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The Spoonbill

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CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Why is it there are so few young members in the Ornithology Group? There are plenty of elderly, old and middle-aged birders in our club attending field trips and monthly meetings. But no young folks, Brian Tarbox excluded. I mean people between the age of eight and eighteen. Why this is I do not know; however, I know it bothers me. Maybe there is a "normal" progression birders must go through in life that does not allow birding as a youth. Surely we don't expect toddlers to be involved with birds, their concerns revolve around food and putting stress on Mom and Dad. The preteen has enough to worry about with learning how to get along with one another at school and in the neighborhood. Clearly high-school students have no time for birds. They are consumed with sports, girls/boys, being cool, gangs and so much more. I doubt very much if any gang initiation ever involved bird identification. Once in college, studies and lack of time and money tend to prevent one from going afield. And only after all this is there the time and opportunity to be exposed to the joys of birding. I wonder if more opportunities to become involved in birding were made available to youngsters would they find the time and have the desire to become interested in birds, and eventually break this system that selectively excludes many of them from getting started in birding at an early age.

However, I know of some that have fought the system and won. Actually many of the premier birders in Houston and the country began birding at a very early age, often prompted by a parent or other birder, and were able to continue through high school and college. They probably had to overcome some peer ridicule and the feeling of isolation on more than one occasion. What I wonder is, how can the OG get more young people interested in birds?

American Birding Association (ABA) has initiated a Youth Education Program for 1993 (see *Winging It*, vol. 5, #5, May 1993). VENT offers the highly-successful Camp Chiricahua in Arizona each summer. And I am sure there are other bird-related programs across the country designed to help youngsters enjoy birds.

This year, in an attempt to promote birding among young people, the OG has begun to develop a field trip program designed exclusively for young people. David Veselka, a teacher at Kinkaid School, has agreed to coordinate these efforts. There are presently four field trips scheduled to areas with large, easy-to-spot birds (herons, egrets, ducks and geese). The immediate problem we face is how do we get our message about our youth field trips out to the appropriate individuals and what other bird related activities, if any at all, should we offer? If you have any suggestions on our new program please call David Veselka at 692-1384. Also we are in need of volunteers to help lead or co-lead youth field trips. You do not need to be an expert in field identification to lead or help lead a youth field trip, all you need is the ability to identify a reasonable number of birds and be able to share your enthusiasm for birds with some future birders.

Wouldn't it be nice to use some of our money generated from raising membership dues last year to send a young birder to Camp Chiricahua next year or to purchase memberships to the ABA for a few kids? Again, if you have any suggestions or feel you might be able to help David Veselka please give him a call (692-1384).

David Bradford
855-2615

COMING EVENTS

Saturday, August 28: OG FIELD TRIP TO BOLIVAR FLATS. Winnie Burkett, who is the chairperson for the Houston Audubon Sanctuary Committee and who is doing a regular census of the shorebird populations at Bolivar Flats, will be the trip leader for this half-day trip. To meet Winnie at the Flats at 8:00 a.m., take the Bolivar ferry at 7:30 or earlier if coming from the Galveston direction. To reach the flats, go north from the ferry landing, on Route 87 until reaching Loop 108. Turn right toward the beach. Turn right again and proceed to the meeting place at the bollards. Call Winnie for any additional information. 713/992-5640.

Monday, August 30: OG MEETING. 7:00 p.m. Harris County Bayland Community Park located on the north side of Bissonnet just west of Hillcroft. Please note that this is our September meeting! OG member David Dauphin, who is known for his ability to "talk" to owls, will use this forum to discuss North American woodpeckers. David is on the OG UTC Checklist Committee and is a former chairman of the OG. Learning Corner will be held at 6:30 p.m. Karen Beekman will conclude her discussion of basic birding tools: scopes, use of bird tapes, taking field notes, and birding organizations.

Saturday, September 11: OG FIELD TRIP TO SABINE WOODS. This half-day trip to Sabine Woods, Sabine Pass Historic Park and possibly Sea Rim State Park will be led by Tony and Phyllis Frank and will be primarily devoted to seeking fall migrants. Meet at 6:45 a.m. at the McDonald's in Winnie, Texas (on north side of I-10). Be prepared for sun, mosquitoes and BIRDS! Call Tony and Phyllis at 713/480-7878 for more information.

Saturday, September 18: BEACH CLEANUP AND HOUSTON AUDUBON FIELD TRIP. The beach cleanup at Bolivar Flats starts at 9:00 a.m., but if you want to look at birds before getting down to work, join the Audubon field trip at 8:00 a.m. For directions to the Flats refer to the August 28th field trip description above. See you there!

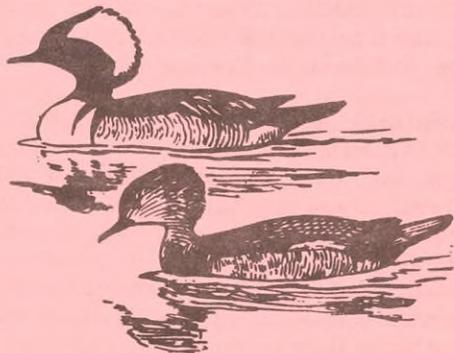
Wednesday, September 29: OG WEEKDAY FIELD TRIP TO SMITH POINT HAWK COUNT. This first weekday field trip of the season will visit Abshier Wildlife Management Area, site of Smith Point Hawk Count 1993 (SPHC). Trip leaders and SPHC co-compilers Gail Luckner and Winnie Burkett will focus on identification of raptors in flight as we watch for accipiters, falcons, Broad-winged Hawks and more. Meet at Abshier Wildlife Management Area at 8:30 a.m. The trip will conclude around noon. Bring water and insect repellent. For more details call Gail Luckner at 328-6236. Follow directions given in the October 2nd field trip description below.

Saturday, October 2: OG FIELD TRIP TO CANDY ABSHIER WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA. Meet at 9:00 a.m. at the Wildlife Management Area for three hours of hawkwatching. To reach this area from Houston, go east on I-10 to exit 813 and turn south (right) onto Highway 61. At the intersection of 65, 61, and 562, continue south (straight) onto 562, bear right at intersection of 562 and 1985 and proceed to Smith Point. Near the end of the road, watch for oil storage tanks on the left and signs pointing to the hawkwatching spot. Dawn and Ross Carrie will be on duty for the hawk census and Gail Luckner or Winnie Burkett will also be present to help identify the hawks. Bring a folding chair and sunscreen. The numbers of hawks depend on the weather, but expect to see Broad-winged, Red-tailed, Sharp-shinned, Cooper's Hawks and others. Call Gail Luckner at 713/328-6236 or Dwight Peake at 409/740-4621 for details.

Monday, October 4: OG MEETING. 7:00 p.m. Harris County Bayland Community Park. OG member Peter Gottschling will discuss Texas pelagic birding. Learning Corner is at 6:30 p.m.

Saturday, October 16: OG FIELD TRIP TO HIGH ISLAND. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at the Houston Audubon Louis Smith/Boy Scout Woods. From I-10, take Hwy. 124 south from Winnie to High Island; turn left onto 5th Street at the Post Office and park along the road at the sanctuary. Observing fall migrant passerines is the main goal of this trip. For more details, call the trip leader Dwight Peake at 409/740-4621.

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS: The OG field trip for November is scheduled for Saturday, November 13 to Brazos Bend State Park. (You can buy your TPWD Conservation Passport at the entrance.) A half-day trip to the Barker Reservoir area of west Houston is scheduled for Sunday, December 5th.



NEWS BRIEFS

.....**MINUTES OF THE AUGUST 2, 1993 OG MEETING:** Karen Beekman gave an informative talk about birding equipment for the Learning Corner.

Chairman David Bradford opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m. with a greeting to guests and new members. He pointed out that the next meeting would be Monday, August 30, and not the first Monday of September, because of the Labor Day holiday. He further mentioned that we should be out of the Community Center building no later than 9:30 pm following meetings, to accommodate the people who must close up after us. David then introduced all new officers.

Treasurer Mike Gremillion noted the new procedure for paying membership dues. Dues are now \$20 and checks must be made out to the ONC Treasurer and mailed to ONC Membership officer Pat Wight. [See CONTACTS for her address. Ed.] David Veselka announced the new field trip program for teenagers (middle school/high school). This program is designed to encourage younger people to become involved in birdwatching and the OG. P.D. Hulce pointed out the progress being made on the revised UTC birding maps. The new West Harris County map is currently available--see Mike Gremillion. Winnie Burkett noted the September 18 Beach Cleanup, and announced that there would be an 8:00 a.m. pre-cleanup field trip sponsored by Houston Audubon.

Program Chairman Steve Bennett introduced the evening's speaker Mike Austin. Mike's colorful slide program brought to life an area few of us will ever see--Attu Island in the Aleutian Island chain. Many birds which are normally considered rare or accidental are common here. Among the birds he saw were Rufous-necked Stint, White-tailed Eagle and Steller's Sea-Eagle, Purple Sandpiper and even a Spoonbill Sandpiper! Mike expounded on the environment he experienced while there, including the "Attu National Forest," and the (not so) luxurious accommodations. His presentation was extremely interesting and enjoyable.

Maggie Dinse, Secretary

.....**NEED BIRDSEED?** The Houston Arboretum and Nature Center is holding their Third Annual Birdseed Sale-A-Bratton. Call the Nature Center at 681-8433.

.....**A BIRDING MAP OF WEST HARRIS AND WALLER COUNTIES** prepared by P.D. Hulce for the OG is available. Stop by the membership table at the next OG meeting to pick up your complimentary copy. This map with numbered locations describes what-birds-have-been-found-where-and-when is the result of months of work by P.D. Hulce collecting and organizing the contributions of many OG birders and of course incorporates his records from his years spent birding this area extensively over the years. This map with descriptions will be available for sale at Chickadee Nature Store in the near future.

.....**CORRECTION TO JIM DAY'S "A WINTER WONDERLAND--IN JUNE"** published in the June/July 1993 issue of The Spoonbill. In the fifth paragraph from the end, the second sentence should read, "The latter [Red Crossbill] was found and viewed extensively by scope, both male and female. But the former [Three-toed Woodpecker] remained elusive." My apologies to Jim for completely changing his observation. [Ed.]

.....**5TH ANNUAL HUMMER/BIRD CELEBRATION IN ROCKPORT** will be held September 16-19, 1993. I have attended the last three celebrations, spoken at the last two and have my reservations made for this year. This four-day event involves far more than just watching the southward migration of thousands of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds. Throughout Friday and Saturday, there are numerous speakers discussing some aspect of hummingbirds. On Sunday speakers are done at 3:45 p.m. Also on Friday, Saturday and Sunday there are bus trips and boat trips with experienced leaders that allow you to view far more than hummingbirds. Also Nancy Newfield will be banding hummingbirds and allowing people to watch, ask questions and hold a hummingbird for release after banding. A favorite stop is the fifty plus booths selling all sorts of bird related items. For more information about the celebration or motels in the area please call the Rockport/Fulton Chamber of Commerce at 1-800-242-0071. **David Bradford**

.....**WANTED: INFORMATION ON MONK PARAKEETS.** I am beginning research on Monk Parakeets and am trying to accurately determine the current distribution and abundance of the species in the United States. I would appreciate any information on the location and size of currently-active breeding colonies. Please contact Stephen Pruett-Jones, Dept. of Ecology and Evolution, University of Chicago, 1101 East 57th St., Chicago, IL 60637. ORNITHOLOGICAL NEWSLETTER, August 1993. [Submitted by Winnie Burkett]

.....**HAVE YOU PURCHASED YOUR TEXAS CONSERVATION PASSPORT?** The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) now caters to hunters and fishermen, partly because their license fees provide a rich source of revenue for TPWD. If enough birdwatchers and other non-consumptive users purchase the Passport, then we will be looked upon as a financial resource by the TPWD and perhaps have more influence when decisions are made concerning use and management of state lands. Recent rumors have it that the Conservation Passport Program is in trouble and could be discontinued. Purchasing a Passport is the surest way to show support for the program. Passports may be purchased at all state parks, TPWD offices, the REI and at Whole Earth stores for \$25.00. With the Passport you will receive a quarterly schedule of activities (lots of birding trips, some to areas closed to the general public), free admittance to state parks, and perhaps some political influence as well.



Things to Consider by Winnie Burkett

Let's say you are on a group birding trip to west Texas. There are ten cars in your group and you are real low on gas, but you know a good gas stop ahead with a fine local restaurant. It's one of those places where you always stop because there is just no place else.

When you get there, there is a big sign in the window, "CLOSED. OPEN IN TWO HOURS. So you and your birding buddies decide to wait it out. You really don't have much of a choice as many of your gas gauge's needles are close to Empty and the next stop is a long way off.

After about an hour of waiting, a highway patrol officer comes by. "You folks can't just park here." No matter what you say, he says you have to move on. So you all leave and drive just a little way down the road before turning around and coming back. The officer took off, so you feel safe to go back to the parking lot and wait. Ten minutes go by and here comes the officer again. Off you all go. After settling back down you spot the sheriff and you are on the road again, but return when the coast is clear. This happens again and again. It has been five hours now and you wonder when the gas station will open. What can you do? Gas tanks are getting lower and lower and this place might never open up. Some cars have more gas than others, so those people decide to leave and take their chances down the road. What do you do?

Unfortunately this kind of problem is frequently faced by birds at Bolivar Flats during September. September tides are some of the highest of the year and if there are any weather events in the Gulf, tides can be very high for days forcing thousands and sometimes tens of thousands of birds, many of them migrants, to sit and wait on the beach for the mud flats to open so they can feed.

This is an ideal time for birders to look at shorebirds. Unfortunately, this is also a time birders can have a very negative impact on those same birds. I frequently see birders needlessly scare up thousands of apparently uninteresting birds to get out where they can see some interesting ones. Most times they have the option of scaring up very few birds if they walk a different way. It takes just a few extra minutes to consider where the birds are sitting.

In the last 20 years Sanderling populations have declined at least 60%. Since nothing has changed on their breeding grounds in the Arctic, it is becoming more and more apparent that the factors affecting their population are conditions they face on the beaches they visit during migration and where they spend the winter. It makes you feel differently about those cute birds scurrying up and down in front of you as you walk the beach. When you realize that they are using up energy they cannot afford.

More and more it is becoming vitally important that we consider how our actions affect the birds we are watching, so that we are not part of the problem.

Plane Crash in Ecuador Claims Ted Parker and Al Gentry [New York Times, Friday, August 5, 1993]

Two Americans ranked among the world's leading field biologists were killed on Tuesday when an airplane they were using to make a treetop survey of the Ecuador coast crashed into a cloud-shrouded mountain. They were Theodore A. Parker, III, a 30 year old ornithologist and Senior Scientist for Conservation International and Alwyn Gentry, 38, a botanist and Senior Curator at the Missouri Botanical Garden.

Scientists familiar with the work of both Americans said their deaths were major losses in their fields. Mr. Parker was widely regarded as one of the world's leading ornithologists and was renowned for his ability to identify nearly 4,000 species of birds by their sound alone. John O'Neill, an ornithologist at Louisiana State University where Parker was a research associate at the Museum of National Science said of his colleague, "There was no one like him out there. He knew birds better than any living person."

Dr. Gentry was an expert in tropical plants and had collected about 70,000 specimens, more than any other living botanist. His knowledge of woody tropical plants was regarded by scientists as unsurpassed.

Russell Mittermeier, President of Conservation International in Washington, said the two scientists were making a low-level flight 350 miles southwest of Quito as part of the organization's program to survey quickly the biological diversity of previously unmapped areas in the tropics.

"Ted and Al carried two-thirds of the unpublished knowledge of neotropical bio-diversity, especially the tropical Andes in their heads," Mr. Mittermeier said in a statement. "We have lost friends and colleagues whose biological and conservation knowledge is irreplaceable. They knew first hand what others only theorized." [Submitted by P.D. Hulce.]



Smith Point Hawk Count 1993

by Gail Diane Luckner

The Smith Point Hawk Count 1993 will be held at Abshier Wildlife Management Area (Abshier) on Smith Point from 8:00 a.m. until noon daily September 16 through October 17. This time period represents peak fall raptor migration along the Upper Texas Coast (UTC), and Smith Point is a great place to view the birds as they head south. The data collected will be submitted to the Hawk Migration Association of North America and Hawk Watch International, two organizations which focus on the study of raptor migration, population trends and conservation.

Since this first organized hawk watch on the UTC began in 1991, observers have watched thousands of Broad-winged Hawks and accipiters stream over the site, as well as dozens of Merlins and Peregrine Falcons and seven American Swallow-tailed Kites. Red-tailed, Red-shouldered and Swainson's Hawks, Northern Harrier, Mississippi and Black-shouldered Kites, Osprey and vultures round out the expected appearances at the count station on Smith Point!

In addition to raptors, Smith Point is a great place from which to view migrating passerines in the fall. The small oak mottes at Abshier shelter warblers and flycatchers before their journey across the Gulf of Mexico, and large numbers of orioles, gnatcatchers, buntings and swallows also depart from this point. American White Pelican, Anhinga, Wood Stork and Magnificent Frigatebird congregate in the area as well. In all, 153 species have been identified from Abshier during the count period.

Houston Audubon Society, the Ornithology Group and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department have scheduled field trips to Smith Point Hawk Count 1993. For additional information, call Gail Diane Luckner 713/328-6236.

NOEL'S NICHE LOOKING BACK

30 YEARS AGO\FROM AUGUST 1963 SPOONBILL

by Noel Pettingell

RARE BIRDMAN Bob Allen sometimes looked like a man who had just got back from hell. His tan was a foot thick. It was hard to tell where he ended and his cigar began. He prowled such impossible places as the Canadian Northwest near Great Slave Lake and the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on the Texas coast looking for and studying the Whooping Crane...often he dropped into the wilds from a helicopter.

He spent months on desolate Inagua Island, southernmost of the Bahamas, in search of the breeding ground of the American (or West Indian) Flamingo, a threatened species. He caught tularemia from handling an infected jackrabbit. In order to combat this and various other illnesses, some of which he contacted in the field, his doctor put him on an unusual regimen of fasting 16 hours a day.

He hated an office so much that he built a roost on top of his house in Tavernier in the Florida Keys. Friends were concerned. They feared a hurricane would come someday and blow him and all his books and valuable records into the sea.

Last week Robert Porter Allen, ornithologist, winner of the John Burroughs Association Medal for conservation and former research director of the National Audubon Society, died at 58.

No one can be sure what motivates a man like Bob Allen, for the love of the search and compassion for things wild are rare in a man, but if we could write his epitaph it would be to recall his fight to keep the Whooping Crane from being rounded up and jammed into a zoo. "Preserve and protect our rare birds," said Allen, "but keep'em flying." *Sports Illustrated*, July 8, 1963.

CLEARING HOUSE

Due to circumstances beyond their control, Clearing House editors Phyllis and Tony Frank, were out of town during the normal preparation time for the Clearing House. The July Clearing House will be included in the September issue of The Spoonbill.



CONTACTS

OG CHAIRMAN, David Bradford, 18046 Green Hazel Drive, Houston 77084-5971, 855-2615.

OG FIELD TRIP CHAIRMAN, Dwight Peake, 30 Leburn Ct., Galveston, 77551-1566, 409/740-4621.

OG TREASURER, Mike Gremillion, 3304 Rice Blvd., Houston, 77005-2934, 665-8502.

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, 992-2757.

SEND SPOONBILL MATERIAL to Editor, Judy Boyce, 5546 Aspen, Houston 77081, Home: 668-5359, Work: 771-2432, Fax: 771-2433 Monday-Friday, business hours.

OG MEMBERSHIP DUES, SUBSCRIPTIONS AND ADDRESS CHANGES: Pat Wight, 7422 Foxtan Place Ct., Houston 77095, 859-8817.

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