



The *Spoonbill*

February 2000
Volume 49, No. 2

MEETING CHANGE: Please read this FIRST!

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

March Meeting Program

Wednesday, March 8, 2000 7:00PM
Houston Zoological Gardens
Brown Education Center
Gate 5

Saving the Cranes of the World
by
George Archibald

Instrumental in developing an international program to save cranes and their habitat. Dr. Archibald has shown conservationists around the world how to accomplish these goals. He is also a reminder of just how much one person can accomplish through perseverance and dedication. As the Director of International Crane Foundation and the United States Whooping Crane Recovery Team he has contributed to the survival of the world's cranes and been instrumental in the conservation of their habitats.

Dr. Archibald will share the wonder of the world of cranes as he addresses the combined membership of the Ornithology Group and the Houston Audubon Society tonight.

Change the date, then save it!

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

VOLUNTEER PLEASE! The ONG needs someone to coordinate the Learning Corner for future meetings. Please call David Sarkozi to volunteer.

Chairman's Message

David Sarkozi

A is for Advocacy

By the time you read this the comment period for the Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the Texas Chenier Plain Refuge Complex (Anahuac, McFaddin, Texas Point, and Moody Nation Wildlife Refuges) will be closed. I hate to say it, but the Fish and Wildlife Service did a terrible job of letting us in the communities that are their biggest supporters know about it.

Through the Internet we were able to raise a fair amount of support, so this phase of the plan is on a healthy pro conservation track. This support came just barely in time.

Still, I can't help thinking all the blame can't be placed on the Fish and Wildlife Service. We must always be vigilant and always be advocates for the wild places that our birds call home.

We're going to have look for these --- meeting, writing and sending those letters, e-mails, and faxes. This is only the start of the CCP process for the Texas Chenier Plain Refuge Complex. Its going to take about two years to write and approve this plan that will be the blueprint for management of these refuges for about the next fifteen years. This is not the only CCP. There will be others for the refuges in our area; for the Brazoria Complex, for Attwater National Wildlife Refuge, and for Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge. We will go through all phases of this process several more times.

There will be other battles for conservation. There will be state projects and other public and private projects like the Bayport project of the Port of Houston. There will be other fights like State Highway 87 and the West Houston Airport.

We must be ever watchful that we weigh in with our opinions as soon as we can. We have an advantage over those forces that oppose conservation - we're going to fight the good fight several times over. We will get stronger and smarter each time.

We must always be advocates for conservation. When conservationists look back at the start of the 21st century in 100 years they aren't going to say we did too much.

Beginning Birding

Identification, Learn What to Expect By Habitat

Don Richardson

Recently, we discussed some advantages to grouping birds for help with their identification. We used certain hawks and saw how knowing differences in several genera could narrow down the field of possibilities and make identification easier. The process of identifying birds is largely a process of elimination. Grouping birds is a good way to accomplish that. There are other ways to group birds and the one we'll discuss today involves a look at the habitats in which they live. Most of us are aware that a marsh supports different birds than a prairie or a forest. Within those major areas, though, are many more, somewhat subtle types of habitat. A prairie may be wet or dry, it may have short or longer grasses and grasses of different types. The forest may be mixed, pine, or deciduous. It may have a heavy, brushy understory or it may be more open. It may be riparian or upland. The marsh may be fresh or brackish, deep or shallow, brushy or grassy. You probably get the point by now, but all these conditions present different living opportunities for birds. Learning about them and the birds that live in them will be quite helpful in their identification. There are few places in the

world, where you can find more different habitats in which to study than on and near the Texas coast and in the nearby East Texas forests.

We touched on the consideration of habitat with our hawk examples when we saw that Accipiters were woodland hunters while the Buteos preferred to soar high over open fields to find their prey.

Sparrows are birds that cause many beginners and even some intermediate birders general heart failure when it comes to their identification. The birders speak in low, frightened voices because it's a scary kind of birding that many seem to avoid for years. That need not be the case, and in the study of sparrows you can find numerous examples which illustrate how knowing habitat can help identify them. If you'll read in the National Geographic field guide, you will see descriptions of the types of areas our sparrows like to use. Check the "range" discussion for the Le Conte's Sparrow, it tells us "a bird of wet grassy fields and marsh edges". For the Henslow's Sparrow it describes "found in wet shrubby fields or weedy meadows". A Song Sparrow is described as living in "brushy areas, especially dense stream-side thickets". Vesper Sparrows like "dry grasslands, farmlands, and forest clearings". Savannah Sparrows are found in "a variety of open habitats, marshes, and grasslands". As you examine the descriptions of the niches preferred by these few sparrows, you can begin to see how having knowledge of these preferences would help with their identification. When you see a sparrow fly from the short grass on the side of the road to perch on a nearby wire fence, you would think of a Savannah Sparrow well before you would consider a Song Sparrow. As long as birds can fly, they will move about and will be seen in habitats where they are not supposed to be. You will certainly have to look at more things than just the habitat when identifying these sparrows and other birds. Knowledge of habitat, however, is a powerful and useful tool.

There are two species of blackbirds that are difficult for some to separate, and they occupy very different habitats. They are the Brewer's and Rusty Blackbirds. Our field guide tells us that Brewer's is "common in open habitats" while we find that the Rusty is "in wet woodlands". Quite different areas of preference for these two.

We can see lots of warblers in our area of Texas, several nest here, several winter here, a couple can be found in good numbers all year round, and a great many of them migrate through our area in spring and fall. They too have their favorite places. Pine Warblers, as the name implies, like the pine forests. They can be seen in deciduous trees, but if I were going to look for them specifically, I'd go to a pine woods like Jones forest in Montgomery County, White Park in Chambers County, or Memorial Park in Harris County.

For a Parula Warbler, I'd look in a riparian forest with lots of Spanish Moss which is where they like to nest. A Prairie Warbler would be more likely in brush or trees near some open grasslands or prairie.

We have looked at quite a few examples of the habitats birds like to be in, but there are even more considerations that are linked to this habitat logic. We might look at where in that habitat the bird is located. Most thrushes make their living on the ground. They scratch among the leaves on the forest floor for bugs and worms. Several warblers stay on the ground too. The Northern and Louisiana Waterthrush, both warblers, like to be on the ground where it's wet. We see them along the edge of a stream looking for food, while another warbler, the Ovenbird, also stays on the ground but, like the thrushes, scratches its living from among the dryer upland leaves. Of our two Kinglets, the Ruby-crowned Kinglet seems to like the mid-story of dense brush, while the Golden-crowned Kinglet stays high in the treetops. The Pine and Parula Warblers we mentioned also like high levels, but a Hooded Warbler much prefers the middle of the forest's understory. The "always heard and seldom seen" Yellow-breasted Chat stays low and in the most dense brush it can find.

As we said, grouping birds into categories can really help narrow down the identification possibilities. Next, we'll see how knowing the seasons in which our birds are present provides yet another valuable tool. As we continue to find categories for birds, we will continue to see that the categories are useful in narrowing the field of possibilities when identifying them.

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

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

CONSERVATION CORNER

Houston Purple Martin Colony Update

Bill Goloby

Just want to update Ornithology Group members on the status of the official purple martin colony of the City of Houston for which they so generously funded the newest house for. The house sits atop a 20 foot steel pole located in front of the Houston Garden Center in Hermann Park, just across from the Houston Museum of Natural Science. A healthy colony has continued to raise young there since the original house was donated by the Houston Horticultural Society back in 1966. The house donated by the Ornithology Group replaced that original house in 1993.

Once a year in January and February, the house is taken down and cleaned and repaired. This is a coordinated effort between myself and the City of Houston's Parks & Recreation Department. Victor Cordova, of the Urban Forestry Division, arranges for a bucket truck to come by and take the house down sometime in early January. Dan Ogea, of the Houston Garden Center, stores the house until I can get by to clean it. Dan also arranges for entry to the work area for me. After the house is cleaned, Victor makes arrangement for the house to be returned to the top of the steel pole.

We try to time the cleaning so that the house is down in early January and not returned until late February. This gets it out of sight while the sparrows and starlings are busy searching for nest sites and gets it up just in time for the returning purple martins to move in and claim cavities before any of the "undesirable species" have a chance to get established. It has worked out well for the most part. We might end up with a pair of starlings and maybe two pairs of sparrows, but most of the cavities are filled with purple martins.

It would be nice for members to send thank you notes to Victor and Dan for their help and support of the care and maintenance of the Purple Martin House. Addresses are as follows:

Victor Cordova, Division Manager
City of Houston Parks & Recreation Dept.
Urban Forestry Division
6501 Memorial Drive
Houston, TX 77007

Dan Ogea, Superintendent
City of Houston Parks & Recreation Dept.
Houston Garden Center
1500 Hermann Drive
Houston, TX 77004

Editor's Note: *Bill sent a very nice black and white picture of the occupied Martin house, taken by Richard Albrecht, to be included in the Spoonbill. However, I am not possessed of a scanner. So, I will be sure one of the officers gets the*

picture to the next meeting for everyone to see. In the meantime, Bill asks:

Please stop by and take a look at the colony and let me know what you think. You can e-mail me (Bill Goloby) at pfcompany@aol.com.

23rd BUFFALO BAYOU, TX, CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Bob Honig

(1/78-1/00)

SPECIES: 117 + 1 EXOTIC

INDIVIDUALS: 32,403

PARTICIPANTS: 100 (64 IN THE FIELD + 36 AT FEEDERS)

Many thanks to the record high number of participants, finally hitting triple figures -- exactly 100 (64 in the field, 36 at feeders). Despite the more thorough coverage, our species numbers were down a bit. As a result of the drought, some areas where there usually is standing water were dry. Thus, waterfowl in particular were absent. Numbers of other species -- in particular those that prefer wet sites (e.g., Common Yellowthroat, LeConte's Sparrow) -- were down. Habitat loss in the northeastern and north-central portions of the count circle continues at a discouragingly rapid rate: there is almost no quality habitat remaining in those areas. Our unofficial total is 117 species. That will almost certainly be reduced by at least one species: although the American Ornithologists' Union considers Ringed Turtle-Dove to be a naturalized species, the American Birding Association still considers it to be an exotic that hasn't established self-sustaining populations (and CBC editors have been following ABA's lead).

Particularly interesting was the observation of 4(!) Peregrine Falcons -- the first time for this species on the Buffalo Bayou CBC. Two of these were adults perched & preening on one of the buildings in the Galleria, near the east end of the count circle; the others were an immature along Braes Bayou near Gessner and an adult along Clay Road in the northwestern part of the circle. Note: there have been scattered reports of Peregrines at the Galleria for at least a month or two (including photos of a third bird, an immature on a ledge outside the photographer's office), so they may be here for the winter (or longer?).

Another species new for this CBC is Eurasian Collared Dove. It is likely that the immigration of this species into Houston initially went unnoticed, with observers' assuming all *Streptopelia* sp. were Ringed Turtle-Dove; it likely has been

here well before this year. How many years has Eurasian Collared Dove been in Houston and, more specifically, in the Buffalo Bayou CBC circle may be difficult to estimate -- I am unaware of literature on this subject. However, it is possible that in prior Buffalo Bayou CBCs, some individuals reported as Ringed Turtle-Dove may in fact have been Eurasian Collared Dove.

Also new to the count was Joe Kennedy's sighting of a Black-throated Gray Warbler at his house. And one Budgerigar (exotic) observed. Other species of note: 2 Merlin, 4 Caspian Tern (unusual right in the city), White-winged Doves in record numbers (358), 1 Common Nighthawk (count week in Bear Creek Park), Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Black-and-white Warbler, Eastern Towhee, Harris' Sparrow, and Rusty Blackbird (Bear Creek Park).

HOUSTON CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

December 18, 1999

P.D.Hulce

Despite a damp, overcast day, with scattered showers, the 61st consecutive and 66th in all Houston Christmas Bird Count enjoyed one of its best days of the last 10 years. Sixty observers recorded 137,670 individuals of 160 different species. Like most habitats on the Texas coast, the Baytown area was feeling the effects of one of the worst droughts in several decades and this certainly affected the numbers and locations of many species. However, this didn't stop a record number of participants from showing up at Luna's Mexican Restaurant for an exciting countdown dinner.

A.K.Stoley's stalwarts in Area 1 produced high species totals for Red-bellied, Downy, and Pileated Woodpeckers, Chickadee, Titmouse, Carolina and House Wren, as well as finding one of three LeConte's Sparrows for the day. The Bradford bunch in Area 2 had high totals for Red-tailed and Red-shouldered Hawks and Northern Harriers, and also had count exclusives Inca Doves and Barred Owl. Due to new parking lot construction at Houston Raceway Park, the count missed Sprague's Pipit for the first time in 10 years.

Scouring Area 3, David Sarkozi and team cornered the market on waterfowl at the Highland Reservoir, with 17 species of ducks and geese, including high totals for Snow and Ross' Geese, Wood Duck, Green-winged Teal, Mallard (112!), Pintail, Canvasback, Ring-ducked Duck, and Greater Scaup. They also had one of two Bald Eagles for the day.

Rick Wilson managed to find some new habitat to bird in Area 4, the most urbanized area in the count circle. His team saw one of only two Sharp-shinned Hawks for the count and also had a count high 47 Pine Warblers.

Baytown resident Judy Behrens' Area 5 counters found count exclusives Brown Creeper, House Finch, and the bird of the count, an immature Orchard Oriole, seen for only the second time in the count's 66 year history.

Area 6, led by David Marrack, produced count exclusives Green Heron and Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Common Moorhen, Marbled Godwit, and Eurasian Collared Dove, as well as high counts for 31 different species.

Richard Uzar and his team in Area 7, found the count's only Common Goldeneye, Piping Plover, and Stilt Sandpiper, and his count of 27,600 Laughing Gulls made the Houston count number one in the nation with a total of 36,903 Laughing Gulls.

Area 8 leader Ed Rozenburg and cohorts recorded the count's only Woodcock and had high species totals of Rock Dove, Eastern Screech and Great Horned Owls, Golden-crowned Kinglets, and three species of blackbirds.

Karen Bradley took over as leader of Area 9 this year, and her group of observers found count exclusive Peregrine Falcons and Dark-eyed Juncos, both in San Jacinto State Park.

Area 10 was also taken over by a new leader this year. David Knutson took over this position and found 400 Black Skimmers, as well as a high count of Royal Terns. Thanks to Karen and David for doing a great job!

Once again, Eddie Seidensticker of the Natural Resources Conservation Service brought his boat and ferried P.D.Hulce and his team to remote Atkinson's and Hogg Islands in Area 11. Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows and a swallow species, probably Tree, were exclusives for this area. Atkinson's Island also produced excellent views of two Virginia Rails and eight species of sparrows.

The count set several new high species records including 374 Brown Pelicans, 12 Ross' Geese, 30 Ospreys, and 5 Merlins. Field Sparrows numbered 134 individuals, for the third highest total ever. Previous highs were 142 in 1963 and 150 in 1939. Seven American Oystercatchers, 253 Sandhill Cranes, and 505 Black Skimmers were all noteworthy totals. Only 2 (!) Inca Doves and 2 White-eyed Vireos were recorded and no Cedar Waxwings were seen.

I would like to thank all of the participants for coming out and helping with the senior Christmas Bird Count on the

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upper Texas coast, and perhaps in all of Texas. We are especially grateful to all of the private property owners that allow access to so much valuable habitat within the count circle, such as Reliant Energy, the Port of Houston Authority, Houston Industries, and many others. My special thanks go out to all of the great area leaders, who are the driving force behind this great count. Thank you all and I hope to see you all again next year.

OLD RIVER CHRISTMAS BIRD
COUNT
12-29-99
P.D.Hulce

On the cool, clear morning of December the 29th, 1999, thirty one observers ventured out into the varied habitats of the Trinity, Old, and Lost Rivers and recorded the third highest species total in the 34 year history of the Old River Christmas Bird Count. About one half of the observers were experienced veterans of this count, and the other half, while relative newcomers to this count, comprised some of the best bird watchers on the upper Texas coast. This excellent group of observers recorded 338,495 individual birds of 149 different species.

Leading in Area 1, Barbara Tilton's group found several exclusives including Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Canada Geese, Tree Swallow, and White-winged Dove. They also had high counts for 16 different species, including 39 Roseate Spoonbills and 18 Loggerhead Shrikes. Area 2 leader Stuart Marcus and his team recorded exclusive Canvasbacks and Dark-eyed Junco, one of two Bald Eagles, and one of the two best birds of the count, a Cassin's Vireo. They found 145 Snowy Egrets, 3 American Woodcocks, and 2 Brown Creepers, as well as numerous other high species totals.

New Area 3 leader John Bregar and his enthusiastic companions worked hard to find a Henslow's Sparrow for the second year in a row, within 100 yards of where last year's bird was found. They also found the count's only Eared Grebes, Ring-necked Ducks, and Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks, as well as 5 Winter Wrens and two Vermilion Flycatchers.

Due to an error of the compiler, Area 4 leader Harry Elliott was forced to cover his territory alone and still produced count exclusives King Rail and White-crowned Sparrows. He recorded high counts for 12 species, including 210 Savannah Sparrows, and found Eastern Screech, Barred, and Great

Horned Owl. Harry has been this count's "owl man" for several years now.

In Area 5, Frankie Simmon's experienced crew found several count exclusives, including Cattle Egret, Eastern Towhee, Brewer's Blackbird, and Baltimore Oriole. They also turned up two hummingbird species, two Vermilion Flycatchers, and 40 Wood Ducks.

Area 6A, covering the north end of Trinity Bay and such waterways as Jacks Pass and Lawrence Cove was covered by P.D.Hulce and Bernice and Ed Jackson, who provided the boat and navigation expertise. This is the only area of the count that has any extensive shorebird habitat and therefore it produced 20 exclusive species, including Black-bellied and Semi-palmated Plovers, American Avocet, Long-billed Curlew, Marbled Godwit, Bonaparte's Gull, and Gull-billed Tern. These observers were also invited to visit the feeders of Lu and Grady Skillern, where they observed Rufous and Anna's Hummingbird and Red-breasted Nuthatch.

Sallie Sherman captained a second boat in Area 6B, the Trinity River proper, and her crew found count exclusives Great-tailed Grackles, as well as recording high counts for 10 species, such as 34 Great Blue Herons, 9 Ospreys and 32 Cedar Waxwings.

Particularly noteworthy on this year's count were some exceptional numbers of some species. Prior to this year, Brown Pelican was usually reported as 2 or 3 birds, if at all. This year's count produced an astonishing 219 individuals! Immature Brown Pelicans were seen all over the inland waterways, all the way north to Highway I-10. Twenty five Bonaparte's Gulls were seen, as well as 100 Black Skimmers. Five Vermilion Flycatchers, 68 Sandhill Cranes, two Bald Eagles, and 312,985 Red-winged Blackbirds were all good totals. The Cassin's Vireo and Anna's Hummingbird were both new birds for the count and shared the honors as best bird of the count.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all of the participants and the great area leaders who contribute so much to this great count, and to the Lower Trinity Valley Bird Club for sponsoring it. I hope to see all of you next year when we will break 150 species!

I would also like to dedicate this season's count to long time participant and compiler, Jonelle Buckels. Her interest and dedication kept the Old River Christmas Bird Count going for many years, and I hope that it will continue on long into the future. Thanks, Jonelle!

TRINITY RIVER CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

December 28, 1999

P.D.Hulce

For the fourth year in a row, the fledgling Trinity River Christmas Bird Count enjoyed beautiful weather with a cold, clear, windless day. Despite a slight drop in participation, twenty observers found 9160 individuals of 98 different species, a new record high for the count. Henslow's Sparrows were found for the fourth straight year, despite most of the pristine prairie patches in the area having been recently mowed. For the second year in a row, the Bewick's Wren was found behind the headquarters building of the Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge. Only seven species of ducks and geese were seen, due to the drought conditions that have affected all of Texas for the past year. However, a respectable 12 species of sparrows were recorded, including LeConte's, Vesper, 33 Field, Henslow's, Eastern Towhee, and Dark-eyed Junco.

David Knutson, leading a party into the Cypress Lakes area, found exclusive Black-crowned Night-Heron, Hooded Merganser, and Coopers Hawk, as well as 50 Anhingas. David's team also had the high count of Red-headed Woodpeckers for the day with 25.

The Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge group was headed up by Stuart Marcus. This area produced most of the count's ducks, and also produced American Woodcock, Barred Owl, Winter Wren, LeConte's Sparrow, and Eastern Towhee.

At the last minute, Bernice Jackson took over the Macedonia area and her group found the counts only White Pelicans and Bald Eagle, as well as several other exclusives.

Working the Tarkington Prairie area, leader Janet Rathjen and companions produced Gray Catbird, the count's only 3 House Sparrows (!), and Brown-headed Nuthatch, for the second year in a row.

The team led by P.D.Hulce birded Davis Hill State Park in the morning and found 25 Field Sparrows, 3 Dark-eyed Juncos, and one of two Henslow's Sparrows. In the afternoon, they covered the northern end of the count circle and lucked into 5 Rusty Blackbirds, as well as single Cattle and Snowy Egrets, a lone Palm Warbler, and a second Henslow's Sparrow.

Red-headed Woodpeckers continue to be a interesting species. In 1996, there were 45 recorded on the count. There were none in 1997 and only 1 in 1998. This year, 1999, again

there were 45 Red-headed Woodpeckers recorded on the count. Four species were noted in record high numbers for the count. Wood Ducks totaled 129, and Mallards were at 67. There were 69 Rock Doves found, at the bridge on Highway 787 over the Trinity River and 2506 Red-winged Blackbirds were found, mostly on the refuge.

Thanks to all of the participants and great area leaders, who all enjoy birding this relatively unknown area of Texas. Special thanks to Stuart Marcus for doing so much of the legwork for this count, making the dinner reservations, and securing access to the Cypress Lakes area, Davis Hill State Park, and of course, the fabulous Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge. Plan to attend the Trinity River 4th of July Butterfly Count on Sunday, June the 25th this summer. I hope to see you all there.

Don't Forget
Great Backyard Bird Count
February 18-21, 2000

Sponsored by the National Audubon Society and Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, fields a count team consisting of any backyard birder that has 15 minutes to spend observing and recording bird species in their gardens or the green spaces near their homes and records their tallies on the BirdSource web site by zip code: <http://birdsource.org>.

To participate, go to BirdSource (<http://birdsource.org>) and click Great Backyard Bird Count. Directions are provided at the site (including directions on science of counting birds). Participation is free. No registration is necessary. For more information, call 1-800-843-BIRD (2473).

Clearing House Electronic Submissions

David Sarkozi

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

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

You may also search the database from the web site.

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

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

December 1999 CLEARINGHOUSE

Thanks to everyone who submitted these records:

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

Please continue to get those observations to:

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

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

Common Loon birds=3 reports=1
Pied-billed Grebe birds=24 reports=7
Horned Grebe 12/30 Galveston (T. City Dike) 1 JB
Eared Grebe birds=1 reports=1
American White Pelican birds=289 reports=4
Brown Pelican birds=118 reports=4
Double-crested Cormorant birds=48 reports=6
Neotropic Cormorant 12/11 Galveston () 60 RT/DM
Neotropic Cormorant 12/30 Galveston (T. City Dike) 1 JB
Neotropic Cormorant 12/30 Galveston (High Island) 1 JB
Anhinga 12/11 Galveston () 1 RT/DM
Anhinga 12/18 Fort Bend(Brazos Bend) 1 RT/DM
Great Blue Heron birds=22 reports=7
Great Egret birds=57 reports=8
Snowy Egret birds=53 reports=7
Little Blue Heron birds=57 reports=5
Tricolored Heron birds=48 reports=3
Reddish Egret birds=10 reports=2
Cattle Egret birds=1 reports=1
Black-crowned Night-Heron birds=13 reports=3
White Ibis 12/5 Fort Bend(Brazos Bend) 6 KR
Glossy Ibis 12/29 Chambers(Anahuac) 1 DS
White-faced Ibis 12/5 Fort Bend(Brazos Bend) 2 KR
White-faced Ibis 12/12 Fort Bend(Brazos Bend) 1 RT/DM
White-faced Ibis 12/18 Fort Bend(Brazos Bend) 3 RT/DM
Roseate Spoonbill 12/11 Galveston () 1 RT/DM
Roseate Spoonbill 12/12 Fort Bend(Brazos Bend) 4 RT/DM
Roseate Spoonbill 12/30 Galveston (High Island) 6 JB
Black Vulture birds=75 reports=4
Turkey Vulture birds=247 reports=7
Black-bellied Whistling-Duck 12/5 Fort Bend(Brazos Bend)
10 KR
Black-bellied Whistling-Duck 12/12 Fort Bend(Brazos Bend)
12 RT/DM
Black-bellied Whistling-Duck 12/18 Fort Bend(Brazos Bend)
25 RT/DM
Greater White-fronted Goose birds=50 reports=1
Snow Goose birds=2,502 reports=4
Wood Duck 12/12 Fort Bend(Brazos Bend) 1 RT/DM
Gadwall birds=6 reports=1
Blue-winged Teal birds=45 reports=3
Cinnamon Teal 12/5 Fort Bend(Brazos Bend) 2 KR
Cinnamon Teal 12/12 Fort Bend(Brazos Bend) 2 RT/DM
Cinnamon Teal 12/18 Fort Bend(Brazos Bend) 5 RT/DM
Northern Shoveler birds=25 reports=5
Green-winged Teal birds=9 reports=2
Ring-necked Duck 12/12 Fort Bend(Brazos Bend) 4 RT/DM
Ring-necked Duck 12/18 Fort Bend(Brazos Bend) 7 RT/DM
Red-breasted Merganser birds=10 reports=3
White-tailed Kite birds=3 reports=1
Bald Eagle birds=1 reports=1

Northern Harrier birds=12 reports=3
Red-shouldered Hawk birds=5 reports=3
Red-tailed Hawk birds=10 reports=3
Crested Caracara birds=6 reports=1
American Kestrel birds=15 reports=6
Aplomado Falcon 12/17 Brazoria(San Bernard) 1 DS
Peregrine Falcon 12/11 Galveston () 2 RT/DM
Northern Bobwhite birds=3 reports=1
Clapper Rail birds=3 reports=1
Common Moorhen birds=72 reports=3
American Coot birds=94 reports=5
Black-bellied Plover birds=208 reports=4
Snowy Plover 12/11 Galveston () 3 RT/DM
Wilson's Plover 12/11 Galveston () 1 RT/DM
Semipalmated Plover birds=16 reports=1
Piping Plover 12/11 Galveston () 12 RT/DM
Piping Plover 12/30 Galveston (Bolivar) 3 JB
Killdeer birds=45 reports=7
American Oystercatcher 12/11 Galveston () 3 RT/DM
American Oystercatcher 12/30 Galveston (E. Beach) 2 JB
Black-necked Stilt 12/11 Galveston () 90 RT/DM
Black-necked Stilt 12/30 Galveston (E. Beach) 3 JB
American Avocet birds=950 reports=1
Greater Yellowlegs birds=5 reports=3
Lesser Yellowlegs birds=1 reports=1
Willet birds=128 reports=4
Spotted Sandpiper birds=1 reports=1
Long-billed Curlew birds=32 reports=3
Marbled Godwit birds=28 reports=3
Ruddy Turnstone birds=45 reports=3
Sanderling birds=166 reports=4
Western Sandpiper birds=49 reports=2
Least Sandpiper birds=3 reports=1
Dunlin birds=325 reports=2
Short-billed Dowitcher 12/30 Galveston (E. Beach) 2 JB
dowitcher species birds=130 reports=1
Common Snipe birds=2 reports=1
American Woodcock 12/11 Galveston () 2 RT/DM
Laughing Gull birds=1,021 reports=5
Bonaparte's Gull birds=6 reports=1
Ring-billed Gull birds=430 reports=4
Herring Gull birds=37 reports=2
Caspian Tern birds=32 reports=3
Royal Tern birds=95 reports=3
Forster's Tern birds=61 reports=4
Black Skimmer birds=760 reports=2
Rock Dove birds=96 reports=4
Eurasian Collared-Dove 12/18 Harris(Bering Ditch) 1 BM
Mourning Dove birds=26 reports=6
Barn Owl birds=1 reports=1
hummingbird species 12/30 Galveston (High Island) 1 JB
Anna's Hummingbird 12/22 Chambers(Residence) 1 DW
Belted Kingfisher birds=5 reports=3
Red-bellied Woodpecker birds=12 reports=4

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker birds=2 reports=1
 Downy Woodpecker birds=2 reports=2
 Northern Flicker birds=1 reports=1
 Pileated Woodpecker birds=1 reports=1
 Eastern Phoebe birds=54 reports=6
 Vermilion Flycatcher birds=1 reports=1
 Loggerhead Shrike birds=8 reports=5
 White-eyed Vireo 12/11 Galveston () 2 RT/DM
 White-eyed Vireo 12/18 Fort Bend(Brazos Bend) 1 RT/DM
 Blue-headed Vireo birds=7 reports=2
 Blue Jay birds=32 reports=5
 American Crow birds=41 reports=4
 Horned Lark birds=34 reports=2
 Tree Swallow 12/11 Galveston () 1 RT/DM
 Carolina Chickadee birds=29 reports=4
 Tufted Titmouse birds=22 reports=2
 Carolina Wren birds=9 reports=4
 House Wren birds=1 reports=1
 Winter Wren 12/11 Galveston () 1 RT/DM
 Sedge Wren birds=6 reports=1
 Golden-crowned Kinglet birds=6 reports=3
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet birds=111 reports=8
 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher birds=19 reports=4
 Hermit Thrush birds=12 reports=2
 American Robin birds=16 reports=1
 Gray Catbird 12/11 Galveston () 1 RT/DM
 Northern Mockingbird birds=23 reports=5
 Brown Thrasher birds=8 reports=1
 European Starling birds=168 reports=4
 American Pipit birds=8 reports=2
 Cedar Waxwing birds=15 reports=1
 Orange-crowned Warbler birds=26 reports=6
 Yellow-rumped Warbler birds=87 reports=7
 Pine Warbler birds=25 reports=3
 Black-and-white Warbler 12/12 Harris(W. Houston) 1 RT/DM
 Ovenbird 12/11 Galveston () 1 RT/DM
 Common Yellowthroat birds=6 reports=4
 Hooded Warbler 12/11 Galveston () 1 RT/DM
 Wilson's Warbler birds=5 reports=3
 Field Sparrow birds=6 reports=1
 Savannah Sparrow birds=43 reports=4
 Song Sparrow birds=5 reports=2
 Lincoln's Sparrow birds=1 reports=1
 Swamp Sparrow birds=10 reports=2
 White-throated Sparrow birds=40 reports=4
 Northern Cardinal birds=29 reports=6
 Red-winged Blackbird birds=692 reports=6
 Eastern Meadowlark birds=6 reports=1
 Common Grackle birds=20 reports=2
 Boat-tailed Grackle birds=1 reports=1
 Great-tailed Grackle birds=67 reports=5
 Brown-headed Cowbird birds=12 reports=3
 American Goldfinch birds=13 reports=3

The Spoonbill

House Sparrow birds=30 reports=1

Rare Bird Field Notes:

Hooded Warbler: (RT/DM): 12/11/99

An adult male Hooded warbler was observed for about 1 minute on the ground at Smith Oaks. Field marks noted: Black hood and yellow face; olive green upper parts; bright yellow underparts. The bird constantly made a very loud "chink" call as it foraged and would flash its white outer tail feathers as it moved about.

Ovenbird: (RT/DM): 12/11/99

An ovenbird was observed for about 4 minutes feeding near a drainage ditch at Smith Oaks. Field marks noted: Orange crown bordered by two black stripes; white eyering; olive brown upperparts; white underparts with bold black streaks; pinkish legs. The bird walked on the ground with tail cocked and made a soft "chink" call.

Cassin's Vireo: (RT/DM): 12/11/99

A Cassin's vireo was seen in a flock of Golden-Crowned Kinglets. Field marks noted: two bold white wingbars; white spectacles; greenish-olive head and back with absolutely no contrast between head and back as in Blue-Headed Vireo; whitish underparts with a very faint yellowish wash along sides and flanks; large, thick bill. Overall, a very dull looking bird when compared to the nearby Blue-headed Vireos. Seen for 3 minutes at Smith Oaks feeding in Hackberries and Crepe myrtles.

Aplomado Falcon:

Dark capped Falcon, bright buffy/cinnamon supercillium extending almost to the nape, nape had only a thin dark strip separating the supercillium. Bright cheeks. Wide dark band extending to the nape and back. Dark narrow mustache strip. Bill gray with a dark tip. Legs yellow, bands on both legs. Back and wings were dark. Wings dark long and pointed in flight. Tail dark with 5 narrow light stripes. The tip of the tail was a narrow light strip. Wide dark belly band. Leg coverts bright buffy/cinnamon. The chest was the same bright color with some narrow dark streaking. In flight the bird was aggressive and speedy. Seen harassing Northern Harriers and White-tailed Kites. Powerful in flight faster and more agile in flight. How were similar species eliminated? American Kestrel has no belly band, not bright cinnamon on light parts. back was dark not cinnamon. No belly band on other falcons, too dark for all but Peregrine.

Anna's Hummingbird:

Description: The bird seemed a little larger than Ruby-throated. The overall color scheme is similar to a RTHU; green back, green flanks, dusky undertail coverts, the wing tips reach the tip of the tail. The underparts are dusker (grayer) than a RTHU. There is a thin lighter band separating the grey of the chest from the gorget. There is a strong white postocular spot. The size and shape of the bill did not strike me as very different than RTHU. The most interesting markings are the red speckling and dark feathers on the gorget and forehead. The red speckling and dark feathers occurs from the forehead to midcrown and scattered throughout the gorget. The red seemed concentrated on the crown area. The retrice tips contained no white that I could see. This, along with the incomplete crown/gorget markings, indicates a second year male according to Pyle (1997). This bird was visible 90% of the time I spent there. It would perch in low branches of the pine trees or high shrub branches, apparently favoring sunny areas. It frequently visited the sugar feeder the Skillerns had in their garden. This bird is very vocal. I realize written descriptions of vocalizations are fairly subjective. This said, it sounded like an individual imitating mouse squeaking by sucking on their knuckles. It was long, continuous, and had a buzzy, electric quality to it. It would vocalize primarily from perches, but I believe also in flight (this was not in my notes, but from memory). How were similar species eliminated? Red markings present from the forehead to mid crown.

Glossy Ibis:

Description: Feeding with two snowy egrets and a white ibis. Observation focused mostly on the head and face. Showed obvious light gray to dirty white facial skin surrounding the loreal area. The border of light skin only extended to the top and bottom of the eye. It did not extend behind the eye. Other Plegadis ibis observed in the same area showed no light color to the loreal skin, in fact several were already showing dark pink loreal skin. On all other Plegadis ibis I was able to observe a red eye, but on this presumed glossy ibis I could not observe the eye color. That could be due to the this bird being back lit by the early morning sun, but I don't think so because the bird was down in a ditch and in shadow most of the time. How were similar species eliminated? White-faced Ibis do not show the light border to the loreal skin

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

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

Activity Reminder List

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

VOLUNTEER PLEASE! The ONG needs a coordinator for week day field trips. Please contact David Sarkozi to volunteer.

Saturdays See dates below 9:00AM

Brazos Bend State Park Bird Walks: Meet at 40 Acre Lake Restrooms. Bring binoculars. No children under 12 please. Robert Thacker, John Billard, and Anne Shelton will lead walks to the Observation Tower, showing and discussing birds on the way. Call Robert Thacker at 713-984-8388 for questions.

Dates:

February 19, 2000

March 4, 2000

March 18, 2000

Saturday-Saturday June 10-17, 2000 CFD

OG Mexico Field Trip: See July 1999 Spoonbill for details. Contact Michael Delesantro at 956-969-8610 or mdele@worldnet.att.net. Fees.

Ongoing Programs

Winter Raptor Monitoring

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

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

Please note, Winter Raptor Survey packets have been sent in the mail to all those who volunteered. If you have not received one, please contact David Sarkozi.

January 2000 Meeting of the Ornithology Group

Pat Pease, Recording Secretary

Chairman David Sarkozi conducted the meeting:

Interesting birds seen:

Bald Eagle and Vermillion Flycatcher at Brazos Bend

Visitors – 2

Announcements:

Coordinator needed for week-day field trips.

Coordinator needed for Learning Corner.

Winter Raptor Survey Packets will be sent in the mail to those people who agreed to participate.

Dues for the year are due and payable to ONC. OG dues increased to \$14. Complete details and form are posted in Nature Notes (ONC publication)

Spoonbill not out again this month. Many members expressed disappointment. Next 2 month's OG meetings have change in date and location. We will meet jointly with the Houston Audubon Society at the Brown Education Center of the Houston Zoo. The dates will be the 2nd Wednesday in February (Feb. 9) and the 2nd Wednesday in March (Mar. 8).

Wednesday, February 9, 2000 - Bob and Vera Thornton - Chasing Warblers

Wednesday, March 8, 2000 - George Archibald - Saving the Cranes of the World

Upcoming Field Trips:

Jan. 8 – West Harris County lead by David Bradford

OG will sponsor a competition for Birder of the year 2000.

Lists must be turned into the Clearing House. Open to all OG members, Birder of the year will be the one who turns in and publishes the most species on the UTC (Brazoria, Chambers, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, and Jefferson Counties), if there at least 10 competitors then there will runner up certificates. Certificates (and possibly runner ups) will be awarded for high total for each UTC county.

Program: Slide presentation by members:

Bob Moore presented Owls

Skip Almony show slides from his trips to Indonesia and China

Bob Ohmart showed birds from all over the country

David Saradozi presented birds of Anahauc National Wildlife Refuge

Rob Thacker presented Wanderings of a Naturalist with slides from trips to Mexico, Costa Rica, and other Central and South American destinations.

It was a great program! Everyone had very interesting slides and comments.

April Meeting

Monday, April 3, 2000 7:00PM, Bayland Community Center 6400 Bissonnet, **Birding and Photography** by Bob Moore, member of both the ONG and ONC Photography groups.

Save the date!

2000 MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

TIME TO SEND THEM IN!

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

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

Membership Renewal

Mail your check and this completed form to:

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

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

Name

Street Address

City State Zip

Phone (please include the area code)

e-mail address

New Rejoining Renewal

ONC Annual Dues (payable to ONC)

Regular \$8 Family \$15
 Supporting \$40 Life \$100

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

Total ONC/OG Dues \$ _____ | _____

Other Donation \$ _____ | _____

Total Amount Enclosed \$ _____ | _____

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

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About the Ornithology Group

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

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

Officers:

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

To Start or Renew Membership:

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

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

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

You can also enroll from our web site.

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

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

Clearing House List Submissions:

Birds for the Clearing House list can be sent to:

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

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

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

Newsletter Submissions

Newsletter submissions can be sent to:

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

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

Rare Bird Hot Line:

Texas Society Rare Bird Alert: 713-369-9673

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Ornithology Group
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Houston, TX 77277-0894**

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