



# THE SPOONBILL

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Volume XXVII, No. 8  
December, 1978

PUBLISHED BY THE ORNITHOLOGY GROUP OF THE OUTDOOR NATURE CLUB

## COMING EVENTS

On all UTC field trips remember to bring lunch, insect repellent, and sack for the aluminum litter which will enrich the OG treasury.

- Saturday, Dec. 16 -- Houston CC, Paul Nimmons, compiler, 682-3597
- Sunday, Dec. 17 -- Freeport CC, Ted Eubanks, co-compiler, 661-8082
- Thursday, Dec. 21 -- El Naranjo, Mary Ann Chapman, co-compiler, 665-2895
- Friday, Dec. 22 -- Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR CC, Wayne Shifflett, compiler,  
713/234-3021
- Saturday, Dec. 23 -- Galveston CC, Ted Eubanks, compiler, 661-8082
- Monday, Dec. 25 -- MERRY CHRISTMAS!
- Thursday, Dec. 28 -- Old River CC, Jonelle Buckels, compiler, 713/576-2504
- Thursday, Dec. 28 -- Deadline for SPOONBILL announcements, articles, etc.
- Saturday, Dec. 30 -- Buffalo Bayou CC, Fred Collins, compiler, 493-5409
- Monday, Jan. 1 -- Cypress Creek CC, Fred Collins, compiler, 493-5409
- Monday, Jan. 1 -- HAPPY NEW YEAR! Your dues are due today!
- Wednesday  
Jan. 3 Photography Group meeting, 7:30 p.m. in Bayou Manor auditorium, 4141 So. Braeswood Blvd.
- Wednesday  
Jan. 3 Deadline for Clearing House observations of December, including compilers' CC lists. Please do not send any individual sightings made on any CC, as those will be covered by the compilers' lists.
- Thursday  
Jan. 4 OG regular meeting, 7:30 p.m. at Bayou Manor auditorium, 4141 So. Braeswood Blvd. Tony Gallucci, whom many of you know as an excellent young ornithologist and a demon birder, will give us an insight on McKittrick Canyon, an area he has covered well during work on an advanced degree at Sul Ross University in Alpine. Here is what he has to say about the subject: "McKittrick Canyon of the Guadalupe Mountains of Texas is a unique biological area consisting of elements of the "Mexican Mountains" of the Sierra Madre and also of the Rocky Mountains. Geologically the range is an exposed coral reef that is considered to be the southern terminus of the Rocky Mountains. The unique assemblage of plants and the geological diversity lead to a fascinating combination of wildlife. The area is of particular note to Ornithologists and birders because of the diversity of birdlife as well as being the only stronghold for many species in Texas. Such species being the Plain Titmouse, Red Crossbill, Stellar's Jay, Mountain Chickadee, Spotted Owl and Grace's Warbler. By slides, we will investigate the diversity of the range in its many facets and explore its beauty during different seasons". This sounds like an exceptional program you won't want to miss.
- Tuesday  
Jan. 9 ONC regular meeting, 8:00 p.m., Garden Center in Hermann Park. Marilyn Crane, paleontologist with Exxon, will talk about the use of microscopic shells in the search for oil.
- Saturday  
Jan. 13 OG field trip to W. Harris Co. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in front of small white church just north of I-10 on Hwy 6. Plan on car-pooling if possible.

PLAY THE LISTING GAME, KEEP A YEAR'S LIST by Margaret Jones

1977 was a fascinating birding year for me, for that was the year I decided to see if I could find 300 species in the UTC during that year. As some of you may remember, the year ended with my score being 329, a new "record" for this area. (see the SPOONBILL, December, 1977 and January 1978). Because I found the year's birding so rewarding, I urged the SPOONBILL'S readers to follow suit in 1978, and I hope to hear from many of you by the second day of January 1979 with your scores. Don't mail it in, just call me at 665-4197.

For those of you who didn't play the game in 1978, consider starting compiling your 1979 list bright and early January 1 (the Cypress Creek CC would be an excellent place and time to begin). There are no "official" rules and regulations, this is simply a game you (and your conscience) play, testing your ability to see and identify as many species of birds as possible during the year. However, comparison of totals is meaningless unless all reporting participants observe uniform checklists. If you want to play, take a UTC checklist, go through it and mark it to conform to ABA rules, i.e. count as one those which are now lumped: Snow-Blue Geese; Red-tailed-Krider's-Harlan's Hawk; Myrtle-Audubon's Warbler; Baltimore-Bullock's Oriole; Eastern-Spotted Towhee; Slate-colored-Oregon Junco; omit "sp." and the hybrid Brewster's and Lawrence's Warblers. Use a checklist to keep your record, marking the date beside the name of each species as you see it. (I also made a check in the month column so I could see at a glance how my sighting compared with the occurrence key).

In order to find as many birds as you can, pay attention to checklist occurrence dates (this means going out and looking for certain species that would be at their most numerous at certain times of the year, or might be found only during a brief period), the most likely habitat for each species, and how weather affects migration movements (in the spring on the coast, a wet norther is the time to go birding). Go look for a rare or an unusual bird as soon as possible after hearing of it. This means you must rely on the pinpoint accuracy of the first observer reporting the exact location of an unusual bird, for so often a bird can be found later in the same spot. A guess at a hastily glimpsed (but needed bird) is meaningless...be sure!

Any record is made to be broken, and I believe and hope that my record of 329 species seen in 1977 will be surpassed by the end of the last day of 1978 (probably by several observers). We truly believe the UTC is one of the very best birding areas in the country!

GIVE YOURSELF OR YOUR FAVORITE BIRDER A CHRISTMAS GIFT TO CHERISH

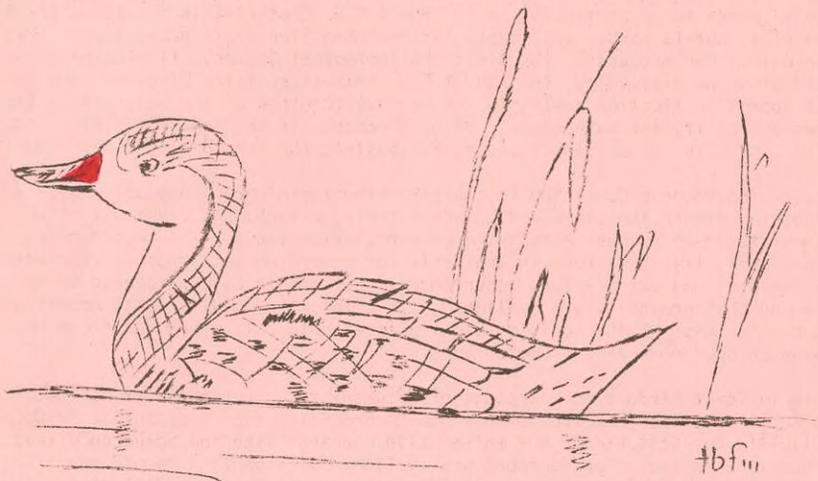
If you need an idea or two about gifts relating to your favorite pastime, hie yourself to THE CHICKADEE & THE NATURALIST'S EMPORIUM, 702 Marshall, and let the ONC-OG member owners help you. The shop is open Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday from 5 to 8 p.m., Saturday from 9 to 6 and Sunday 12 to 5. And if you realize with a shock on December 24th that you need a last minute gift, don't despair, for Linda, Clark and Bill are staying open that day just in case you need their services. The phone number is 528-0139.

PAST EVENTS

OG field trip to Cooling Ponds...On Sunday, November 19, 78 OG members and guests gathered together to make our now annual trip to the Houston Lighting and Power Cooling Ponds. In spite of nearly continuous light rain and a chilly wind, 56 species were seen, almost entirely by birding out of car windows. Some of the better finds were Common Goldeneye, White-winged Scoter and Common Scoter. In addition, several Greater Scaup were seen, plus 10,000 Lesser Scaup, 200 Canvasback and 125 Bufflehead. A total of 15 species of ducks were seen at the Cooling Ponds. Noel Pettingell, the OG's man of records, was out to set a personal one day record for duck species seen. His previous best was 15 species and having tied that at the Cooling Ponds, he was anxious to continue on to other birding haunts to better his record. Ted Eubanks, Jr. and I (Jim Morgan) joined Noel in his pursuit and we battled heavy rain and poor viewing conditions at Mercury Drive and Sheldon, but the effort paid off. Each of us saw 21 species of ducks on this day, including additions of Redhead and Hooded Merganser at Mercury Drive and Wood Duck at Sheldon Reservoir. I guess the old saying was true..."it was great weather for ducks!"

[Ed. note: According to Texas Parks & Wildlife News of November 22, ducks and geese are behind schedule on fall migration to Texas. Mild weather in the midwest, combined with a lack of ground water over much of East Texas has caused shooting to run the gamut from excellent to poor in the traditionally strong Southeast Texas waterfowling area. A waterfowl biologist of Port Arthur believes more than half the usual population of geese and ducks usually in Texas by mid-November is yet to come].

A WILD DUCK CHASE: *ANAS BAHAMENSIS* COMES TO TEXAS....by T. Ben Feltner



"There is a Bahama Pintail at Laguna Atascosa". Whether or not to go is not the question, but rather, "when do we leave?" Chores finished and errands run, I join Ms. Mary Ann Chapman, who has kindly offered the use of her Chinook in place of my chronically ailing bus.

Our departure is at noon, Houston time. Ms. Chapman, having been apprised of the gravity of the situation and the rarity of the bird, assumes a demeanor remarkably like that of A.J. Foyt. Moments later we are traveling down the Southwest Freeway at speeds somewhat in excess of 55 mph. I note that the cab of the truck vaguely resembles the cockpit of a B-25 bomber. The driver is surrounded by a complex of electronic devices to assure that we won't be molested or slowed down by anything as mundane as the law.

We pass Victoria shortly after takeoff, having accomplished this leg of the journey in what seems to be only 45 minutes. I note our speed to be approximately 80 mph. Fifteen minutes down the road we are intercepted by an unfriendly highway patrolman who has no comprehension of the seriousness of a Bahama Pintail in Texas. At this juncture, had I been driving, our speed would have dropped substantially. Ms. Chapman, however, deems the whole thing an unnecessary imposition. Leaving the officer beside the road deeply engrossed in his clerical work, we are again immediately airborne and resuming speed of Mach 1.

As we approach Harlingen at 5 p.m., I realize that we have lost our race against the sun and to reach the duck before dark is impossible. It is 23 miles to the Refuge headquarters on narrow country roads. The amazing Ms. Chapman makes it by 5:20. We leap out of the truck and begin banging on doors at Refuge headquarters. By 5:30 we have a marked map in hand and still 7 miles of gravel road before us. The task is impossible....even if we arrive at the location before dark, we still have to find the duck. Mary Ann is a fury of changing gears. We make it in five minutes.

At the likeliest spot we stop the truck and jump out, each surveying our respective side. My first and only contribution of the day comes seconds later when I hear myself saying "I've got it!" With ten minutes of rosy twilight left, we study at leisure Texas' first Bahama duck. At 100 yards the immaculate white cheek patch and black, vermillion-based bill are readily discernible. We are treated to great looks from every conceivable angle, including full flight. Our skin-of-the-teeth adventure leaves us fulfilled.

It is with some astonishment that we learn later from our friend John Arvin that it had required two hours to find the bird earlier that day. In the course of this wild duck chase, I have established two facts: 1) The Bahama Pintail is a member in good standing of the Texas avifauna and 2) Amelia Earhart is alive and well and living in Houston.

[Chapman's note: The Bahama Pintail, *Anas bahamensis*, has been at Laguna Atascosa Refuge since November 20, 1978. It has remained at the same location consistently and seems likely to stay for some time. The bird is not banded or pinioned and displays very wary behavior. There is little doubt that this is a wild bird and constitutes a first Texas record.

IS THERE AN "OFFICIAL" LIST OF TEXAS BIRDS?...by Dr. Keith A. Arnold

To the average birder (if such exists), there is always some authority for a final decision on birds for a particular area. The A.O.U. Checklist is the authority for North America, but is hardly applicable for the Lone Star State because of its publication date. For members of the Texas Ornithological Society, finding an authority should offer no difficulty; the 1974 T.O.S. Checklist of the Birds of Texas is the most recent publication available and was put together by the body within T.O.S. given responsibility for authenticity of bird records in the state, the Bird Records Committee (actually, a sub-committee was responsible for the initial compilation).

The T.O.S. Bird Records Committee is charged with examining any new and unusual records reported within the state and adjacent marine waters. At least six of the eight committee members must accept the evidence presented for the record to be added to our "state list". A form is available for reporting such records (including unusual seasonal and out-of-place occurrences), but should be accompanied by detailed notes and photographs, where available. Thus far, the committee has accepted one species new to Texas on the basis of sight records only; all other additions have been based on specimens and/or photographs.

Available to Texas birders for purposes of documentation, but not part of the Bird Records Committee files, is the Texas Photo-Record File, a part of the Texas Cooperative Wildlife Collections, Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences, Texas A&M University. Whenever photographs are available to support a record submitted to the BRC, these are usually deposited in the Photo-Record File. Additionally, photographs submitted to the TPRF independent of submission of records to the BRC are available for examination by the latter group.

The answer to my original question, then, is yes, an "official" list exists: the TOS Checklist, which is intended for revision every five years. It is up to the individual birder to accept or reject this list.

[Ed. note: We are indebted to Dr. Arnold for the above answer to my request for clarification of an issue which seemed to be confusing to a number of SPOONBILL readers. Another "official" state list in the making will probably be published next year (1979) by the A.B.A. According to Ben Feltner, chairman of the A.B.A. Bird Records Committee and member of the T.O.S. BRC, all but one of the members of the A.B.A. committee are also members of the T.O.S. committee. There will likely be very few differences, and the importance of the two lists will be equal, except of course, to the few birders who may have one of their birds on one list but not the other!]

PANAMA 1978.....by George and Jane Clayton

It was indeed our good fortune when Dr. Jaime Pujals, premier Middle American birder, found that he could spend fifteen days with us birding the Canal Zone and various areas in the Republic of Panama. Hence, on September 22 Dr. Richard Goldfarb, Jane and I flew to Panama and began an initial six days of birding in the Canal Zone. During this period we birded the Achiotte Road, Fort Sherman and Fort San Lorenzo, Skunk Hollow and Blacktank Road on the Caribbean side where we saw numerous exotics such as Great Jacamar, Pygmy and Streaked Antwren, Bicolored and Ocellated Antbird, perched Black Hawk Eagle, and Spot-crowned Barbet. At night we saw Great and Common Potoo, Boatbilled Heron, and heard a number of owl voices.

A trip to Rio Piedras and a walk down a jungle stream netted Blue Cotinga, Scarlet-thighed Tanager, and White-tailed Swallow. We traveled to the Pacific side to the Tocumen Marsh for Pied Water Tyrannulet, Pale-breasted Spinetail and Yellow-headed Caracara, and Green and Rufous Kingfisher. In the afternoon we went to the Pipeline Road and waded up the Rio Agua Salud where we found Sunbittern in a quiet pool.

On Friday, September 29, the group boarded a small plane in Colon and flew to Changuinola in Bocos Del Toro, Panama's most western state on the Caribbean and an area which has been rarely birded. After the depositing of our gear in Changuinola's "finest" and, I think, only hotel, we rented a cab and drove through the vast banana plantations of the United Fruit Company, the home of "the Chiquita banana" to an edge which was productive of lowland birds such as Bronzy Hermit, Slaty Spinetail, Olive-crowned Yellowthroat, and Crimson-fronted Parakeet.

The next morning we met Wilberto Martinez, the owner of a finca in the foothills of Bocos and superb naturalist and all of us piled into a pickup truck and drove westward toward the Costa Rica border where we saw hundreds of migratory Broadwing and Swainson's Hawks and Plumbeous Kites. In the afternoon a torrential rain drowned out any birding efforts.

The following morning we packed our camping gear for a trip into the foothills. The first thrill was a ride across the swollen Teribe River in a cayuga, or dugout canoe with a 1-inch freeboard, which resulted in a considerable pallor of the knuckles as it zipped across in the swift current.

With our packs we then began slogging through the mud and heat into the foothills. The only untoward event was a fall from a log crossing a stream by the author resulting in little physical damage but considerable embarrassment. After a three-hour walk during which we saw a considerable number of birds including Brown Jay, in perhaps its southern-most range, Olive-backed Euphonia, Black-cowled Oriole, and Cinnamon Woodpecker, we reached Wilberto Martinez's finca. Our headquarters was a bohío, or open-thatched hut, where we stored our equipment, had lunch, and set out into the hills in the rain. A climb up a slippery, muddy pathway in the jungle resulted in few birds but upon reaching the crest, Wilberto suddenly whispered "cot-linga" and we all had our first view of the rarely seen Snowy Cotinga (*Carpodectus nitidus*). The male, perched high in the canopy, was about 8 inches, pure white with black eye and blue-grey bill -- truly a remarkable sight. Little wonder the bird is known locally as "la paloma del espíritu santo". We saw two additional males and two females as well as Lattice-tailed Trogon, Wedge-billed and Black-striped Wood-creeper, Brown-billed Scythebill, and numerous others. That night the five of us bedded down in the loft of the bohío and listened to calls of the Black and White Wood Owl and Vermiculated Screech-Owl.

We got up at dawn and took another long walk through the remarkably beautiful jungle seeing many birds including Red-fronted Parrotlet, Band-backed and Black-throated Wren, Tawney-faced and Immaculate Antbird, Greyrumped Swift, and Black-crowned Pygmy Tyrant.

After two days at Wilberto's finca, we packed our gear and began our trek out of the Teribe River valley and back to Changuinola. On the hike back excellent birds were seen.

The following day we flew to David where we rented a car and drove to Boquete in the highlands. The highlands around Boquete were very rewarding, especially the beautiful trail toward El Velo on the Finca Collins. Jaime Pujals, with his characteristic skill, spotted a Mottled Owl being mobbed by virtually all of the Furnariids depicted on Plate 8 of Ridgley's *Birds of Panama* including Buffy-tufted Cheek, Streaked Tree Runner, Spectacled Foliage Gleaner and Lineated Foliage Gleaner. In addition to these, other fantastic birds including the beautiful Resplendent Quetzal were seen. We drove from Boquete to Volcan again in the highlands, where we stayed at the Hotel dos Rios. In early morning the hotel grounds were alive with birds and on the Boquete Trail above Cerro Punta a number of highland specialities were seen such as Ruddy Tree Runner, Black-faced Solitaire, Black-billed Nightingale Thrush, Slaty and Big-footed Finch, Golden-browed Chlorophonia, Quetzal, and Green-fronted Lancebill and Volcano Hummingbird.

One day we drove from Volcan toward the Costa Rica border on the road to Rio Serena and walked up a steep trail leading to a coffee finca. About half-way up we encountered an amazing mixed flock which, among others, contained Smoky-brown Woodpecker, Plain Ant Vireo, Rufous-rumped Foliage Gleaner, Red-headed Barbet, and White-throated Spadebill.

The following day we flew back to Panama having gotten some 462 species in fifteen days. Jaime had to return to work, hence, Rick, Jane, and I birded the Pacific side for several more days at such fine birding areas as Chiva Chiva Road, Pipeline Road in the Canal Zone, and the Pacific lowlands adding a number of additional birds.

It was truly an amazing trip. Birding with Jaime Pujals for fifteen days may be likened to making fifteen big day runs, back to back; however, his patience and skill with us amateurs resulted in every member of the party seeing virtually every bird. Panama at this time certainly is one of the birdable spots in the neotropics, but we would urge that your trip be made as soon as possible.

[The Editor is grateful she doesn't have to type names like the above in a Clearing House each month! If those exotic-sounding names are whetting your appetite for a trip to Panama, Merlin Birding Tours can satisfy your hunger with their tour of January 20 to February 1, 1979. Write them c/o PO Box 19687, Houston, Texas 77024 to see if there is room for you, and for further information. This Tour Group had a very successful trip to Panama last winter, and expects an equally successful repeat this winter].

CALIFORNIA ABA TRIP OCTOBER 14-21.....with Jim Beaty

The ABA Monterey-Yosemite trip gave me the opportunity to do some birding in California for the first time.

Under the expert leadership of Rich Stallcup and Davis Finch about 20 birders started the trip early on a very foggy Saturday morning several miles north of Monterey at Moss Landing and we worked our way back down to Monterey during the day. Along the way we found Brown Pelicans, Brandt's & Pelagic Cormorants, White-wing and Surf Scoters, plus Black Turnstones, Wandering Tattler, Surfbirds and many other different shorebirds. Also seen were Elegant Terns, Glaucous-wing, Western, California and Mew Gulls. After we returned to Monterey in the late afternoon several of us went on a hike down the dry stream bed of the Carmel River to its mouth. We were rewarded by the effort when we found a SHARP-TAILED SANDPIPER in among a group of Pectoral Sandpipers. This bird is very rare along the coast south of Alaska. We all got a good look at the bird as he completely ignored all of the people standing around talking about him. (The rest of the group who missed him on Saturday went back on Sunday and had even a closer look at him).

Sunday we were up before dawn for an Owling trip to Robinson Canyon which is a few miles out of Monterey in the Carmel Valley. The only Owl seen was one Great Horned which was perched at the top of a dead tree. During this day we covered a lot of area in the valley and we found some California Quail, Yellow-billed Magpies, a Nuttall's Woodpecker and a small flock of Lawrence's Goldfinch just to name a few of the many different birds we saw during the day.

Monday we had an all-day Pelagic Trip out in Monterey Bay. It was still foggy but not as bad as it had been on Saturday. This was a great trip, the water was calm and there were lots of birds to see, some of which were Pink-footed, Sooty, & Manx Shearwaters along with large rafts of Black & Ashy Storm-Petrels. One lone Black-footed Albatross landed next to the boat and every one got a long close look at him.

On Tuesday we spent the day heading for Yosemite. Along the way we stopped at the Merced National Wildlife Refuge where we saw huge flocks of Sandhill Cranes feeding in the fields along the side of the road.

We arrived at our motel in El Portel late in the afternoon and we were greeted at the motel office by a beautiful male Anna's Hummingbird at a feeder. This bird was present at all times and many pictures were taken of this beautiful bird.

Wednesday was the most outstanding day of the trip for me. We were up real early for our first day in the park. This morning we were looking for several special birds. The first one we saw was a Black-backed 3 Toed Woodpecker who spent most of the time at the very top of a dead tree. She stayed a long time on this tree and everyone got a very good look at her. But the bird of the day was not 1 but 2 Great Gray Owls seen in the same meadow. The first bird flew away before everyone arrived but the second bird stayed perched out on a branch in the open for at least 15 or 20 minutes. Everyone got a long good look at this rare owl. During the rest of the day we found White-headed Woodpeckers, Mt. Chickadees, Nuthatches and other common mountain birds. In addition to the birds the view of the park from Glacier Point was very beautiful.

Thursday we birded along and over Tioga Pass looking for Grouse and the Gray-Crown Rosy Finch but our luck had run out as none were to be found. On the eastern side of the pass at Momo Lake our leader said that this lake was the major stop-over point for migrating Eared Grebes. During the months of October and November there are over 2 million Eared Grebes feeding on the brine shrimp at the same time. He said that from where we stood we were looking at 600,000 birds. (Now that's a lot of Eared Grebes to see).

Friday morning we were out in the field just to see if any strangers might be found since the trip would be ending around noon. The group started out to San Francisco but Marilyn Crane and myself headed down to Gorman for a try at the Condor. Saturday morning found us at the top of a very cold and windy Mount Pinos. After about 4 hours and no Condor we started working our way down the mountain and over to the pump station. At the pump station we found several car loads of birders who had spent all day with the same goal in mind. At about 4:00 p.m. a loud cry went up: "CONDOR"! One lone bird was seen soaring along the ridge.

What an ending to 9 days of wonderful birding. The Condor was the 17th lifer and the 177th bird that I had seen on the trip. This was my first ABA trip and because of the great time and expert leadership I plan to make a couple of trips with them next year. Why don't you plan to make at least one trip with them because I know you will enjoy it as much as I did.

## THE LEARNING CORNER.....SPIZELLA SPARROWS ON THE UTC by Jim Morgan

The major identification problem in *Spizella* sparrows is the separation of fall-plumaged and immature Chipping, Clay-colored and Brewer's Sparrows (there is just one record of a Brewer's on the UTC, made by Arlie MacKay in October, 1950). An excellent, fairly detailed article on this identification problem is addressed by David Simon in "Birding", October, 1977, Volume 9, No. 5. This is highly recommended reading and the accompanying color plate is excellent. I will draw on this article, plus my own experiences, for what follows.

Chipping Sparrow (*Spizella passerina*) - This common to abundant fall and winter resident on the UTC is easily recognized in breeding plumage. This small, clear gray-breasted sparrow with rufous cap, black eyeline, and white superciliary line is unmistakable as a breeder, particularly in its open woodlands habitat. However, fall adults and immatures can be confused with Clay-colored and Brewer's Sparrows. The cap can become much browner, even streaked (particularly in the immature). The fall bird can be less distinctly gray on the underparts and the facial markings much less pronounced. Best field marks in fall are no contrasting neck collar, hints of reddish in cap and on back, gray rump extending well up the back, and a grayer overall appearance to the undersides.

Clay-colored Sparrow (*Spizella pallida*) - This species is a very rare fall and winter visitor to the UTC, with no more than one or two records usually in any given year. By far, the most obvious and striking field mark is the gray nape, which contrasts sharply with the warm buff of the foreneck and breast as well as with the browns of the back and head. Also, the rump is brownish, but often difficult to clearly see. The overall color of this species is distinctly buff and warm brown. The light median stripe of the crown shown in most field guides can be absent or very subtle, but the crown is streaked. This species is normally found in open brush and fields (with specific occurrences on Bolivar Peninsula and near High Island, also in West Harris County).

Field Sparrow (*Spizella pusilla*) - This species is fairly common as a fall and winter resident on the UTC. The pink bill, reddish cap, eye-ring, clear light buffy breast and reddish-brown upperparts usually suffice to identify this species which is usually found in brushy, semi-open country.

Although there has been only one record of a Brewer's Sparrow (*Spizella breweri*) on the UTC, and none for a Tree Sparrow (*Spizella arborea*), it is well to note these field marks, "just in case":

Brewer's Sparrow - It is the palest and dullest of the *Spizellas*, dirty gray-buff below and gray-brown above. The eye-ring is noticeable and the bird appears to be uniformly streaked above from crown to rump. Usually found in open brush.

Tree Sparrow - the combination of the breast spot ("stickpin"), white wing-bars and solid reddish brown cap should suffice to identify this species in the unlikely event of its occurrence on the UTC.

[Ed. note: With the help of my favorite lexicon, "Words For Birds", let's examine the scientific names of these sparrows, and see just how apt they are. *Spizella* is a Latinized diminutive of the Greek *spiza*, "finch". *Passerina* is the Latin feminine diminutive of *passer*, "little sparrow", and chipping is an allusion to its call. *Pallida* is Latin for "pale", the allusion being similar to the common name. *Breweri* was so named by Audubon in honor of his friend, Thomas Mayo Brewer, "a curmudgeon, physicist, journalist, and a fine "closet" ornithologist". *Pusilla* is from the Latin *pusillus*, meaning "small", though it is not a particularly small sparrow, and field suggests the preferred habitat. *Arborea* is Latin for "tree" and a suggestion of its habitat, as well as the source of the common name.]

## AROUND AND ABOUT

\*\* Jim Beaty calls our attention to seminar, Birds of the Big Bend, which is in the planning stages by the CDRI Field Seminar Program of 1978-1979. Leaders are: Roland Wauer, National Park Service (author of Birds of Big Bend National Park) and Dr. Grainger Hunt. Five days in May, 1979 by car with day hikes in Big Bend National Park. A repeat of a highly successful seminar initiated in 1976. If you are interested, write Dwight Deal, Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute, PO Box 1334, Alpine, Texas 79830. This is very popular, don't hesitate too long.

\*\* Wayne Shifflett tells us he has sent in to Albuquerque a biological impact report on a proposed housing project just north of Gulf Coast Airfield, formerly Spaceland Air Park. When Government funding is requested for a project which might

affect an endangered species, such as the Prairie Chicken, a biological impact report is requested. Wayne, manager of the Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR, has evaluated several areas on the UTC such as this one.

The small flock at the airfield in question has seemingly remained static for several years. Cattle have been removed from some of the grazing land they used, and the resulting growth of grasses and weeds is not attractive to the Prairie Chickens. Wayne feels this particular flock will continue to diminish and eventually die out even if the proposed project doesn't get built.

Wayne asked me to remind the Christmas Counters that he will serve coffee and doughnuts at 6:30 a.m. at the refuge headquarters the morning of Dec. 22!

\*\* The Bellaire Texan says there is a real jail bird in Bellaire! For two weeks in November a Chinese Golden Pheasant was seen roaming the lawns of at least six Bellaire residents, but evaded capture until Nov. 28. The technicolored transient has a yellow and black tiger-striped collar with emerald green feathers underneath. Its wings are royal blue and purple over brown, and it has a scarlet breast and belly. The comb is golden, and the two-foot long tail feathers are covered with brown spots. According to a spokesman at the Houston Zoo, it is the most common of exotic species. The police are holding the bird in their property room in hope its owner can be located. A Police clerk put the case in its proper perspective: "It's the first real jail bird we've ever had".

\*\* "The Least Tern On The Upturn" is the title of an article by Judith Toups, chairman of the Least Tern Protection Project of the Mississippi Coast Audubon Society, which appeared in "Panhandle", magazine of the Panhandle Eastern Pipeline Company. It is the inspiring tale of one woman's efforts to protect the Least Tern while nesting along the Gulf Coast of Mississippi. After what was hailed as the world's longest man-made beach was developed in the 1950s along the coast from Biloxi Bay to the Bay of St. Louis, the Least Tern disappeared from the area as a nester, for the beaches were cleaned every week or two by bulldozers and raking machines. But in 1972, some Least Terns attempted to nest, and Ethel Floyd, who grasped the significance of this, only amused the Harrison County Board of Supervisors when she asked them to suspend beach cleaning until nesting was over. In 1973, she found a supervisor with a heart. He became a champion of the birds, and in so doing became Conservationist of the Year by the Mississippi Wildlife Federation. After the organization of the Mississippi Coast Audubon Society was formed, official sanctuary designation of two nesting areas, at Gulfport and LongBeach-Pass Christian, was achieved. "Success has been spectacular, surpassing the most optimistic outlook of those earlier years. Individual nest counts show a rise from 1,000 nests in 1975 to more than 4,000 nests in 1976, 1977, and 1978. These are the largest colonies of nesting Terns in the United States". You would enjoy this article, with its marvelous photographs by Dan Guravich, so the magazine is being placed in the OG library for several months.

#### PLACES TO GO

\*\* Everybody heads to Warren Lake and West Harris County in the winter. Eagles by the hundreds and ducks and geese by the thousands entrance the viewers. Last month a Harlan's Hawk was seen near Clay Road and Peek Road, a Rough-Legged Hawk on Katy-Hockley Cut-off, and Yellow Rails were observed being flushed by a rice thresher in a field on Clay Road.

\*\* Houston Baptist University is playing host to a Burrowing Owl who seems to be a jogger-watcher! From Beechnut, enter a drive between two dormitories and park in parking lot. Behind the left hand dorm is the running track, surrounded by a wire fence. You are asked to stay out of the track area, so walk to the right along the fence from the stile entrance about 30 feet. Between the fence and the edge of the track is a culvert, covered by an iron grate, which seems to be the winter residence of this delightful owl. He stands atop the grate and gravely watches the joggers go by!

\*\* With wintering waterfowl in and coming in, Mercury Drive has much to show you. For those of you who are not familiar with the birding area we refer to as Mercury Drive, it is a dredge spoil area about 1 mile south of I-10 beside Mercury Drive, which at that point runs along the top of a levee dividing the spoil area. Because the best viewing area is on the east side, morning is not the time to go for you look into the morning sun. Binoculars are a must, and a scope is a necessity for viewing the birds in the middle or toward the far side. Be cautious! This is a two-way road with lots of fast traffic, shoulders are minimal and often muddy. There are a few hard surfaced (shell or packed dirt) pull-out spots which seem to be pretty safe. If you take care, the rewards can be great at this spot.

## CLEARING HOUSE November, 1978

The Clearing House is a monthly record of bird sightings made in the six counties comprising the upper Texas coast: Jefferson, Chambers, Galveston, Harris, Ft. Bend, and Brazoria. How to read the CH: Species: Location--(how many) date, observers. Those common species which can be readily identified and are widely distributed in the UTC will also be listed, followed by number of reports, with lowest and highest numbers seen in parentheses, i.e. (1-42). If any of these species is reported in unusual habitat or numbers that will be noted separately.

Loon, Common: Galveston--(10)18,RE, (2)24,M; Cooling Ponds--(8)19,OG; Texas City--(5)23,P&MJ

Grebe, Eared: 4 reports of 1 each

Grebe, Pied-billed: 12 reports (2-30)

Pelican, White: 12 reports (2-125)

Pelican, Brown: Galveston--(2)23,JHa, (2)24,M(SeaArana), (2)30,JHa (Offats Bayou)

Cormorant, Double-crested: 13 reports (2-100)

Cormorant, Olivaceous: Cooling Ponds--(3)19,OG; Cedar Point--(2)2-5,WC; Galveston--(2)24,M

Anhinga: 4 reports (1-26)

Heron, Great Blue: 19 reports (1-60)

Heron, Little Blue: 6 reports (1-5)

Egret, Cattle: 9 reports (4-500)

Egret, Reddish: W. Galveston--(2)2,JHa, (1)24,M

Egret, Great: 13 reports (1-70)

Egret, Snowy: 11 reports (1-30)

Heron, Louisiana, 8 reports (1-5)

Night Heron, Black-crowned: 5 reports (1-45)

Night Heron, Yellow-crowned: Galveston--(1)24,M

Ibis, White-faced: W.Harris Co.--(75)5,TE, (1)26,TE,JMo

Ibis, White: W.Galveston--(5)2,JHa, (1)18,TE, (30)24,M; Ft.Bend Co.--(6)4,MC, (1)23,P&MJ; (3)26,TE,JMo; W.Harris Co.--(2)26,TE,JMo

Spoonbill, Roseate: 7 reports (1-55)

Goose, Canada: 9 reports (2-5,000)

Goose, White-fronted: 10 reports (15-5,000)

Goose, Snow: 16 reports (3-20,000)

Goose, Ross': Warren Lake--(6)18,WR (no field notes), (1)26,TE (no field notes)

Mallard: 7 reports (2-200)

Duck, Mottled: 6 reports (1-20)

Duck, Gadwall: 9 reports (3-250)

Pintail: 8 reports (1-500)

Teal, Green-winged: 8 reports (2-500)

Teal, Blue-winged: 5 reports (2-100)

Wigeon, American: 11 reports (10-750)

Shoveler, Northern: 11 reports (2-500)

Duck, Wood: W.Galveston--(2)2,JHa; Warren Lake--(6)12,JEy; Sheldon Reservoir--(3)19 E; Ft.Bend Co.--(5)26,TE,JMo

Redhead: W.Harris Co.--(1)5,TE; Houston--(3)15,18,WC, (1)19,E (Mercury Dr.)

Duck, Ring-necked: Houston--(25)8,WC (Mercury Dr.); Galveston--(7)18,TE; Sheldon Reservoir--(5)19,E; W.Harris Co.--(5)23,BG

Canvasback: Houston--(8)3,(2)8,WC (Mercury Dr.); Warren Lake--(6)12,JEy, (3)23,BG; Cooling Ponds--(200)19,OG; W.Harris Co.--(3)26,TE,JMo

Scaup, Greater: Cooling Ponds--(3)19,OG (see notes)

Scaup, Lesser: 9 reports (2-10,000)

Goldeneye, Common: Galveston--(5)18,TE, (4)24,M; Cooling Ponds--(15)19,OG; Cedar Point--(9)25,WC

Bufflehead: Houston--(1)15,25, (6)18,WC (Mercury Dr.); Galveston--(1)18,TE; Texas City--(1)23,P&MJ; Cooling Ponds--(125)19,OG

Scoter, White-winged: Cooling Ponds--(1)19,OG (see notes)

Scoter, Common: Cooling Ponds--(1)19,OG (see notes)

Duck, Ruddy: 5 reports (1-1,000)

Merganser, Hooded: Houston--(3)19,E, (1)ERe, (4)15,(2)18,(2)29,WC (Mercury Drive); Ft. Bend Co.--(7--3 adult males, 2 imm. 2 females)23,P&MJ, (4)25,PMr,ERe, (6)26,TE,JMo

Merganser, Red-breasted: Houston--(2)5,J&BH (Mercury Dr.); Galveston--(3)18,TE; Cooling Ponds--(8)19,OG; Texas City--(4)23,P&MJ; Bolivar--(150)24,M; Cedar Point--(1)25,WC

Vulture, Turkey: 9 reports (2-23)

Vulture, Black: 5 reports (1-75)

Kite, White-tailed: Ft. Bend Co.--(1)4,MC, (1)26,TE,JMo; Galveston--(3)5,J&BH, (1)23,JHa; W.Harris Co.--(2)12,JEy; Pearland--(1)14,22,25,B&EW

Hawk, Sharp-shinned: Houston--(1)1,WC (White Oak Bayou); W.Harris Co.--(1)5,JEy  
 Hawk, Cooper's: W.Harris Co.--(1)5,JEy, (1)5,TE  
 Hawk, Red-tailed: W.Harris Co.--(1 melanistic)18,WR(see notes); (1 Harlan's)12,WR  
 (see notes); 13 additional reports (1-40)  
 Hawk, Red-shouldered: 4 reports (1-20)  
 Hawk, Swainson's: Ft. Bend Co.--(1)26,TE,JMo  
 Hawk, Rough-legged: W.Harris Co.--(1)12,JEy,MH (see notes); Houston--(1)14,DM (610  
 & Post Oak, no field notes)  
 Eagle, Bald: Warren Lake--(1)18,MJ,MA,VC  
 Hawk, Marsh: 20 reports (1-60)  
 Osprey: Galveston--(1)18,TE; Warren Lake--(1)24,B&EW  
 Falcon, Peregrine: Ft. Bend Co.--(1)26,TE,JMo (see notes)  
 Merlin: Houston--(1)1,9,10,WR (Rice U., see notes)  
 Kestrel, American: 17 reports (1-70)  
 Bobwhite: 9 reports (1-15)  
 Crane, Sandhill: Ft. Bend Co.--(2)26,TE,JMo  
 Rail, King: W.Harris Co.--(2)18,MJ,MA,VC  
 Rail, Clapper: Galveston--(5)24,M  
 Rail, Virginia: W.Harris Co.--(1)18,MA  
 Sora: W.Harris Co.--(1)18,MA,VC  
 Rail, Yellow: W.Harris Co.--(4)18,MJ,MA,VC (see notes); Anahuac NWR--(1)18,Florence  
 Bennett (see notes)  
 Gallinule, Common: Ft. Bend Co.--(2)4,MC  
 Coot, American: 11 reports (4-500)  
 Oystercatcher, American: Bolivar--(4)7,JHa, (5)24,M; W.Galveston--(10)24,M  
 Plover, Semipalmated: 2 reports (3-20)  
 Plover, Piping: Bolivar--(2)7,JHa, (40)24,M  
 Plover, Snowy: Bolivar--(1)24,M  
 Killdeer: 18 reports (2-200)  
 Plover, Black-bellied: 8 reports (2-200)  
 Turnstone, Ruddy: W.Galveston--(1)16,JHa, (4)18,TE; Bolivar--(1)24,M  
 Snipe, Common: 6 reports (1-10)  
 Curlew, Long-billed: 9 reports (1-125)  
 Sandpiper, Spotted: 5 reports (1-15)  
 Willett: 8 reports (1-75)  
 Yellowlegs, Greater: 8 reports (1-4)  
 Yellowlegs, Lesser: 8 reports (1-10)  
 Knot, Red: W.Galveston--(30)16,JHa; Bolivar--(5)24,M  
 Dunlin: 3 reports (1-200)  
 Dowitcher, Short-billed: Bolivar--(300)24,M  
 Dowitcher, Long-billed: Galveston--(2)3,JHa, (1)24,M; W.Harris Co.--(30)5,TE  
 Dowitcher, species: 3 reports (5-200)  
 Sandpiper, Stilt: Houston--(100)19,E (Mercury Dr., see notes), (25-60)all month,WC,  
 (previously reported, Mercury Dr.)  
 Sandpiper, Semipalmated: Bolivar--(2)24,M  
 Sandpiper, Western: 4 reports (1-1,500)  
 Godwit, Marbled: W.Galveston--(2)18,TE, (40)24,M, (1)29,JHa  
 Sanderling: 4 reports (20-100)  
 Avocet, American: 4 reports (15-150)  
 Phalarope, Wilson's: E. Galveston--(10)3,JHa (no field notes)  
 Gull,Herring: 4 reports (1-125)  
 Gull, Ring-billed: 11 reports (4-250)  
 Gull, Laughing: 5 reports (50-750)  
 Gull, Bonaparte's: Bolivar--(3)24,M  
 Tern, Forster's: 4 reports (5-40)  
 Tern, Common: Bolivar--(15)24,M  
 Tern, Royal: 7 reports (3-50)  
 Tern, Sandwich: Galveston--(30)24,M  
 Tern, Caspian: 6 reports (1-20)  
 Skimmer, Black: Galveston--(1,500)24,M  
 Dove, Rock: 6 reports (5-500)  
 Dove, White-winged: Galveston--(4)all month,JHa (yard)  
 Dove, Mourning: 15 reports (1-43)  
 DOVE, RINGED TURTLE: Bellaire--(1)16,P&MJ (prior reports)  
 Dove, Inca: 8 reports (1-15)  
 Cuckoo, Yellow-billed: High Island--(1)7,JHa (no field notes); Tri-Cities Beach  
 Road--(1)11,DM (no field notes)  
 Ani, Groove-billed: W.Harris Co.--(1)4,WR, (2)10,A&WE, (1)26,TE,JMo; Galveston--  
 (15)29,JHa (see notes)  
 Owl, Barn: High Island--(1)7,JHa; Ft. Bend Co.--(2)26,TE,JMo  
 Owl, Burrowing: Houston--(1)all month,DM, m.ob (Houston Baptist Univ., see notes)  
 Owl, Barred: Ft. Bend Co.--(2)4,MC, (1)26,TE,JMo

Swift Chimney: Bellaire--(2)1,DM (yard); Houston--(20)1,NP (M&M Bldg.); W.Harris Co.--(1)14,BG

Swift, species: Houston--(5)10,21,(4)11,12,13,16,17,22,(2)14,15,(3)Dec.1,NP, (4)23,27,WC, (3)25,(4)30,TE (see notes)

Hummingbird, *Selasphorus* species: (1)10-30,Glenn Cureton (yard); Algoa--(1)all month,DW (see notes)

Kingfisher, Belted: 15 reports (1-7)

Flicker, Common: 11 reports (1-60)

Woodpecker, Pileated: 3 reports (2-10)

Woodpecker, Red-bellied: 7 reports (1-10)

Sapsucker, Yellow-bellied: W.Harris Co.--(2)23,BG; Galveston--(1)24,M; Ft. Bend Co.--(1)26,TE,JMo; Houston--(1)29,J&BH (yard)

Woodpecker, Downy; W.Harris Co.--(1)14,(2)23,BG; Ft.Bend Co.--(8)26,TE,JMo

Flycatcher, Scissor-tailed: W.Galveston--(30)2,JHa

Phoebe, Eastern: 6 reports (1-15)

Flycatcher, *Empidonax* species: Ft. Bend Co.--(2)26,TE,JMo (see notes)

Pewee, Eastern: High I.--(1)7,JHa

Flycatcher, Vermilion: Ft. Bend Co.--(1)4,MC, (3)26,TE,JMo

Lark, Horned: Bolivar--(10)7,JHa, (25)24,M

Swallow, Tree: W.Harris Co.--(18)14,BG, (10)18,TE; Cooling Ponds--(20)19,OG; Cedar Point--(3)25,WC

Swallow, Barn: W.Harris Co.--(2)5,TE; Mercury Dr.--(1)18,WC

Jay, Blue: 13 reports (1-15)

Crow, Common: 10 reports (2-400)

Chickadee, Carolina: 8 reports (1-15)

Titmouse, Tufted: 9 reports (1-30)

Nuthatch, Red-breasted: W.Harris Co.--(1)14,BG; Houston--(1)25,JMo (yard)

Creeper, Brown: Houston--(5)20-21,J&BH yard); W.Harris Co.--(1)14,(2)23,BG

Wren, House: W.Harris Co.--(1)14,(2)23,BG, (2)18,MA,VC,MJ, (2)23,BG, (5)26,TE,JMo; Ft. Bend Co.--(2)23,P&MJ, (2)26,TE,JMo; Galveston--(3)24,M

Wren, Winter: Ft. Bend Co.--(1)4,MC; Houston--(1-2)all month,WC (White Oak Bayou)

Wren, Carolina: 6 reports (1-15)

Wren, Long-billed Marsh: Ft. Bend Co.--(1)4,MC; Galveston--(1)24,M

Wren, Sedge (Short-billed Marsh): Ft. Bend Co.--(1)26,TE,JMo

Mockingbird: 12 reports (1-25)

Catbird, Gray: 4 reports (1-2)

Thrasher, Brown: 11 reports (1-10)

Robin, American: Galveston--(1)18,JHa; Houston--(5)18,(15)23, WC (White Oak Bayou), (25)22,MH (Rice U.); Ft. Bend Co.--(30)23,P&MJ, (30)26,TE, JMo; Virginia Point--(1)23,P&MJ; W.Harris Co.--(1)26,TE,JMo; N.Harris Co.--(70)27,WC

Thrush, Hermit: W.Harris Co.--(1)14,23,BG; Ft.Bend Co.--(2)26,TE,JMo

Bluebird, Eastern: Ft.Bend Co.--(5)4,MC; Bear Creek Park--(3)26,TE,JMo; Ft.Bend Co.--(20)26,TE,JMo

Gnatcatcher, Blue-gray: Ft.Bend Co.--(5)26,TE,JMo

Kinglet, Ruby-crowned: 9 reports (1-8)

Pipit, Water: W.Harris Co.--(1)5,TE, (4)12,JEy, (10)26,TE,JMo; Galveston--(40)18, TE, (10)24,M; Ft.Bend Co.--(20)26,TE,JMo

Shrike, Loggerhead: 15 reports (3-32)

Starling: 14 reports (20-500)

Vireo, Solitary: Houston--(1)25,JMo (yard); Ft. Bend Co.--(2)26,TE,JMo

Warbler, Black-and-white: Houston--(1)22,MJ (Rice U.)

Warbler, Tennessee: 8 reports (1-10)

Warbler, Orange-crowned: W.Harris Co.--(1)23,BG, (1)26,TE,JMo; Virginia Point--(1)23,P&MJ; Galveston--(1)24,M; Ft.Bend Co.--(4)26,TE,JMo

Warbler, Yellow-rumped: 13 reports (2-75)

Warbler, Black-throated Green: W.Harris Co.--(1)14,BG

WARBLER, CERULEAN: Houston--(1)4,WC (White Oak Bayou, see notes)

Warbler, Pine: Houston--(3)25,JMo (yard)

Yellowthroat, Common: W.Harris Co.--(4)14,BG, (1)18,TE, (1)26,TE,JMo

Chat, Yellow-breasted: Houston--(1)4,WC (White Oak Bayou, see notes)

Warbler, Wilson's: Houston--(1)1,5,WC (White Oak Bayou); Ft. Bend Co.--(1)4,MC, (1)23,P&MJ, (5)26,TE,JMo

Sparrow, House: 13 reports (2-300)

BOBOLINK: W.Galveston--(1)2,JHa (see notes)

Meadowlark, Eastern: 15 reports (2-200)

Blackbird, Red-winged: W.Harris Co.--(1 albino-pink bill, completely white)ERe), 12 additional reports (20-5,000)

Blackbird, Brewer's: Ft. Bend Co.--(15)26,TE,JMo

Grackle, Boat-tailed: 2 reports (1-4)

Grackle, Great-tailed: 8 reports (5-500)

Grackle, Common: 8 reports (20-1,000)

Cowbird, Brown-headed: 13 reports (50-30,000)

Cardinal: 9 reports (2-175)

Bunting, Indigo: Houston--(1)1,5,(2)4,WC (White Oak Bayou)  
 Siskir, Pine: Houston--(1)1,WC (previously reported, White Oak Bayou)  
 Goldfinch, American: Houston--(1)18,(2)22,WC (White Oak Bayou); Ft.Bend Co.--(2)26, TE, JMo  
 Towhee, Rufous-sided: Alcoa--(1)10-29,DW (see notes)  
 Sparrow, Savannah: 10 reports (5-600)  
 Sparrow, LeConte's: W. Harris Co.--(2)5,(4)12,JEy, (7)26,TE,JMo  
 Sparrow, Sharp-tailed: Bolivar--(20)24,M; Cedar Point--(5)25,WC  
 Sparrow, Seaside: Bolivar--(20)24,M  
 Sparrow, Vesper: W.Harris Co.--(14)18,MA,VC,MJ, (4)18,A&WE, (4)24,B&EW, (1)26,TE, JMo; Texas City--(1)23,P&MJ  
 Sparrow, Lark: W.Harris Co.--(3)18,MJ,MA,VC  
 Junco, Dark-eyed (Slate-colored): Ft. Bend Co.--(1)26,TE,JMo  
 Sparrow, Chipping: W.Galveston--(3)Oct.14,NP, Harvey Patten; Houston--(2)1,(1)4, (8)18,(4)2,3,WC (White Oak Bayou); W.Harris Co.--(3)23,BG, (1)26,TE,JMo; Ft.Bend Co.--(1)26,TE,JMo  
 Sparrow, Field: W.Harris Co.--(2)14,BG  
 Sparrow, White-crowned: Houston--(1)4,WC (White Oak Bayou); W.Harris Co.--(5)26,TE JMo  
 Sparrow, White-throated: 10 reports (1-60)  
 Sparrow, Lincoln's: W.Harris Co.--(12)18,MJ,MA,VC, (4)23,BG, (25)26,TE,JMo; Ft. Bend Co.--(1)23,P&MJ, (3)26,TE,JMo  
 Sparrow, Swamp: Galveston--(3)24,M; W.Harris Co.--(10)26,TE,JMo; Ft. Bend Co.--(10) 26,TE,JMo  
 Sparrow, Song: W.Harris Co.--(3)18,A&WE, (1)23,BG, (2)26,TE,JMo

#### CLEARING HOUSE CONTRIBUTORS, November 1978

MA--Margaret Anderson; VC--Virginia Courtney; MC--Marilyn Crane; WC--Wesley Cureton; A&WE--Ann & Willard Elston; T,J&CE--Ted, Jr., Janet and Cory Eubanks; JEy--John Eyre. BG--Bernd Gravenstein; JHa--John & Jane Hamilton; J&BH--Jean & Bill Harwell; MH--Malcolm Hodges; P&MJ--T.Paul & Margaret Jones; DM--David Marrack; PM--Peggy Milstead; PMr--Polly Moore; JMo--Jim Morgan; NP--Noel Pettingell; ERE--Ellen Red; WR--Will Risser; B&EW--Bob & Edith Willman; DW--Diane Wise; E--party of TE,JMo,NP; M--party of TE, JMo, Holly Hobart; OG--Ornithology Group Field Trip.

[Ed. note: If you want more explicit directions to the location of any bird(s) listed in this CH, call the contributing observer of the bird(s) in which you are interested. If you need help with the phone number, call the editor, 665-4197 or Mary Gillette, 626-1755]

#### CLEARING HOUSE NOTES, November 1978

Greater Scaup: White extended well beyond bend of wing in all 3 birds. Also, birds noticeably larger and whiter on back than nearby Lesser Scaup. Seen at distances of 50-300 yards with binocs....Jim Morgan

White-winged Scoter: Large, dark duck with pronounced wedge-shaped head. In flight, bright white full speculum clearly noted. Seen several times by many observers with binocs and scopes in fair light.....Jim Morgan

Common Scoter: Dark sooty gray duck, noticeably smaller than White-winged Scoter. Some white markings below ear and below-and-behind eye (not complete--bird believed in molt). Round head and no eye-ring. Bird constantly diving, staying up only 3-5 seconds at a time. The head, bill shape and body posture on the water, plus continuous diving habits convinced most observers of this identification. All other ducks which could be confused with this species were seen later that day by this observer, Ted Eubanks, Jr., and Noel Pettingell, and we all agreed that the Common Scoter identification was correct. Seen by many observers from 20-50 yards with binocs in fair light....Jim Morgan

Harlan's Hawk: Body dark with white streakings on head and breast...wing linings dark...flight feathers white underneath with dark barring and dark tips. Tail white underneath...from above, approximately distal 1/3 dark though somewhat mottled. Upperparts dark with some light spotting on wings (not at base of primaries). Size and shape of red-tail....Will Risser

Rough-legged Hawk: John Eyre and I first saw the buteo as it stood on a fence post about 40 yards from Katy-Hockley Cut-off Road. Looking through 7x glasses, I first noted the white breast with dark vertical streaks, which contrasted sharply with the black belly. The top of the head and wings were also dark. After a couple of minutes, the bird flew up, around and away from us; we saw its white underwing linings, with black-tipped primaries, and its white tail with a black terminal band about 1.5 inches wide. The bird then soared out of sight. We saw it in excellent light, with the sun behind us....Malcolm Hodges

Peregrine Falcon: Seen in flight and perched in dead tree on Elm Lake. At rest, this very large falcon appeared dark brown from the back, broad shouldered and tapered towards the tail. Crown dark and black "mustaches" clearly seen when head seen from the side. In flight the pointed wings and banded tail were noted. Seen as close as 50 yards with scopes and Ted Eubanks saw it overhead as close as 50 feet. Viewed in good light for up to 10 minutes by both observers. Kelly Bryan reported in October a Peregrine Falcon at same location....Jim Morgan

Merlin: 15 minutes at 20 to 300 feet, harrassing Kestrel...slightly larger...brown back and tail with darker barring on tail, white tip...streaked breast...no distinct whisker mark but dark crown and markings on side of head....Will Risser

Yellow Rail: Rails flushed by rice harvesting machines in fields along Clay Road. Small dark rails, white wing patches clearly seen.....Margaret Jones

I was parked at the end of West Line Road at the bay and watching a Marsh Hawk flying low over the marsh (300-400 feet away) when it dropped to the ground. Instantly a Yellow Rail flushed out of the marsh about a foot from the hawk. It flew up and weakly flew four feet and dropped down. A small brownish bird with white wing patches close to body with legs dangling as it flew. Observed with 10x40 binoculars in good light. I had seen a Yellow Rail before at Anahuac in 1976 on a buggy trip.....Florence Bennett

Stilt Sandpiper: Medium-sized sandpipers, with relatively long legs, and whitish superciliary stripe. Seen feeding in water almost belly high. This species is noticeably more common and late (as it was also early!) this fall on the UTC than normal. Seen by all 3 observers with binocs and scopes in fair to poor light for 2-3 minutes at distances of 50 to 200 yards.....Jim Morgan

Groove-billed Ani: All 15 sitting on one low branch, huddled together as if protecting each other from cold breeze.....Jane Hamilton

Burrowing Owl: In response to call regarding an "injured owl on the ground" at the running track of Houston Baptist University, I found a well, bobbing, long-legged Burrowing Owl at the culvert about 30' N.E. of the turnstile to the track. Also seen at dusk flying in the area.....David Marrack

Swift, species (Probable Vaux's Swift, *Chaetura vauxi*): Observed from parking lot near 100 N. Travis (behind the Old Spaghetti Warehouse Restaurant) late in the afternoon. Birds were seen entering chimney on south side of M&M Bldg. (One Main Plaza) on all dates except 21st, 23rd, and 27th. Inasmuch as Vaux's Swifts have wintered in the Baton Rouge, La. area there is a very real possibility that the birds observed in Houston from No. 10 through the 27th are this species--especially in view of the following statement appearing in Louisiana Birds by George H. Lowery, Jr. (1974 Edition, p. 398): "Any swift seen in Louisiana after the first week of November and before the second week of March is almost certainly of this species (Vaux's--N.P.), since there is no unequivocal evidence that the Chimney Swift is ever present anywhere in the United States in this period".

Sight substantiation of Vaux's Swift in Texas has always been considered virtually impossible due to its close resemblance to the Chimney. As a matter of fact, the swifts I observed in the vicinity of the M&M Bldg. were usually present for very short periods at considerable heights except when going into the chimney to roost at dusk. Confirmation of Vaux's as a valid state species could finally be accomplished, however, if the Houston birds remain in the area throughout the winter and plans made to trap them in order that they may be identified in the hand, as was done in Louisiana.

For the record, the following table includes November observations and Houston Airport temperature extremes by dates for 1975, when swifts were recorded by the writer from the 4th through the 12th at the MYM Bldg. site (see THE SPOONBILL, Dec. 1975, pp. 6&7, and 1978 at the same site:

1975	Total	Time*	Temp. (F)		1978	Total	Time*	Temp. (F)	
Nov.	Birds	(PM/CST)	Max.	Min.	Nov.	Birds	(PM/CST)	Max.	Min.
4	4	5:40	--	--	4	--	--	84	55
5	10	5:35	80	52	5	--	--	81	55
6	8	5:45	81	52	6	--	--	77	60
7	7	5:21	85	53	7	--	--	56	52
8	8	5:25	86	62	8	--	--	69	44#
10	7	5:41	77	47	10	5	5:40(c)	85	50
11	4	5:40	82	47	11	4	5:36(c)	87	61
12	7	5:40	68	56	12	5	5:41(c)	83	68

(chart continued on next page)

	13	4	5:35	82	69
	14	2	5:25	86	69
<u>Explanation:</u>	15	2	5:23(c)	88	68
	16	4	5:42	82	55
* Last bird into chimney	17	3	5:42(c)	68	42
(c) Call notes heard	21	5	?	65	54
# Nov. 9, 1978 temp. 74/36	22	4	5:13(c)	74	53
	23	4	? (c)	81	65
M&M Bldg. site not checked Nov. 9, 1975;	25	3	5:20(c)	82	65
Nov. 4-9, 18-20, 24,26, 1978	27	5	? (c)	64	44

Observer in 1975 & Nov. 4-22, 1978: Noel Pettingell  
 " Nov. 23 & 27, 1978: Wesley Cureton  
 " Nov. 25, 1978: Ted Eubanks, Jr.

Both Wesley Cureton and Ted Eubanks feel the birds they saw and heard were Vaux's (Wes has seen this species in Mexico) as they exhibited discernable differences from the familiar Chimney Swift in appearance, behavior and voice. It would seem reasonable to assume that wintering swifts in both the Baton Rouge and Houston areas feed on insects during the warmer days and are able to survive prolonged cold and/or rainy periods by semi-hibernation within chimneys or other protected roosting places. It is therefore of utmost importance that the M&M Bldg. area be observed regularly late in the afternoon on sunny and warm days from December through March, with attention being directed toward noting any increase in individuals during the first three weeks of March in order to detect the earliest returning Chimney Swifts so that direct field comparisons of both species can be made.

As of this writing (Nov. 27) 5 swifts were still present at the M&M Bldg. site in downtown Houston.....Noel Pettingell

[Ed. note: Noel reported 3 birds still there as of Dec. 1]

Hummingbird, *Selasphorus* species: These hummers really have me in a quandary as I can't tell the immature Rufous or Allen's apart. Any hints? Hardly a day goes by that we don't have a hummer with dotted throat, orange chest, white "bib", and green back. One hummer was quite distinct. My husband and I saw it five times and decided it must be an Allen's: throat spotted rather than dotted...lower splotches flashed red...orange chest...white "bib"...orange on back of head... back clearly bisected: top half green and bottom half orange...tail orange.....

Diane Wise

[Ed. note: Many experienced birders and nearly all ornithologists say that immature *Selasphorus* hummingbirds are impossible to positively tell apart by sight. This is especially the case in the winter season.....CH Ed.]

Empidonax Flycatchers: First bird very olive green above, and very yellow on belly. Exceptionally large white eye-ring and strong white wing-bars. Flicked tail down 2-3 times after perching. Second bird much less colorful, with little or no yellow on undersides.....Jim Morgan

CERULEAN WARBLER: Slender warbler only a little larger than a nearby ruby-crowned kinglet. Underparts white with very pale yellow on breast and lores. This yellow was paler and less extensive than on a spring female. Head and wings light gray. Two bold white wing bars. Back olive with dark streaks. I did not notice color of legs and shape of tail. Size and color seem right for an immature or fall female, but no book mentions a streaked back. If correctly identified, this bird would seem to be the latest recorded in fall. Seen at 15' feeding 12' up in a willow in a shady stream bottom. 7x50 binocs.....Wesley Cureton

Yellow-breasted Chat: About the size of white-throated sparrow. Greenish-gray head, back, wings and tail. Yellow breast. Strong white eye ring. Heavy, slightly curved beak. 15', 7x 50 binocs.....Wesley Cureton

BOBOLINK: More buffy than sparrow, crown stripes, pointed tail.....Jane Hamilton

Rufous-sided Towhee: This towhee always comes to the feeder with our pair of resident cardinals which have been here several years. Apparently the cardinals did not have young this year as they did not bring them to the feeder as they have previously done. As a novice, I wondered if there is a correlation, and if they have "adopted" one another.....Diane Wise

[Ed. note: There is no correlation, it is entirely a coincidence they are coming to the feeder at the same time.]

PAST EVENTS

OG field trip to Cinco Ranch, Dec. 9: 16 OG members braved early morning temperatures in the mid-twenties, and a strong north wind in order to visit Cinco Ranch, which they found to be the best spot on the UTC to see Sandhill Cranes this month. The group was rewarded with an estimated 1000 of these magnificent birds, an exceptionally large flock. The wind severely hampered the birding of sparrows, but a few species were kicked up working the fields. In the woods, the best finds were 2 Woodcock and a Fox sparrow. Though the birding was generally slow (with such an abundance of wind, there was a dearth of birds), the bright mid-day sunshine following a week of cold rain and drizzle was reward enough to be outdoors.

FOLLOW-UP ON CONNECTICUT WARBLER

The T.O.S. Bird Records Committee has accepted the September 16, 1978 Connecticut Warbler sighting as a valid, first documented, state record. David Dauphin, who attended the T.O.S. Fall meeting at San Angelo, said Dr. Keith Arnold, chairman of the BRC said the extensive field notes and the photographs left no doubt a Connecticut Warbler had been seen. Hooray for Ted Eubanks' every-ready camera!

Four cropped 5x7 enlargements of those photographs, along with the written details were also sent to Dr. Eugene Eisenmann of the American Museum of Natural History for his opinion on the bird. Dr. Eisenmann, a noted ornithologist of much expertise, especially on warbler, responded as follows:

"Although the photographs are far from ideal, coupled with your description, it seems to me that the bird was a Connecticut Warbler, *O. agilis*, probably an immature or female. The basis of the specific identification is mainly the combination of conspicuous complete eye-ring and the extremely long under-tail coverts, almost reaching the tip of the middle rectrices. There seems also to be a brownish tonality on the breast, which female and immature Connecticut Warblers usually have, but this last point might be an artifact of photography or enlargement". (About 20 observers can testify that it really was clearly visible in real life!). Further in his return letter Dr. Eisenmann said: "So far as I am aware, the extremely elongated under-tail coverts do not occur in Mourning and MacGillivray's".

From all this we have learned how important two diagnostic marks are in identification of a Connecticut Warbler: the complete eye-ring and the extremely long under-tail coverts. A suggestion: detach, or copy, those extensive field notes which appeared in the October SPOONBILL, and keep them with your field guide. Or underline, or write them in (the two important diagnostic marks) your field guide, as an aid in future sighting decisions.

[Our lexicon, Words For Birds, has this to say about the Connecticut Warbler: *Oporornis* is Greek for "autumn bird," coined from *Opora*, "autumn" and *ornis*, "bird." The allusion is to the abundance of the species in the fall in contrast to the scarcity in the spring. *Agilis* is Latin for "agile" and an allusion to the species ability to get around in trees and bushes. Connecticut is the type locality, where Wilson saw it first. It is more of a mid-western and western species. --Ed.]

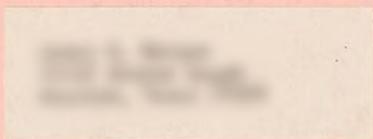
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A Joyous Holiday Season To All

-- THE SPOONBILL Staff

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