



THE SPOONBILL

Volume XXX, No. 9
January, 1982

PUBLISHED BY THE ORNITHOLOGY GROUP OF THE OUTDOOR NATURE CLUB
HOUSTON, TEXAS Randy Pinkston, Editor

YOUR 1982 DUES ARE DUE IMMEDIATELY !!!, IF NOT ALREADY PAID

Members' dues -- \$7 (\$5 goes to ONC and \$2 to OG)

Non-member subscription to THE SPOONBILL -- \$4

Mail to Ms. Linda Walsh, 702 Marshall, Houston 77006

COMING EVENTS

- Monday January 25 Deadline for THE SPOONBILL announcements, articles, etc.
- Wednesday February 3 Photography Group regular meeting at Bayou Manor auditorium, 4141 S. Braeswood Blvd., at 7:30 p.m. Roger Peace, a super, super photographer will present a program of slides on the life cycle of butterflies and moths.
- Wednesday February 3 Clearing House deadline for observations for January. Please send early.
- Thursday February 4 OG regular meeting at Bayou Manor auditorium, 7:30 p.m. Dr. Ralph Moldenhauer will give a presentation on bird song. A signed print of an Elf Owl by Ray Harm (out of print) will be auctioned.
- Saturday, Sunday Feb. 6 & 7 Photography Group field trip to Jones State Forest, which is located south of Conroe on FM 1488. Meet at the campgrounds at 9:00 a.m. on Saturday. Birds which may be seen include Red-cockaded Woodpeckers and Brown-headed Nuthatches. Call Ann Nunes (665-8854) for more information.
- Tuesday February 9 ONC regular meeting at the Garden Center, 1900 Hermann Dr., at 7:30 p.m. Cynthia Rogers will give a program on mushrooms.
- Wednesday February 10 The Piney Woods Wildlife Society will meet in Rm. A126 of the Academic Bldg. on the North Harris County College campus (W.W. Thorne Dr.), 7:30 p.m. Call Gary Clark (350-5599) or Lorna Felton (367-7169) for more information.
- Saturday February 13 OG field trip - Meet at 8:00 a.m. at one of the following two places: (1) the playground near the entrance to Bear Creek Park, or (2) the headquarters of Jones State Park (along FM 1488, about 1 mile west of I-45). The two groups will bird all morning on routes leading to Warren Lake, where they will meet and have lunch. Call David Matson (723-1968) for more information.

Texas Bird Watching: Conservation and Preservation, Parts I and II. Elaine Robinson Adams will discuss the conservation and preservation of birds and their habitats during this two-part course. A field trip will be made during each, the first aboard the "Whooping Crane" boat out of Rockport to look for coastal birds, including the endangered Whooping Crane, and the second to the Attwater Prairie Chicken National Refuge. Part I - February 2 & 9; Part II - February 16 & 23. Course fee: \$40 per course or \$65 for both. For more information call Rice

University, Office of Continuing Studies and Special Programs, 527-4803 or 520-6022.

Big Bend Birds and Wildflowers - The R. A. Vines Environmental Science Center, Dept. of Continuing Education, offers this natural history tour April 17-21, 1982. Guides will be Randy Beavers, Charles Peterson, and Bill Mealy. These field trips offer an opportunity to explore the unique biological, geological and historical features of the Big Bend country. Long and short hikes will be conducted for those who wish to participate. Round trip fee of \$225/person includes all lodging, transportation, entry fees, guides, tour packets and hike lunches. Most meals are not included in the fee. All registrants must be at least 18 years of age. Space is limited and reservations will be made in the order payment is received. A reservation deposit of \$75 at registration is required. Deadline for balance due is March 10, 1982. For more information, call 465-9628.

SUMMARIES OF SOME AREA CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

The Cypress Creek Christmas Count enjoyed excellent weather on its sixth count ever (Dec. 28, 1981). The count was hampered, though, by problems encountered this year by other area counts -- a lack of observers sufficient to cover the circle and a general lack of some of the more common birds we expect here in the winter. As do others, I think this lack of the more common birds is due to their non-arrival because of the mild winter we have experienced.

Most notable numberwise, of course, were the low numbers for several species (unrelated to the decreased numbers of observers) and the complete absence of others. Six species were missed for the first time ever on this year's count: Sandhill Cranes, longspurs, Harris' Sparrows, Snowy Egrets, Brown Creepers, and Rusty Blackbirds. Particularly low in numbers were night herons, Snow Geese, puddle ducks, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Blue Jay, Brown Thrasher, Orange-crowned Warbler (odd because of its abundance elsewhere), finches and all sparrows except the small Melospizas.

There were some exceptional bright spots. Our only two boldface birds were shorebirds -- 3 Stilt Sandpipers (which had been in the vicinity in numbers since late November) and Jim Morgan's 4 Black-necked Stilts. It is interesting that the only two boldface species on last year's count were also shorebirds. Part of this trend were very high numbers of all shorebird species, despite the flooding of our best shorebird location so as to make it unsuitable on count day. Other good species and numbers were 44 Cinnamon Teal (on Borgstedt's), 4 Greater Scaup (part of a trend -- I saw this species on seven of ten counts), 2 Ross' Goose, 1 Ferruginous Hawk (very rare here but not boldface because we have found it almost yearly), 6 Bald Eagles, 1 Caracara, 66 yellowlegs, 2 Herring Gulls, 22 owls of five species, 3 Golden-crowned Kinglets, 4 Sprague's Pipits, 3 Pine Siskins and one each Grasshopper and Le Conte's Sparrows.

-- Tony Gallucci

Buffalo Bayou reversed the trend for low counts this year with a total of 102 species, 12 more than the previous all-time high. Two factors were primarily responsible. First, party-hours were up significantly from last year (52 vs. 32.5). I was hoping that participants would spend the whole day in the field, and apparently most did. Thanks to everyone for a terrific job! Secondly, the amount of water was up in the western half of the circle. This created more habitat suitable for ducks, waders, and a few shorebirds.

As with other UTC counts this year, several winter visitors were either absent or in low numbers. Not a single waxwing was found, nor a single Golden-crowned Kinglet. There were no juncos. Creepers and robins were unusually low or absent altogether in some areas.

A few highlights are worthy of special mention. Certainly the most unusual bird for the count was a Northern Oriole at Bear Creek Park,

found by Jim Morgan and Tony Gallucci. Eleven other species were new to the count. One was an American Bittern, flushed by Tony Gallucci in Barker Reservoir. Tony also had a male Vermilion Flycatcher there. Another new one was a Red-headed Woodpecker, heard by Charles and Carolyn Russell in the Houston Country Club area. A remarkable 124 Mottled Ducks were reported, five times the number on any previous count. Likewise, an all-time high of 47 Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were reported. We had thirteen species of sparrows (counting Rufous-sided Towhee, of course), highlighted by John Bargman and Ena Spalding's Grasshopper Sparrow, Tony Gallucci's 4 Harris' Sparrows, and Jerry Caraviotis' 2 Vespers.

-- Randy Pinkston

The new Spring Creek CBC (sponsored by the Piney Woods Wildlife Society) got off to a good start this year. Although not entirely within the UTC, the count circle contains pineywoods habitat similar to that in the northern part of Harris County. With 24 observers, they recorded 81 species.

Among those were several species indicative of southeastern U.S. forests: 6 Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, a Brown-headed Nuthatch, 438 Pine Warblers, and a Bachman's Sparrow. Highlights included 3 Olivaceous Cormorants, a Merlin, 2 Wood Thrushes, and one each of Henslow's and Lark Sparrows.

-- information submitted by Lorna Felton

MINUTES OF THE OG MEETING, JAN. 7, 1982

Ron Braun opened the meeting in the basement of Bayou Manor. The minutes were approved and Linda Walsh reported a balance in the treasury of \$3,047.08. She is now accepting dues for the new year.

Paul Nimmons reported on the Houston Christmas Count. Although there were 175 species seen, the totals were way down in almost every category (see details, this issue). The only birds with higher totals were Bonaparte's and Herring Gulls.

A signed, numbered, out-of-print Golden Eagle by Charles Beckendorf (donated by Jim Beatty) was auctioned and sold to Wally Gardner for \$25.00, proceeds going to the OG.

Tony Gallucci's ink wash of a Least Bittern was auctioned and sold to Noreen Damude for \$55.00. This is a donation to the Audubon Society purchase fund for Boy Scout Woods.

Unusual birds seen on Christmas Counts: Black-headed Gull at Livingston Dam, Mangrove Cuckoo near Bolivar Ferry, Whistling Swans near Winnie, Rufous-capped Warbler near Boerne, Gray-collared Becard and Blue Bunting in the valley.

Bill Harwell made a motion to give a \$25.00 donation to Bayou Manor. The motion was seconded and passed. At all our meetings we are guests of Marion and Edward Taylor. The donation is in appreciation of our being able to meet there.

Emory Froelich introduced Marilyn Crane, who graciously consented to show some of her beautiful slides at the last minute due to a program cancellation. The slides were of birds and scenery she took on a trip to Churchill, Manitoba last summer.

Ellen Red, Secretary

 THE SPOONBILL broadened to national circulation last year when 3 articles were published in the summer issue of Birding News Survey (Avian Publications, Inc., P.O. Box 310, Elizabethtown, KY 42701). The first was Margaret and Paul Jones' recount of their South Florida birding tour (Vol. 30, No. 3), the second a review of Spizella sparrows on the UTC by Jim Morgan, and the last about a birding trip to California and SE Arizona (Vol. 29, No. 8).

1981 HOUSTON CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

By Paul W. Nimmons, Jr., Co-Compiler

Sixty-eight years ago, in 1913, George Findlay Simmons conducted the first Houston Christmas Bird Count. On December 19, 1981, the second highest number of birders saw the fifth highest number of species ever seen on a Houston Christmas Bird Count. In spite of this relative success, all observers subjectively felt that the number of passerines were down. The objective figures bear out this feeling. The total numbers of individuals were down in almost every category of winter residents. Before the count, we thought totals for winter residents would be low because of the area's unusually mild fall and the lack of severe winter weather in the midwest and northeast. But we had no idea that totals would be as low as they were. For instance, we usually average 350 Cedar Waxwings each year. This year we had no Cedar Waxwings at all. They were missed for only the second time since 1947. We missed Purple Finch for the first time in eleven years. Ducks were down. Sparrows were down. We had only 336 Robins when our average is 5,600 Robins each year. The most astounding reduction was in blackbirds. Our average for blackbird sightings since 1971 has been 67,000 per year. Not included in this average is the all-time 1967 high of 1,540,893 blackbirds. Our total for 1981 was 4,810 total blackbirds of all species.

If mild weather is the reason for the lack of winter residents, we should have had an increase in summer residents and late fall migrants. There was a substantial increase in the numbers of migrant shorebirds, but we had no unusual thrushes, vireos or warblers. We had only six rare birds: Wood Stork, Ross' Goose, Least Tern, Chimney or Vaux's Swift, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher and Green-tailed Towhee. Only four of these could be deemed summer residents or fall migrants. This lack does not coincide with the mild weather reasoning.

The final anomaly is that we had 15-year highs in all three winter gulls: Herring Gull, Ring-billed Gull and Bonaparte's Gull. It will take a good man, Charlie Brown, to explain these decreases and increases.

The Count Checklist and the List of Participants is reproduced below. You will be happy to know that the twenty species seen on all previous Houston Christmas Counts were sighted again in 1981. These birds are Red-shouldered Hawk, Marsh Hawk, Am. Kestrel, Killdeer, Yellow-shafted Flicker, Eastern Phoebe, Blue Jay, Com. Crow, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren, Mockingbird, Brown Thrasher, E. Bluebird, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Loggerhead Shrike, Myrtle Warbler, Brewer's Blackbird, Cardinal and Am. Goldfinch.

Count Checklist

Com. Loon 20, Horned Grebe 32, Eared Grebe 123, Pied-billed Grebe 26, White Pelican 650, Double-crested Cormorant 2800, Olivaceous Cormorant 47, cormorant, sp. 12, Anhinga 5, Great Blue Heron 318, Green Heron 10, Little Blue Heron 35, Cattle Egret 93, Reddish Egret 1, Great Egret 167, Snowy Egret 202, Louisiana Heron 29, Black-crowned Night Heron 287, Yellow-crowned Night Heron 8, Am. Bittern 2, Wood Stork 11 (PH,EP,SS), Roseate Spoonbill 73, Canada Goose 70, White-fronted Goose 101, Snow Goose 5500, Snow Goose (blue form) 2300, Ross' Goose 3 (2 parties), Mallard 36, Mottled Duck 70, Gadwall 310, Pintail 367, Green-winged Teal 238, Blue-winged Teal 56, Am. Wigeon 60, N. Shoveler 70 (low), Wood Duck 33, Redhead 5, Ring-necked Duck 37, Canvasback 6 (low), Greater Scaup 187, Lesser Scaup 2580, scaup, sp. 2198, Com. Goldeneye 40, Bufflehead 170, Black Scoter 1, Ruddy Duck 690, Hooded Merganser 16, Red-breasted Merganser 532, Turkey Vulture 70, Black Vulture 1, White-tailed Kite 3, Sharp-shinned

Hawk 6, Cooper's Hawk 3, Red-tailed Hawk 150, Red-tailed (Harlan's) Hawk 1, Red-shouldered Hawk 13, Marsh Hawk 57, Osprey 3, Merlin 1, Am. Kestrel 211, Bobwhite 30, King Rail 6, Clapper Rail 14, Sora 1, Com. Gallinule 3, Am. Coot 1202, Semipalmated Plover 3, Killdeer 2415, Black-bellied Plover 104, Ruddy Turnstone 2, Am. Woodcock 12, Com. Snipe 133, Spotted Sandpiper 52, Willet 74, Greater Yellowlegs 358, Lesser Yellowlegs 84, Least Sandpiper 1096, Dunlin 1403, Short-billed Dowitcher 305, Long-billed Dowitcher 2008, dowitcher, sp. 327, W. Sandpiper 1718, Sanderling 2295, sandpiper, sp. 102, Am. Avocet 102, Herring Gull 280, Ring-billed Gull 4100, Laughing Gull 7100, Bonaparte's Gull 71, Gull-billed Tern 2, Forster's Tern 560, Com. Tern 38, Least Tern 1 (RG), Royal Tern 47, Caspian Tern 41, Rock Dove 497, Mourning Dove 936, Ground Dove 4, Inca Dove 27, Groove-billed Ani 1, Barn Owl 17, Screech Owl 173, Great Horned Owl 24, Barred Owl 8, Short-eared Owl 3, Chaetura, sp. 1 (FC, RP party), Rufous Hummingbird 1, Belted Kingfisher 75, Com. (Yel.-sh.) Flicker 140, Pileated Woodpecker 19, Red-bellied Woodpecker 75, Red-headed Woodpecker 4, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker 34, Downy Woodpecker 17, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher 1 (JRe,TT), E. Phoebe 102, Tree Swallow 126, Blue Jay 189, Com. Crow 270, Carolina Chickadee 303, Tufted Titmouse 33, Brown Creeper 7, House Wren 40, Winter Wren 5, Carolina Wren 53, Long-billed Marsh Wren 8, Short-billed Marsh Wren 34, Mockingbird 263, Gray Catbird 12, Brown Thrasher 123, Am. Robin 336, Hermit Thrush 18, E. Bluebird 28, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher 153, Golden-crowned Kinglet 4, Ruby-crowned Kinglet 779, Water Pipit 128, Sprague's Pipit 5, Loggerhead Shrike 327, Starling 1837, White-eyed Vireo 11, Solitary Vireo 20, Black-and-white Warbler 1, Orange-crowned Warbler 153, Nashville Warbler 2, Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler 1743, Pine Warbler 56, Com. Yellowthroat 21, Wilson's Warbler 3, House Sparrow 534, E. Meadowlark 189, meadowlark, sp. 234, Red-winged Blackbird 2296 (low), Rusty Blackbird 25, Brewer's Blackbird 31 (low), Boat-tailed Grackle 3, Great-tailed Grackle 212, Com. Grackle 366, Brown-headed Cowbird 539, blackbird, sp. 1338 (low), Cardinal 290, Pine Siskin 3, Am. Goldfinch 649, Green-tailed Towhee 1 (PaN) Rufous-sided Towhee 5, Savannah Sparrow 218, Grasshopper Sparrow 1, Le Conte's Sparrow 12, Henslow's Sparrow 1, Sharp-tailed Sparrow 3, Seaside Sparrow 6, Vesper Sparrow 4, Lark Sparrow 1, Dark-eyed (Slate-col.) Junco 2, Chipping Sparrow 70, Field Sparrow 11, Harris' Sparrow 1, White-crowned Sparrow 14, White-throated Sparrow 480, Fox Sparrow 2, Lincoln's Sparrow 12 (low), Swamp Sparrow 78, Song Sparrow 28.

Comparison With Prior Years

<u>Year</u>	<u>Species</u>	<u>Individuals</u>	<u>Observers</u>
1971	156	54,320	57
1972	158	61,802	59
1973	144	94,944	63
1974	163	176,900	77
1975	170	209,200	99
1976	173	120,288	123
1977	183	73,449	130
1978	177	77,719	127
1979	191	158,923	139
1980	185	159,126	143
1981	175	64,145	139

List of Participants

Margaret Anderson, Jennifer Backo, Jerry Baker, Larry & Martha Ballard, John Bargman, Charles & Priscilla Bauer, Cynthia & Shirley Boden, Earl Bogar, Anne Booth, Marcia & Ron Braun, Sue Buchanan, Dennis Caputo, Eric & Lawrence Carpenter, Peggy Caskey, Ben Chrisman, George & Jane Clayton, Fred Collins, James Collins, Virginia Courtney, Mike Cousins, Marilyn Crane, Glenn & Robin Cureton, Wesley Cureton, Noreen Damude, Barbara Darr, Maryann Dillon, Cecilia Donaldson, Melba Drake, Don Draper,

David (co-compiler), Jan & Stephanie Dauphin, Hubert Davis, Barbara Duryea, John & Stephen Earthman, Bob Ekas, Jessica Fitch, C.J. Forrest, Tony Gallucci, Bill Galtney, Jim Gillespie, Jack & Mary Gillette, Richard Goldfarb, Bill & Diane Goloby, Delton Goodin, Sarah Gordon, Susie Graham, Bruce & Glen Halstead, Cindy Harrison, Bill & Jean Harwell, Gene Heitzman, George Hinds, Sam House, George Howe, P. D. Hulce, Tony Hulls, Bernice Jackson, Kyle Keefer, Joseph Kennedy, Evan Kerr, Helena Kimball, Twan Lonquist, David Marrack, Christine & David Matson, Elric McHenry, John & Vicki McLemore, Bill Mealy, Jim Morgan, Jim Murphy, Barbara Neal, Paul (compiler, 7702 Westview, Houston, TX 77055) & Phyllis Nimmons, Bob Norris, Norma Oates, Kathleen Orr, Frances & Walter Pagel, Maryann Payne, Euz Peine, Celeste Peterson, Randy Pinkston, Gene Prejean, Deborah Price, Nell Ray, Ellen Red, Jim Renfro, Henrietta & Ray Richardson, Jan & Will Risser, Doris Robertson, Matt Robinson, Candy & Charles Russell, Steve Schultz, Javan Shelly, Laura Singleton, Gwen Smith, Linda Snyder, Don Sontag, Eva Spalding, Walter Springall, Aaron Stoley, Gail Storey, David & Wade Strickland, Albert & Deborah Swarts, Wally Swartz, Tom Taroni, Mary Taylor, Robert Thacker, Doug Troeger, John Tveten, Don & Grey Verner, Betsy Webber, Jerry Weir, Joe Williams, Steve Williams, Sandra Williamson, Charlene, George & Kris Wilson, Marshall Yost.

FREEPORT CBC TOPS 200 IN ALL DAY RAIN

... by Jim Morgan, co-compiler

On December 20, a day of almost continuous light to moderate rain, 204 species were tallied on the Freeport CBC. In addition to the rain, the count was hampered by winds that were often quite strong and gusty. In spite of the miserable birding conditions, a UTC record high number of 156 observers participated in this year's count. This is believed to be the most participants to ever participate in a CBC in Texas. It was through the efforts and perseverance of these observers that the count was able to do as well as it did under the poor weather conditions. Thanks to you all!!

Even though the weather did not cooperate, and in spite of the dearth of wintering birds, there were some true highlights of the 1981 count, including the record number of participants. A new species was added to the count this year - Black-bellied Whistling-Duck - and it was found in numbers, a whopping total of 125 individuals! With the expansion of this species up the Texas coast I would not be surprised to find these beautiful ducks becoming regular on the Freeport count. The two birding groups which really had outstanding days were the jetty observers and the "hummingbird patrol". The poor weather helped the jetty observations, as it always seems to, and they recorded 11 Gannets (plus 4 solid sp.), all three scoters in numbers, Purple Sandpiper, Franklin's Gull, two Black-legged Kittiwakes, and a jaeger species. The team of five observers who made the rounds of hummingbird feeders in the count circle saw six species of these little jewel-like birds, a truly outstanding total under the conditions. It was interesting that the hummingbird variety was as good as last year but the total number of individuals was below an average year. Other outstanding reports were: Ash-throated Flycatcher, Rough-winged Swallow, Swainson's Thrush, Western Meadowlark, Bronzed Cowbird and Lark Sparrow. Two other outstanding species, Brown Pelican and Burrowing Owl, were seen count day but it was discovered that these two birds were a mile outside the count circle.

Was it the weather, the paucity of wintering birds, or both, that accounted for missing four species we have not missed in all the years I have data for (12 years)? The four missing species were Hooded Merganser, Wood Thrush, Cedar Waxwing, and White-eyed Vireo. Two of these species, the merganser and waxwings, were seen count week, but not count day. In addition, finding lingering neotropical migrants

was difficult indeed, even though we had a very mild fall. Definitely, the weather had an effect on this for Freeport, but other counts have not found many lingerers either.

For my co-compilers and myself I want to again thank everybody who participated in this year's count. Special thanks go out to our area leaders, the property owners who let us on their properties, Dow Chemical for hosting the countdown dinner and permitting us to bird their extensive properties, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service personnel for providing access to the Brazoria NWR and providing the marsh buggy and personnel, the Houston Audubon Society for continued sponsorship, and to all the out-of-town birders who made a special effort to come help us on this year's count. Many, many thanks to you all!

THE SILENT KILLERS: DISEASES OF BIRDS by B. C. Robison, D.V.M.

Part 12: Listeriosis

This is a disease of birds caused by the inadvertent placement of mouthwash in bird bath water. Well, not exactly. Listeria monocytogenes is our Germ-of-the-Month; this bacteria is known to infect many kinds of birds and mammals throughout the temperate zones of the world. It is found primarily in moist humus-like soil and in the feces of affected animals. It is one of the few bird diseases that is transmissible to humans.

The birds most commonly affected are the chicken, turkey, goose, duck, and canary; less commonly, the parrot, snow owl, eagle, grouse, and partridge can also be hosts for this infection.

Frequently it is only an inapparent infection, and flares up into a clinical case as a sequela to stress or previous infection. Once it gets started it becomes septicemic, with the characteristic symptoms of depression and death. The heart, liver, and spleen are the primary targets of infection. The bacteria infiltrate the organs and destroy the cells. Infected premises are maintained by the bacteria living in the soil and in the feces in unhygienic areas.

L. monocytogenes is unfortunately resistant to most antibiotics, so good husbandry and sanitation is important in commercial operations.

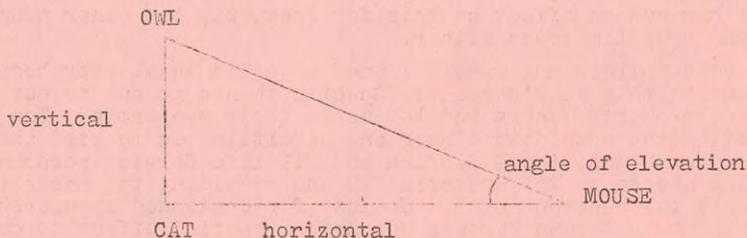
THE HEARING OF THE BARN OWL (Article from Dec. 1981 Scientific American by Eric Knudson)

Synopsis by B. C. Robison, D.V.M.

There are few birds as distinctive as the Barn Owl. Its heart-shaped face and penetrating gaze are familiar to all students of nature. Yet behind the mysterious and haunting image lies an animal of absolutely extraordinary powers of hearing. According to author Eric Knudson, a neurobiologist at Stanford, the Barn Owl exceeds the auditory acuity of even man, primates, and cats, all species exceptionally endowed with keen hearing.

We all know that owls, being nocturnal animals, hunt by the sound of their prey. That sounds simple enough, but consider for a moment what that really means. The owl, high aloft in a tree or open sky, hears the rustle and squeak of a tiny field mouse (which makes up 95 % of the owl's diet) far below. How loud can that be? And further, field mice are protectively colored, making them hard to see even in daylight. Nor do they roam out in the open, but under grass mats, leaf litter, and snow banks. And on top of all that, as the owl swoops in, he can change his flight path at the last instant so that his talons will strike at right angles to the long axis of the mouse's body, ensuring a more secure grip. So the owl knows not only where the mouse is, but also his direction and speed.

Under the most difficult circumstances imaginable, in almost total darkness, the Barn Owl strikes with stunning and deadly accuracy.



Since the owl hunts from the air, he must locate his prey by defining it in two dimensions: horizontal and vertical. A cat stalking the mouse needs to know only the horizontal vector -- i.e., how far away the mouse is along the ground. The owl must know that, and also the vertical dimension, as measured by the angle of elevation.

The Barn Owl makes these critical measurements by evaluating the difference in sound as perceived by each ear. In most cases the two ears will be unequal distances from a sound source; thus sound will hit one ear slightly sooner than it hits the other. Direction and loudness will therefore vary for each ear, and this information helps the owl determine the horizontal vector.

For the vertical component the owl relies upon its strange anatomy -- the ear canals point up and down instead of sideways. The right ear canal faces up, the left faces down. Imagine the owl flying, face toward the ground. The right ear will be more sensitive to sounds from ahead, the left more tuned to sounds more directly below or behind. Therefore the owl hears sounds in two modes: loudness and timing.

But the most important anatomic adaptation is not the ear canals, but the famous face. The feathers creating the characteristic heart-shaped face, known as the facial ruff, actually form a cup-like, exquisitely sensitive cone that reflects and funnels sound into the ear canals. The feathers form two distinct troughs that channel the sound into each ear canal. They are not evident grossly because the entire facial structure is covered with an additional layer of very fine feathering that is acoustically transparent. The ruff is thus similar in function to the external ear flap of mammals. Researchers have discovered that an owl with the ruff removed can of course still hear but that it also loses its ability of precise orientation.

With all this information of sound characteristics, the owl processes it deep within the central nervous system with speed and precision that would shame mankind's mightiest computer. So should you ever see a crazed Barn Owl carrying Ted Eubanks over a field in West Harris County, you'll know how he did it.

IN SEARCH OF ATLANTIC ALCIDS

by Mike Austin

Circumnavigate Canada's Bay of Fundy in mid-November. Rain. Fog. The idea must make icicles form in the minds of most native Texans. Yet November 13th found me bundled up and ready for any environmental challenge in Halifax's International Airport. In the following paragraphs I shall attempt to chronicle the challenges and rewards of birding eastern Canada in this rather inhospitable season.

The targets of my quest: winter alcids, Dovekie, Thick-billed Murre, and Razorbill, which I had missed while doing a summer pelagic survey in the North Atlantic in 1970; Black-backed Three-toed Woodpecker, for which I have been searching since I began birding at age 8; Black-headed Gull, whose center of abundance in North America is around Halifax, according to "American Birds" Christmas Bird Count data.

Advance preparation had been extensive. I had come armed with letters from local contacts, topographic maps of the most promising areas and summaries of the past 6 years' Atlantic Canada Christmas Counts.

"Where to Find the Birds in Nova Scotia", the only local bird-finding guide, was invaluable. The book is available locally at The Chickadee.

We landed in ideal weather - cloudless and low 40's, hardly the type of climatic welcome I had anticipated. There was just enough daylight left the first afternoon to examine a sewer outfall in Dartmouth which one of my contacts claimed was dependable for Black-headed Gulls. An hour of twisted, hilly streets and rush-hour traffic with creeping septuagenarian drivers later we were able to watch the sun set in a blaze of glory over 5 gulls - 3 Herring, 2 Ring-bills. Hardly an impressive list, even at Galveston!

Next morning dawned sunny again to find me cruising the Eastern Shore for my gull. One and one-half hours of frustrated driving through picture postcard countryside produced only a Common Loon, 5 Oldsquaws, a pair of Surf Scoters, a Horned Grebe, and hundreds of common gulls. But, at last, far out in Cole Harbour and almost back to Halifax there were my prizes: slightly more ponderous in flight than Bonaparte's with striking black underwings contrasting with their white outer primaries. I drove back into the city well-satisfied, stopping by the Volvo assembly plant of Halifax harbor where my second prize of the day awaited - an adult Lesser Black-backed Gull. The bird had reportedly spent the last several winters in the same location. He obligingly chased some Great Black-backs to underscore his subtle size and mantle color differences, then alit on a favourite lamp post, yellow legs ablaze in the morning sun.

The rest of the morning was anti-climactic: a lone immature Bald Eagle, a female Common Eider and a flock of late Tree Swallows along the shore of St. Margaret's Bay. Then, it was off to the eastern end of the Bay of Fundy and Black-backed Three-toed country. Dusk found me on a brisk hike through Amherst Point Sanctuary, formerly a hot bed of woodpecker activity. But today only an occasional chickadee broke the silence until faint twittering from a trailside tree rekindled my interest-three Common Redpolls within arm's reach, topknots ablaze, ended the day on a positive note.

Next morning's dawn walk through Amherst Point's beetle-infested spruce woods again produced no Three-toes. Only substantial numbers of Boreal and Black-capped Chickadees, some as close as six feet away were in evidence. A brief trudge around Fort Beausejour yielded the same species in similar habitat. After spotting a lone female Pine Grosbeak in an almost-bare apple tree by following her loud, yellowlegs-like call, it was off to Fundy National Park, reputedly the best place in the Maritimes to find the woodpeckers. The spruce budworm had killed acres of trees in the park and, armed with a lengthy list of likely locations provided by a former park naturalist, I had been assured the birds would be "no problem" there. Ha!

A brief stop en route along the shores of the Petitcodiac River in Moncton, New Brunswick yielded another gull I hadn't seen since seeing my first in the same location eleven years before - "Kumlien's" Iceland Gull. White-winged, smudgy brown immatures, like stunted Glaucous Gulls and round-headed adults with characteristic white wing-tips that nature had penciled with vertical charcoal streaks mingled along the shore with Herrings in amazing numbers - at least 25 in all.

But joy was short-lived. The Three-toeds were not to be found as the clouds lowered and the winds freshened in advance of a low pressure area. Over logs, across beaver dams, around bogs, through campgrounds. Everywhere dead trees. Everywhere huge patches of bark scaled by the woodpeckers. Even an old nesting hole but, alas, no Picoides arcticus. Even in defeat, my trip list continued to grow: Gray Jays, more Boreal Chickadees and a pair of White-winged Crossbills. Fundy Park even added to my mammal list - my first Snowshoe Hare, sort of a faded chocolate color at that time of year. With heavy heart we were off through the drizzle heading west along the Fundy shore.

Monday morning looked the part. Intermittent drizzle, fog, and winds the weather service promised would top forty knots. What a day for a ferry ride to Grand Manan Island! The lifer of the day was to be Razorbill, reputed to winter in "numbers" along the ferry's route a-

cross Grand Manan Channel. Is zero a number? The Mike Austin pre-Christmas count yielded 26 Great Cormorants, 4 Common Eiders, 5 Oldsquaws, 2 scoters, 3 loons but nary an alcid. Monday's bird was definitely the kittiwake, a veritable blizzard of them. As the winds howled louder, the waves grew to ten feet and beyond, and the ferry rolled hideously, the kittiwakes frolicked. Soaring, gliding, rocking, gray-hooded adults and black-naped immatures filed by in grand procession, five hundred and forty-three in all.

Tuesday the wind had died, the ferry had grown by one hundred feet and the rain had picked up in earnest. The "Princess of Acadia" would give me one more look at the gray face of the Bay of Fundy and, hopefully, my first look at the white face of an alcid. Within sight of Saint John a Red-throated Loon surfaced within forty feet of the boat affording a marvellous glimpse of its upturned profile. Scattered kittiwakes appeared again in groups of two to six, some following schools of porpoises. One and a half hours out of Saint John a lone alcid appeared at the limits of binocular range, then disappeared into the murk. A quick lunch to drown my sorrow and then back to my chilly starboard perch with one hour to go. Then, suddenly, alcids! Blown southward by yesterday's nor'easter, they were apparently huddled against the Nova Scotia shore. First, Thick-billed Murres flying. Then two birds surfaced momentarily for a maddingly brief glimpse one hundred yards ahead before tipping up and disappearing. Then, within sight of the Digby Neck light, two neckless and frontless alcids heading north. Razorbills! Hey, this hobby is fun after all! Final tally: 13 Thick-billed Murres, 2 Razorbills, one cold, soggy sleeve.

Oldsquaws, eiders and Common Mergansers lurked in the fog beside the highway en route from the ferry terminal to Digby. A lone Bonaparte's Gull ran the trip total to seven. The Lesser Black-back which had haunted Digby harbor for ten winters was not in evidence. As the rain quickened and the fog lowered, we beat a retreat for Halifax.

Rain and fog washed out a last ditch try for Three-toed Woodpeckers Wednesday morning. The elements also washed out our planned departure Wednesday night. We left Thursday morning after a 15-hour flight delay.

Final tally: three out of five "lifers". Final analysis: A successful trip species-wise. Had the weather cooperated, a trip to Brier Island near Digby might have added more alcids but, then again, the weather might have been bad for the entire trip. Final comment: I agree with Larry Ballard, the Dovekie does not exist.

HOLIDAY RARITIES

by Randy Pinkston

Kelly Bryan of Conroe and I crossed paths near Trinity, Texas, on the morning of 3 January this year. We were to work the upper Lake Livingston Christmas count. After griping at me for showing up late, Kelly casually mentioned that he, along with Tony Gallucci and Dave Stewart, had found a new state bird on the lower lake count the previous day.

Immediately I began to guess. I figured it had to be some arctic floater, but certainly not a Yellow-billed Loon! Texas had all the grebes. Could it be a duck? A little more thinking and I felt it had to be a larid. Then Kelly showed me his list. A few lines from the top was written "Black-headed Gull". WOW !! Aesthetically speaking, it's not the most exciting of rarities; just a gull. But think about it a moment: In the Western Hemisphere, it's range is confined largely to Europe and Iceland; only in recent years has it become a regular find in North America, and then only in the northeast. Without doubt, this bird should be impressive to birders and very valuable to Texas ornithology.

Without further delay, let me finish the story of how the bird was found. Kelly worked the dam on the 2nd, getting the usual Herring, Ring-billed and Bonaparte's Gulls (some 2000+ birds!), plus a bonus Laughing Gull (unusual on inland lakes) and an immature Black-legged

Kittiwake which had been hanging around since mid-December (not too shabby for Lake Livingston without the Black-headed!). Tony requested that they return to the dam so he could get his first Lake Livingston Kittiwake.

Back out on the dam, Kelly once again scanned the scattered white spots bobbing on the lake side. Mostly they were small white gulls with black bills. But suddenly there was something obviously different about one of them - a bright red bill. That feeling of having found something really good was already solid in his mind I'm sure, but a variable character like bill color couldn't safely be used alone to identify Black-headed Gull. By coincidence, Tony had been reviewing the field marks of all small, black-headed gulls immediately before Kelly spotted this bird, and he knew just what to look for. It soon took flight, affording them excellent looks at the black underwings and white outer primaries. It was a perfect adult in winter plumage! They left the dam that afternoon with six species of gulls, one of them a new state record. That's what I call Miller time.

Many birders from all over the state (and elsewhere) came to see this bird in the days that followed, several of which got photographs. It wasn't always a matter of scanning through a raft of Bonaparte's Gulls. Many times it was found feeding below the dam, where the size difference between it and Bonaparte's was more obvious. Occasionally it wasn't found at all. In short, success depended mostly on patience, which was sometimes difficult to muster in the chilling wind. If you're still interested, it was seen at least up until the weekend of Jan. 16-17.

Another rarity was found closer to home, here on the UTC. It was a Mangrove Cuckoo, a stray from the opposite direction of the gull I'm sure. On 30 December 1981, at least two observers discovered it independently near the ferry landing on Bolivar Peninsula. One of those observers was Eugene Armstrong. More specifically, it was found at the intersection of Hwy. 87 and the first road to the left coming east from the ferry on the peninsula. Like the gull, it was visited by many birders, most of whom were successful if patient. Some found it immediately though, perched on a roadside barbed-wire fence or atop a nearby billboard. Several onlookers got excellent photographs. It foraged in the field of rattlebean at that intersection and roosted in some oleanders on the backside. It was seen up until the time of the cold snap (ca. Tues., Jan. 12). The cold might have been a lethal surprise for it or, more optimistically, it could have moved elsewhere just in time. Or perhaps it's still there? In any case, it was a super find (only the 2nd accepted record for the UTC; the other was also found in late December) and a great winter surprise for all who were lucky enough to get down there during those two weeks.

CLEARING HOUSE December 1981

The Clearing House is a monthly record of bird sightings made on the Upper Texas Coast. How to read the CH: Species, Location--(how many) date, observers. Those common species which can be easily identified and are widely distributed in the UTC will also be listed, followed by the number of reports, with the lowest and highest number of individuals seen in parentheses, i.e. (1-40). Noteworthy sightings will be underlined, capitalized, or both, according to their status. All observations reported below must be accepted by the Checklist Committee before they are considered valid and included in the next checklist.

Loon, Common: 6 reports (3-20)

Loon, Red-throated: Texas City Dike--(1)26,DD...see notes

Loon, Arctic: Texas City Dike--(1)26,DD...see notes

Grebe, Horned: Chambers Co.--(32)19,HC; Brazoria Co.--(2)20,Fr; Texas City--(2)21,G

Grebe, Eared: 7 reports (1-123)

Grebe, Pied-billed: 10 reports (4-189)

Felican, White: 10 reports (8-650)

Pelican, Brown: Galv--(1)10,J&H; Brazoria Co.--(1)20,DM...notes submitted
 Gannet, Northern: Quintana Jetty--(11)20,Fr
 Cormorant, Double-crested: 10 reports (2-2800)
 Cormorant, Olivaceous: Bolivar--(1)31,D; Chambers Co.--(47)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--(13)20,Fr
 Anhinga: W. Harris Co.--(1)8,TG; (3)28,CC; Chambers Co.--(5)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--(156)20,Fr
 Heron, Great Blue: 11 reports (1-366)
 Heron, Green: W. Harris Co.--(1)8,TG; Chambers Co.--(10)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--(5)20,Fr
 Heron, Little Blue: 5 reports (1-35)
 Egret, Cattle: 8 reports (6-233)
 Egret, Reddish: 5 reports (1-18)
 Egret, Great: 11 reports (5-495)
 Egret, Snowy: 10 reports (1-241)
 Heron, Louisiana: 8 reports (1-77)
 Night Heron, Black-crowned: 6 reports (1-333)
 Night Heron, Yellow-crowned: W. Harris Co.--(3)8,TG; Chambers Co.--(8)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--(40)20,Fr
 Bittern, American: 3 reports (1-10)
Stork, Wood: Baytown--(11)19,HC...see notes
 Ibis, White-faced: Brazoria Co.--(1,993)20,Fr; 4 other reports (1-18)
 Ibis, White: Brazoria Co.--(657)20,Fr; 3 other reports (2-24)
 Spoonbill, Roseate: 4 reports (2-140)
 Goose, Canada: 4 reports (70-350)
 Goose, White-fronted: 5 reports (1-1500)
 Goose, Snow: 6 reports (68-59,950)
 Goose, Snow (Blue): 5 reports (100-28,800)
 Goose, Ross': W. Harris Co.--(1)11,17,(4)24,TG;(2)28,CC; Baytown--(3)19,HC; Brazoria Co.--(1)20,Fr
Whistling-Duck, Black-bellied: Brazoria Co.--(125)20,Fr...notes submitted
 Mallard: 5 reports (26-500)
 Duck, Mottled: 6 reports (15-249)
 Gadwall: 6 reports (4-419)
 Pintail, Common: 6 reports (39-513)
 Teal, Green-winged: 5 reports (2-2,110)
 Teal, Blue-winged: 5 reports (3-224)
 Teal, Cinnamon: W. Harris Co.--(2)8,(4)24,TG; (44)28,CC
 Wigeon, American: 7 reports (4-1,415)
 Shoveler, Northern: 8 reports (4-485)
 Duck, Wood: Baytown--(33)19,Ho; Chambers Co.--(39)20,Fr
 Redhead: Baytown--(5)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--(8)20,Fr; W. Harris Co.--(41)28,CC; Houston--(1)27,BB
 Duck, Ring-necked: 6 reports (1-120)
 Canvasback: 5 reports (1-226)
 Scaup, Greater: W. Harris Co.--(1)24,TG; (4)28,CC; Baytown--(187)19, Ho; Brazoria Co.--(40)20,Fr; Houston--(10)27,BB; Texas City--(60)21, G; Bolivar--(20)27,I
 Scaup, Lesser: 9 reports (16-2,580)
 Goldeneye, Common: Brazoria Co.--(38)13,B; (55)20,Fr; Baytown--(40)19,Ho
 Bufflehead: W. Harris Co.--(1)24,TG; (1)28,CC; Baytown--(170)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--(304)20,Fr
 Scoter, White-winged: Brazoria Co.--(3)20,Fr
 Scoter, Surf: Brazoria Co.--(12)20,Fr
Scoter, Black: Cooling Ponds--(1)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--(35)20,Fr... notes submitted
 Duck, Ruddy: 6 reports (1-690)
 Merganser, Hooded: W. Harris Co.--(3)17,TG; Baytown--(16)19,HC; Brazoria Co.--(3)21, Chuck Sexton
 Merganser, Red-breasted: 4 reports (1-2054)
 Vulture, Turkey: 10 reports (1-220)
 Vulture, Black: 6 reports (1-102)
 Kite, White-tailed: 4 reports (1-24)
 Hawk, Sharp-shinned: W. Harris Co.--(2)17,TG; (3)28,CC; Baytown--(3)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--(6)20,Fr; Houston--(3)27,BB

Hawk, Cooper's: Baytown--(6)19,HC; Brazoria Co.--(2)20,Fr; W. Harris Co.--(2)28,CC; Houston--(1)27,BE
 Hawk, Red-tailed: 10 reports (1-117)
 Hawk, Red-tailed (Krider's): W. Harris Co.--(2)8,11,(1)17,TG; (2)28,CC
 Hawk, Red-tailed (Harlan's): W. Harris Co.--(1)15-24,TG...see notes; (1)28,CC; Baytown--(1)19,HC
 Hawk, Red-shouldered: 6 reports (2-77)
 Hawk, Ferruginous: W. Harris Co.--(1)28,CC
 Eagle, Bald: W. Harris Co.--(1 ad.)8,(4 imm.)17,TG; (6)28,CC
 Hawk, Marsh: 11 reports (1-151)
 Osprey: Texas City--(1)15,D; Brazoria Co.--(1)13,B; (5)20,Fr; Baytown--(3)19,HC
 Caracara: W. Harris Co.--(1)17,TG; (1)28,CC; Brazoria Co.--(1)18, Brownie Rhodes
 Falcon, Peregrine: Galv Bank--(1)23,D; (2)26, unnamed observer
 Merlin: Baytown--(1)19,HC; Brazoria Co.--(2)20,Fr
 Kestrel, American: 10 reports (4-222)
 Bobwhite: 7 reports (1-50)
 Crane, Sandhill: 4 reports (2-427)
 Rail, King: 5 reports (1-36)
 Rail, Clapper: 4 reports (1-41)
 Rail, Virginia: Brazoria Co.--(54)20,Fr
 Sora: Baytown--(1)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--(69)20,Fr
 Gallinule, Common: 5 reports (1-91)
 Coot, American: 9 reports (8-2,779)
 Plover, Semipalmated: 2 reports (3,14)
 Plover, Piping: 2 reports (1,11)
 Plover, Snowy: Bolivar--(1)31,D; Brazoria Co.--(10)20,Fr
 Killdeer: 10 reports (10-2415)
 Plover, Black-bellied: 5 reports (1-104)
 Turnstone, Ruddy: 5 reports (1-345)
 Woodcock: Manvel--(1)25,KW; Baytown--(12)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--(12)20, Fr; W. Harris Co.--(2)28,CC
 Snipe, Common: 8 reports (1-133)
 Curlew, Long-billed: 6 reports (1-231)
 Sandpiper, Spotted: 6 reports (1-52)
 Willet: 6 reports (1-98)
 Yellowlegs, Greater: 8 reports (1-358)
 Yellowlegs, Lesser: 9 reports (1-84)
 Knot, Red: Brazoria Co.--(3)20,Fr
 Sandpiper, Purple: Quintana Jetty--(1)20,Fr...notes submitted
 Sandpiper, Least: 5 reports (10-1096)
 Dunlin: 4 reports (25-1403)
 Dowitcher, Short-billed: 2 reports (8-305)
 Dowitcher, Long-billed: 4 reports (3-2008)
 dowitcher spp.: 5 reports (6-643)
 Sandpiper, Stilt: W. Harris Co.--(12)8,(35)11,(3)15,TG; (3)28,CC... previously described
 Sandpiper, Semipalmated: Bolivar--(3)31,D
 Sandpiper, Western: 6 reports (4-1718)
 Godwit, Marbled: Bolivar--(6)31,D; Brazoria Co.--(2)20,Fr
 Sanderling: 4 reports (6-2295)
 Avocet, American: 3 reports (21-127)
 Stilt, Black-necked: W. Harris Co.--(4)28,CC
 Jaeger sp.: Quintana Jetty--(1)20,Fr...notes submitted
 Gull, Herring: 7 reports (1-379)
 Gull, Ring-billed: 11 reports (10-4100)
 Gull, Laughing: 7 reports (50-7100)
 Gull, Franklin's: Quintana Jetty--(1)20,Fr; (1)21,G(same bird)...see notes
 Gull, Bonaparte's: W. Harris Co.--(1)17,TG; 4 other reports (3-225)
 Kittiwake, Black-legged: Quintana Jetty--(2)20,Fr...notes submitted
 Tern, Gull-billed: Baytown--(2)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--(17)20,Fr; (1)21, G
 Tern, Forster's: 6 reports (10-1284)
 Tern, Common: Baytown--(38)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--(146)20,Fr; (2)21,G
 TERN, LEAST: Baytown--(1)19,Ho...see notes

Tern, Royal: 7 reports (1-121)
 Tern, Sandwich: Brazoria Co.--(3)20,Fr
 Tern, Caspian: 7 reports (1-253)
 Skimmer, Black: 3 reports (1-30)
 Dove, Rock: 9 reports (2-497)
 Dove, White-winged: 1 report from Galv (2)
 Dove, Mourning: 8 reports (6-936)
 Dove, Ground: Galv--(2)15,H; Baytown--(4)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--(19)20,
 Fr; W. Harris Co.--(8)28,CC
 Dove, Inca: 5 reports (3-30)
 CUCKOO, MANGROVE: Bolivar Peninsula--(1)30-31, sev. observers...see
 notes next month
 Ani, Groove-billed: W. Galv--(34)15,H; Baytown--(1)19,Ho; Brazoria
 Co.--(21)20,Fr
 Owl, Barn: Galv--(1)15,H; Manvel--(1)12,KW; Baytown--(17)19,Ho; Bra-
 zoria Co.--(5)20,Fr; W. Harris Co.--(7)28,CC; Houston--(1)27,BB
 Owl, Screech: Manvel--(2)all month, KW; Baytown--(173)19,Ho; Bra-
 zoria Co.--(4)20,Fr; W. Harris Co.--(5)28,CC; Houston--(6)27,BB
 Owl, Great Horned: Baytown--(24)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--(6)20,Fr; W.
 Harris Co.--(2)28,CC; Houston--(2)27,BB
 Owl, Burrowing: Brazoria Co.--(1)20, DM; Pelican Island--(1)26,DM...
 notes submitted
 Owl, Barred: Baytown--(8)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--(22)20,Fr; W. Harris Co.
 --(3)28,CC; Houston--(1)27,BB
 Owl, Short-eared: Baytown--(3)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--(1)20,Fr; W. Harris
 Co.--(1)28,CC
 Chaetura sp.: Baytown--(1)19,Ho...see notes
 Hummingbird, Ruby-throated: Brazoria Co.--(1)20,Fr...see notes
 Hummingbird, Black-chinned: Brazoria Co.--(1)20,Fr
 Hummingbird, Anna's: Brazoria Co.--(1)20,Fr; Houston--(1)6-23, Glenn
 Cureton...see notes
 HUMMINGBIRD, BROAD-TAILED: Brazoria Co.--(2)20,Fr...see notes
 Hummingbird, Rufous: Baytown--(1)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--(8)20,Fr;
 Houston--(1)23-31,WC; (2)27,BB
 Hummingbird, Buff-bellied: Brazoria Co.--(1)20,Fr...notes submitted
 Kingfisher, Belted: 9 reports (3-97)
 Flicker, Common (Yellow-shafted): 8 reports (3-261)
 Flicker, Common (Red-shafted): Bear Creek Park--(1)7,TG...notes sub-
 mitted
 Woodpecker, Pileated: 5 reports (1-27)
 Woodpecker, Red-bellied: 5 reports (2-75)
 Woodpecker, Red-headed: Baytown--(4)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--(1)20,Fr;
 Houston--(1)27,BB
 Sapsucker, Yellow-bellied: 7 reports (1-34)
 Woodpecker, Hairy: Brazoria Co.--(1)20,Fr
 Woodpecker, Downy: 5 reports (3-37)
 Flycatcher, Scissor-tailed: Baytown--(1)19,Ho...notes submitted
 Flycatcher, Ash-throated: Brazoria Co.--(1)20,Fr...see notes
 Phoebe, Eastern: 8 reports (3-221)
 Empidonax species: Brazoria Co.--(1)20,Fr
 Flycatcher, Vermilion: Brazoria Co.--(2)13,B; (13)20,Fr; W. Harris
 Co.--(2)28,CC; Houston--(1)27,BB
 Lark, Horned: 2 reports (3,21)
 Swallow, Tree: Baytown--(126)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--(82)20,Fr
 Swallow, Rough-winged: Brazoria Co.--(1)20,Fr
 Jay, Blue: 8 reports (1-189)
 Crow, Common: 7 reports (10-671)
 Chickadee, Carolina: 5 reports (12-447)
 Titmouse, Tufted: 5 reports (11-229)
 Creeper, Brown: Baytown--(7)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--(4)20,Fr; Houston--
 (2)27,BB
 Wren, House: 5 reports (1-66)
 Wren, Winter: Baytown--(5)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--(5)20,Fr; White Oak
 Bayou--(1)5,WC
 Wren, Carolina: 5 reports (1-102)
 Wren, Marsh: Baytown--(8)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--(136)20,Fr
 Wren, Sedge: 6 reports (1-102)
 Mockingbird, Northern: 10 reports (3-294)
 Catbird, Gray: Baytown--(12)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--(8)20,Fr; W. Harris

Co.--(1)28,CC
 Thrasher, Brown: 7 reports (1-123)
 Robin, American: 6 reports (80-3000)
 Thrush, Hermit: 4 reports (3-18)
 Thrush, Swainson's: Brazoria Co.--(1)20,Fr...see notes
 Bluebird, Eastern: 5 reports (3-41)
 Gnatcatcher, Blue-gray: 7 reports (1-238)
 Kinglet, Golden-crowned: W. Harris Co.--(1)17,TG; (3)28,CC; Baytown--
 (4)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--(3)20,Fr
 Kinglet, Ruby-crowned: 6 reports (5-779)
 Pipit, Water: 7 reports (10-458)
 Pipit, Sprague's: Brazoria Co.--(3)13,B; (47)20,Fr; W. Harris Co.--
 (3)8,(1)17,TG; (4)28,CC; Baytown--(5)19,Ho
 Waxwing, Cedar: 3 reports (1-10)...very low
 Shrike, Loggerhead: 10 reports (7-327)
 Starling: 10 reports (32-1964)
 Vireo, White-eyed: Baytown--(11)19,Ho
 Vireo, Solitary: 3 reports (11-20)
 Vireo species: Bear Creek Park--(1)7,TG...see notes
 Warbler, Black-and-white: Baytown--(1)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--(6)20,Fr
 Warbler, Tennessee: W. Galv--(2)15,H...see notes
 Warbler, Orange-crowned: 8 reports (1-153)
 Warbler, Nashville: Baytown--(2)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--(2)20,Fr
 Warbler, Yellow-rumped (Myrtle): 10 reports (2-1743)
 Warbler, Pine: 4 reports (1-56)
 Warbler, Palm: Brazoria Co.--(14)20,Fr
 Yellowthroat, Common: 6 reports (2-172)
 Warbler, Wilson's: W. Galv--(1)15,H; Baytown--(3)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--
 (23)20,Fr; Houston--(5)27,BB
 Redstart, American: Brazoria Co.--(1)20,Fr
 Sparrow, House: 10 reports (20-534)
 Meadowlark, Eastern: 10 reports (2-836)
 Meadowlark, Western: W. Harris Co.--(2 by voice)8,TG; Brazoria Co.--
 (1)20,Fr
 Blackbird, Red-winged: 8 reports (40-4878)
 Oriole, Northern: Houston--(1)27,BB...see notes
 Oriole, Northern (Bullock's): Brazoria Co.--(1)20,Fr
 Blackbird, Rusty: Baytown--(25)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--(30)20,Fr; Hou-
 ston--(1)27,BB
 Blackbird, Brewer's: 6 reports (25-278)
 Grackle, Boat-tailed: 4 reports (3-298)
 Grackle, Great-tailed: 10 reports (15-2190)
 Grackle, Common: 6 reports (1-2377)
 Cowbird, Brown-headed: 8 reports (100-15,000)
 Cowbird, Bronzed: Brazoria Co.--(5)20,Fr
 Cardinal: 9 reports (2-823)
 Grosbeak, Black-headed: Brazoria Co.--(1)20,Fr
 Bunting, Indigo: Brazoria Co.--(4)20,Fr
 Finch, Purple: Brazoria Co.--(1)20,Fr
 Siskin, Pine: Chambers Co.--(3)19,Ho; W. Harris Co.--(2)16,TG; (3)28,
 CC; Houston--(3)27,BB
 Goldfinch, American: 7 reports (4-649)
 Towhee, Green-tailed: Baytown--(1)19,Ho...see notes
 Towhee, Eastern: 4 reports (1-5)
 Sparrow, Savannah: 8 reports (5-680)
 Sparrow, Grasshopper: Baytown--(1)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--(2)20,Fr; W.
 Harris Co.--(1)28,CC; Houston--(1)27,BB
 Sparrow, Le Conte's: Baytown--(12)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--(5)20,Fr; W.
 Harris Co.--(1)28,CC; Houston--(1)27,BB
 Sparrow, Henslow's: Baytown--(1)19,Ho
 Sparrow, Sharp-tailed: Baytown--(3)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--(6)20,Fr
 Sparrow, Seaside: 2 reports (6,31)
 Sparrow, Vesper: 6 reports (2-39)
 Sparrow, Lark: Baytown--(1)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--(3)20,Fr; W. Harris
 Co.--(2)28,CC
 Junco, Dark-eyed (Slate-colored): Baytown--(2)19,Ho; Brazoria Co.--
 (1)20,Fr
 Sparrow, Chipping: 5 reports (1-70)
 Sparrow, Field: Baytown--(11)19, Ho; Brazoria Co.--(5)20,Fr; W. Harris

Co.--(1)28,CC; Houston--(2)27,BB
Sparrow, Harris': Baytown--(1)19,Ho; Houston--(4)27,BB
Sparrow, White-crowned: 5 reports (2-31)
Sparrow, White-throated: 5 reports (12-480)
Sparrow, Fox: W. Harris Co.--(1)17,TG; (2)28,CC; Baytown--(2)19,Ho;
Brazoria Co.--(1)20,Fr
Sparrow, Lincoln's: 5 reports (8-131)
Sparrow, Swamp: 7 reports (1-418)
Sparrow, Song: 7 reports (1-57)

Clearing House Contributors - December, 1981: B-Ron & Marcia Braun, Marilyn Crane, Tony Gallucci, Jim Morgan; BB-Buffalo Bayou Christmas Count; CC-Cypress Creek Christmas Count; D-Ruth & Arch Dillard; DD-Dave Dauphin & Vicki McLemore; DM-David Marrack; Fr-Freeport Christmas Count; G-Tony Gallucci, Kelly Bryan, Greg & Becky Lasley, Chuck Sexton; H-John & Jane Hamilton, Fae Humphrey, Carolyn Killian; I-Dave Dauphin & Steve Williams; Ho or HC-Houston Christmas Count; J&JH-John & Jane Hamilton; LR-Linda Roach; KW-Kris Wilson; TG-Tony Gallucci; WC-Wesley Cureton.

Field Notes - December, 1981

Arctic Loon: Same size as Red-throated Loon which was 20 ft. away from this bird; small loon, smaller than accompanying Commons; cap dark gray and extending to below the eye; No white seen above or around the eye; Nape lighter gray than cap and back; back was same dark gray as cap; throat, chest, flanks were white; bill was very thin - much, much smaller and more delicate than prominent bills on nearby Common Loons. Light and weather excellent; 15-60X B&L @ 30-75 yards.
--Dave Dauphin & Vicki McLemore

Red-throated Loon: Very small loon with very light gray cap, nape, back; back speckled; throat, chest and sides white; bill thin and upturned. Light and weather excellent; 15-60X B&L @ 30-75 yards.
--Dave Dauphin & Vicki McLemore

Wood Stork: seen at 3 PM over San Jacinto R. About the same size as nearby White Pelicans, but slimmer. Flew with head and legs extended. Wings held straight. Wingbeat slow and deliberate. White birds with dark heads. Primaries black from fingertips to armpits.
--Buz Peine, Steve Schultz, P.D. Hulce

Red-tailed (Harlan's) Hawk: buteo shape, black body and wings, mottled tail underneath with dark band near end.
--Bob Norris and others

Red-tailed (Harlan's) Hawk: Buteo shaped like red-tail; Solid black except for a few white feathers in breast and a light gray oval in center of black tail. Had characteristic behavior of leaning forward when perched and of perching low. 100 yds., 15-60X B&L.
--Tony Gallucci

Franklin's Gull: slightly smaller than nearby Laughing Gulls. Gray-mantled, dark-winged bird. First noticed because of apparent broad rectangle in end of tail. The outer tail feathers were pure white, and there was a very broad white distal tail band. The "jizz" was very different. No features of the head were seen. In immature Laughing Gulls, the outer tail feathers are banded, and the terminal white tail band, when present, is very thin.
--Tony Gallucci

LEAST TERN: seen briefly at 20 yds. in good light with 7X35 binocs. Only observed on dorsal surface. Small tern--much smaller than Forster's Terns seen earlier. All-black short needle-like bill. Black stripe extending from bill through eye. White forehead patch. Wings had abrupt black primaries at leading edge. No fork in tail. Butterflylike flight. Very familiar with bird by size alone. Don't know what else this could be.
--Rick Goldfarb

Chaetura species: small, dark. Rapid wingbeat and shape gave the bird away in an instant. Distinctly smaller than Tree Swallows with which it mixed. When the bird faced us in flight, there was a light patch which appeared to include the anterior underparts. Sailed on fixed wings about 75% of the time.
--Randy Pinkston, Fred Collins, and party

Ruby-throated Hummingbird: green back and head, light underparts. Throat clear of spots. Wings same length or a little shorter than tail. Apparently a female. Black-chins tail is shorter than wings. Female Black-chin has small spots on throat. --Jim Renfro

Anna's Hummingbird: seemed larger than Rufous that visited yard during same period. Bright green back extending all the way down to the end of the two middle tail feathers. Flanks were also greenish, and the belly had large smudges of pale gray. The only white was on the upper breast, between the throat and the green and gray farther below. Throat had a good bit of dark color that occasionally flashed reddish. On one side the throat color extended far down and back on to the neck. Beak straight and black. Tail very slightly notched and dark on the outer feathers except for small white corners. There was no buffy or rufous color anywhere on the bird, which would seem to eliminate Broad-tail. Came very quickly to feeder. Quite noisy while perching, but no definite song was heard. --Glenn Cureton

BROAD-TAILED HUMMINGBIRD: larger than Rufous hummer. Back and head bronzy green, not emerald green. Flanks buffy, center of belly gray. 50% of gorget developed; twice flashed rose red. Tail wide and square at bottom, with some rufous in sides. Rufous flanks and square tail eliminate Anna's. Large size, lack of much rufous in tail, and rose red throat (instead of mercurochrome red) eliminate Rufous hummer. --Margaret Anderson, Faye Humphrey, Norma Oates

BROAD-TAILED HUMMINGBIRD: apparently a female. Broad square tail when perched. Buffy flanks. Back bronzy green becoming dark green at middle of base of tail. Dark decurved bill. Gray-green spots on throat. Breast dingy grayish white. Wings did not whistle. Not a Rufous because of wide and square tail and large size. Not chunky like Anna's, with shorter wings. --Diane & Doyle Wise

Ash-throated Flycatcher: near size of cardinal. Perched 5-12 ft. Caught large grasshopper. Dark brown crest, grayish brown back and wings. Wing coverts and secondaries edged with dull white. Rufous in primaries seen best in flight. Much brown in tail with rufous showing in flight. Throat and upper breast pale gray, blending gradually into pale yellow belly and undertail coverts. underside of tail more rufous than above. Bill medium-sized and all dark. Gape orange (seen while catching insect). Leg color not noted. Gave single emphatic "peet". Great Crested is larger and brighter with larger bill. Weid's is larger with larger bill. Call is different. We are familiar with Ash-throat from southwest. --Charles Sexton, David Ferry

Swainson's Thrush: slightly larger than Hermit Thrush. Thrushlike bird with uniform dull brownish-gray back, tail, and head. Throat, breast, and undertail coverts were off-white. Upper breast and upper flanks had pale but distinct reddish-brown spots. Lower edge of cheek had a few brownish black flecks. Warm buffy color began at lower cheek and extended into cheek, forming a buffy eye ring and superciliary line. Bill was dark. Gray-cheeked Thrush eliminated because of buffy cheeks. Hermit and Wood Thrushes eliminated because of uniform dull brownish gray tail, back, and head. --Ron Braun, Emory Froelich

Vireo species: small vireo feeding with kinglets and warblers in open parkland. In behavior reminiscent of Bell's or White-eyed. Back grayish green, breast grayish white. A single very broad white wingbar. A second, upper wingbar may have been obscured. The dark eye was surrounded by an unusual spectacle - a white line from the bill back to the eye and circling below and around the eye and then projecting backwards a distance, all together looking like an upside-down omega, leaving a gap in the eye ring above. I only saw the bird a total of about 10 seconds in 3 brief glimpses. I am very familiar with Hutton's Vireo and thought this bird to be most similar to that species, except for the lack of a smaller upper wingbar and for the funny eye ring. I failed to relocate the bird on three subsequent days. --Tony Gallucci

Notes continued on outside flap.....

Notes cont. ...

Tennessee Warbler: seen in a wooded area ca. 30 ft. away for 10 mins; a typical fall Tennessee with thin black line through eye and yellowish wash on sides and breast. --Jane Hamilton

Northern Oriole: in mixed hardwoods and pines. Obvious oriole posture. Icterid bill, which was all dark. Olive-gray back, nape, and crown. Orange or yellow-orange breast, crissum, and rump. Darker orange-brown tail. Whitish belly, tending more towards gray than white. Wings were dark, brown-olive, with two distinct white wingbars. Orchard, Scott's, and Hooded Orioles are not expected and are all greener than this bird. --Jim Morgan, Tony Gallucci

Green-tailed Towhee: brick-red cap, very white throat, green-tinged nape and back. Slightly longer and generally thinner than Swamp Sparrow, but otherwise about the same size. Sat up on low scrub with crown raised in response to pish. Did not see tail. --Paul Nimmons

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