Common	6-28	3/35	HA-3/35
Cowbird, Brn-head	25-25	1/8	HA-1/8
Sparrow, House	1-31	2/25	HA-2/25

TOTAL INDIVIDUALS: 2530

LIST OF OBSERVER CODES: Joe Farrell(JF); Lynne Aldrich, Peter Gottschling(LAPG); Patrick Baum(PB); Peggy Milstead(PM); Rob Thacker, Jim Day(TD)

LIST OF LOCATION CODES: Bolivar Flats(BF); Buffalo Bayou Park(BU); Eisenhower Park(EP); Sheldon Park(SH)

LIST OF COUNTY CODES: Brazoria(BR); Chambers(CH); Fort Bend(FB); Galveston(GA); Harris(HA); Jefferson(JE); Upper Texas Coast(U)

REPORT FROM JUNE 1991

Glaucous Gull - G. Rosenburg, J.N. Collier June 8, 1991
This gull was seen on the beach at Bolivar Flats in Galveston county. It was walking around a large tidal pool. The bird was a large, white gull which was larger than Herring Gulls on the beach. The head was large and somewhat angular. The beak was pink with a black tip. The whole body was white with some slight brownish mottling on the flanks. Bird was observed from the car at 5 to 15 feet for 5 minutes. No optical equipment was used or needed.

CONTACTS

SEND CLEARING HOUSE bird sightings to: Clearing House, (OG), P.O. Box 271374, Houston 77277.

TEXAS RARE BIRD ALERT TAPE, sponsored by Houston Audubon Society, (713) 992-2757.

SEND SPOONBILL MATERIAL to Editor, Judy Boyce, 5546 Aspen, Houston 77081, (713) 668-5359.

OG MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION, dues, subscriptions and address changes. Edward J. Lebeau, Jr., 5459 Beechnut, Houston, Texas 77096 (713) 664-4900. Annual dues \$15. Non-member subscriptions to The Spoonbill \$13.

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

The Lower Rio Grande Valley -- the name summons up visions of exotic birds and other wildlife. How many of us drive six hours or more, or fly and rent a car, to visit the Valley and its south Texas habitats? There is a much easier alternative, one that will produce most south Texas breeding species within about 3 hours drive time from Houston! These so-called "Valley specialties" might better be called "south Texas specialties," and south Texas is a lot closer than one might think!

Many of you already may be aware that from Beeville to Lake Corpus Christi can be found extensive Tamaulipan scrub vegetation and the associated bird community. My education in the avifauna of this area began with the 1991 Birdathon and continued with trips to gather data for the Texas Breeding Bird Atlas Project, and it resulted in the following composite description (thanks to Larry Branam, Jim Day, Sandra Grimes, Julia and Trevor Ricketts and Rob Thacker for helping on the atlasing trips).

The brush is alive with song at sunrise: Cactus and Bewick's Wrens; Couch's Kingbird; Brown-Crested Flycatcher; Verdin; Olive, Lark, and skylarking Cassin's Sparrows; Curve-billed Thrasher; Pyrrhuloxia; Ladder-backed and Golden-fronted Woodpeckers -- all significantly contribute to the dawn choruses throughout this area. Cave Swallows, expanding eastward, can be found nesting under almost every culvert and overpass. Dozens of Roadrunners can be observed by just driving the roads (how appropriate!). And unfortunately (because they are taking a toll on other songbirds), one can hardly find a spot without Bronzed Cowbirds. In the evening, Lesser Nighthawks abound; I was lucky enough to see several performing distraction displays. Pauragues call into the night and at dawn. Other south Texas species, not quite

as ubiquitous, are still fairly easy to find: Groove-billed Ani; Buff-bellied Hummingbird; Western Kingbird; Ash-throated Flycatcher; Great Kiskadee (check the riparian woodlands on the Nueces River below the Lake Corpus Christi dam); Green Jay; Lesser Goldfinch (harder to find); and House Finch (which by the way has expanded into Houston, undoubtedly from the northeast -- see information elsewhere in this issue). A trip 25 miles north to Choke Canyon State Park can provide even more species: this year I observed Bell's Vireos, my first Audubon's Oriole, singing Grasshopper Sparrows on territory, Harris' Hawk nestlings being fed by adults, and a Spotted Sandpiper (26 May, nesting?).

Some species familiar to Houston are more common west of Beeville. Painted Buntings are downright abundant, warbling sweetly from the treetops; they are easy to see, however, because many of the trees are so much shorter than those in east Texas. White-winged Doves seem to be everywhere, especially at Lake Corpus Christi State Park where their calls serve as campground alarm clocks at first light each spring morning.

Okay, one may not see Red-billed Pigeon, Red-crowned Parrots, Chachalacas, Mexican Crow, Ringed Kingfisher (although I've seen one at Lake Corpus Christi in 1989), and Altamira Oriole, nor the Valley's winter rarities. But between Beeville and Lake Corpus Christi, one certainly gets a very strong flavor of the Valley while saving time, effort and expense.

The San Antonio River, approximately 25 miles southwest of Victoria, has been considered the approximate boundary for these habitats and bird species. Moving northeast, vegetation with affinities to east Texas begins to predominate. However in July, in a patch of mesquite-dominated brush in Jackson County, a few miles north of Edna, I observed Ladder-backed and Golden-fronted Woodpeckers, a singing Curve-billed Thrasher, and a pair of Brown-crested Flycatchers. This is 25 miles northeast of Victoria, less than 100 miles from Houston! Maybe next year this site will yield additional south Texas species.
Bob Honig (665-6963)

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