



Volume 44, No. 1
January 1995

The Spoonbill

Published by The Ornithology Group, Outdoor Nature Club, Houston

Membership Meeting

"Rancho del Cielo"

Lawrence V. Lof

Date: Monday, February 6

Location: Bayland Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet

Time: 7:00 p.m. Pre-meeting Learning Corner to hear Karen Beckman discuss "Winter Birds of Lake Tawokoni Area" at 6:30 p.m.

A native of Brownsville, Lawrence V. Lof, became involved with Rancho del Cielo first as a student and president of the Gorgas Science Society, then as a full-time volunteer in the program. For 18 years, he served as Associate Director, eventually becoming Director of the Biology Station Program. Mr. Lof is a member of the faculty of the Natural Science Department at the University of Texas at Brownsville. A charter member of the Board of Directors of the Gorgas Science Foundation, Mr. Lof was instrumental in the establishment of the foundation.

Chairman's Message

I trust you all attended as many Christmas Counts as possible in December. I was glad to see many people new to this endeavor join me in Area Two on the OG's Houston Count. We were treated to about 20 Sprague's Pipits spiraling up, up and away at the Houston Raceway parking lot. This is the same place where we have seen Sprague's Pipit for the last five years. A few lucky souls did get extended views of a pipit on the ground in good light.

Now might be a good time to make a New Year's Resolution to learn sparrows. Get out and meet them on their own field or hedgerow. When I first began birding, sparrows fit into three categories. 1) Sparrows that flew a long distance when flushed. These were good sparrows because no time or thought was wasted trying to identify them. 2) Sparrows that just sat on a fence or wire allowing a close approach and a slight glimmer of hope that identification might just happen this time. It never did. 3) Sparrows that were not sparrows, but looked like sparrows to me. You know the kind...female Red-winged Blackbirds, house "sparrows," female Brown-headed Cowbirds, or any other small brown bird.

If you missed the OG's January sparrow trips, do not despair. Saturday, February 4th, I will lead a trip for Pineywoods Wildlife Society (Meet at 7:30 a.m. Bear Creek Park jogging trail parking lot). Saturday, February 11th, David Veselka and I will lead another OG "Youth" field trip to west Harris County. (Meet at 8:00 a.m. Bear Creek Park jogging trail parking lot.) If you bring a young birder, you are more than welcome to attend. If you bring a youthful spirit and an eagerness to learn sparrows, we won't say no and you will be setting a good example for our younger participants. Finally, on Saturday, February 25, John Eriksson will lead an OG field trip to Waller County in search of sparrows and other birds of the prairie. Check the calendar for details.

If you are unable to attend any of these helpful events, you can still do it the old-fashioned way...no, not with a gun...but with your field guide and a map of west Harris County that can be purchased at our regular monthly meetings. May all your sparrows be adult White-crowned. *David Bradford*

Calendar of Events

February

Saturday, February 4: Houston Audubon Work Day. 8:00 a.m. Boy Scout Woods. Volunteers are needed for trail work, tallow removal, planting, clean up and ideas! If you are unable to volunteer on weekends, and love using your chainsaw for tallow removal, give me a call. I'll be working 2-3 days each week at High Island during February and March and welcome your help. *Winnie Burkett, 992-5640.*

Thursday, February 9: ONC Meeting. 7:00 p.m. Houston Arboretum and Nature Center. Diana Foss will present a program on the alligators at Sheldon Reservoir located northeast of Houston.

Saturday, February 25: OG FIELD TRIP TO WALLER COUNTY. John Eriksson will lead a trip to Waller County. This trip will require strenuous walking but should be very productive for sparrows, including Henslow's Sparrow. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at FM 529 and 2588. Take I-10 west to Pederson Road (Exit 737). Drive north on Pederson about 1/2 mile to Hwy. 90. Turn left. Drive about 1/2 mile to 2588. Turn right. Drive about six miles to 529. Meet in parking lot on NE corner. Plan to bird all day. Wear appropriate foot gear for muddy fields. For more information, call John at (409) 826-4158.

March

Saturday, March 4: Houston Audubon Work Day. 8:00 a.m. Boy Scout Woods. *Winnie Burkett, 992-5640.*

Monday, March 6: OG Membership meeting. 7:00 p.m. Harris County Bayland Community Center. OG member, Frank Peace, will talk about the annual Hawk Watch and radar tracking. Learning Corner begins at 6:30 p.m.

Saturday, March 11: OG FIELD TRIP TO LITTLE THICKET NATURE PRESERVE AREA. Aaron Stoley will lead this trip to find the Red-cockaded Woodpecker and to bird the area around the ONC Sanctuary. To get to the meeting place, take Hwy. 59 north from Houston to Cleveland. Take the bypass around Cleveland. Exit onto 2025, turn left and drive five miles to a flashing light. Turn left at the light onto Hwy. 945. Drive 2.5 miles and meet Aaron at 8:30 a.m. along the road. Although this trip is scheduled in early March for the woodpeckers, it should be a good time for woodland birds, sparrows and perhaps some early neotropical migrants.

Saturday, March 25: OG FIELD TRIP. Mike Austin will lead this trip. In past years, this coastal birding trip provided excellent all-around birding and such rarities as Lesser Black-backed Gull. Details in next month's *Spoonbill*.

Saturday, April 8: OG FIELD TRIP TO SMITH POINT AND HIGH ISLAND. No leader has been found for this trip to see spring migrants. If you can lead this trip, please contact Dwight Peake as soon as possible. (409) 740-4621

Special Joint OG/Audubon Program

George Archibald
International Crane Foundation

Monday, February 27
7:30 p.m.
Brown Education Center
Houston Zoological Gardens
Refreshments at 7:00 p.m.

The Ornithology Group and the Houston Audubon Society are hosting a presentation by George Archibald of the International Crane Foundation. Using slides, Mr. Archibald will discuss cranes of the world and the environmental situation affecting cranes in Asia. He is an engaging speaker who will expand your knowledge and understanding of worldwide conservation issues.

This will not replace either group's normal monthly membership meetings. No group business will be conducted.

Please welcome new members Joan and Franklin Moon, Ann Bradford, Susan Feather, Paige Marlow, Suzanne Milstead, Jane Herring, Doris Graham, Ginny Hartman, Gerald and Bessie O'Brien, Jose Hernandez, David Sarkozi and Marilyn Kircus.

Newsbriefs

.....**TRUMPETER SWAN AT BRAZORIA REFUGE:** The unexpected presence of a Trumpeter Swan this winter on the Brazoria NWR has created a strong interest among birders throughout the state. Since it is located in an area normally closed to the public, the Brazosport Birders are offering guided tours to view the swan. A two-mile round-trip walk may be required. Tours are planned for Saturday, February 4 and 18. Meet at the Otter Slough gate (3:00 p.m.) is located on the north side of the refuge on FM 2004, 5.8 miles northeast of the intersection of FM 2004 and CR 523. For last minute updates on the status of the swan prior to each tour, call (409) 233-5338. *Al Clarke*

.....**YOUTH FIELD TRIP, DECEMBER 10:** The small group of birders that gathered to enjoy our third youth field trip of the year encountered rain and wind on Galveston Island. As we persisted we found Eared Grebe, Northern Gannet, Surf Scoter, Tree Swallow and numerous gulls and terns. We were able to study Caspian, Royal, Forster's and Sandwich Terns roosting side by side. The diving and wheeling gannets proved to be the highlight of our wet and windy trip. *David Bradford*

.....**BEGINNERS FIELD TRIP, JANUARY 8:** The weather was great and the sparrows fine on this trip to West Harris County. Twenty participants studied ten species of sparrow often observed at close range. Before the trip's conclusion, some participants could even tell the difference between Savannah and Vesper Sparrow. A Sprague's Pipit was a delight for most as were the male Vermilion Flycatchers, Bald Eagles and Barn Owls. A special thanks to P.D. Hulce who helped all participants view the birds and fielded their numerous questions. *David Bradford*

.....**ART DAY WITH JOHN P. O'NEILL IN GALVESTON:** Ornithologist and artist, John O'Neill, will conduct a painting workshop in water-based media, Saturday, February 4 in the Moody Gardens Visitor Center on Galveston Island. The fee is \$38.00 and includes lunch. Call (409)737-3750 or 744-9270. *Martha Micks*

.....**SMITH POINT HAWK WATCH 1994:** The hawk numbers tell only part of the Hawk Watch story. They don't tell about the rain and fog. Are they up there? Most counters sit and wait to see if the weather will break. The numbers also don't tell about glorious sunrises followed by a steady stream of Sharp-shinned Hawks headed west or of lazy, circling Broad-winged Hawks or of speeding Merlins. They don't tell about all the other things counters see--like

record numbers of Wood Stork, flocks of Snipe, rivers of swallows, uncountable numbers of dragonflies and too many mosquitoes. Smith Point is truly a spectacular place in autumn.

In 144.1 observer hours, 61,022 individual hawks were reported in the 1994 Hawk Watch., including one White-tailed Hawk, seven Swallow-tailed Kites, 38 Peregrine Falcons, 399 Kestrels and an astounding 57,134 Broad-winged Hawks.

A special thanks goes to the hawk count leaders, Buddy Hollis, Dwight Peake, Dawn and Ross Carrie, John Whittle, Bill Tarbox, Gail Luckner, Bob Behrstock, John Bregar, Marilyn Crane and David Dauphin. I also thank the OG for funding the 1994 Hawk Watch.

We are still learning about what hawks are doing on the Upper Texas Coast in the fall. Having Frank Peace watch the weather radar in League City while we watch the hawks is teaching us a lot. We hope to see all of you at the Hawk Watch 1995. *Winnie Burkett*

.....**BEGINNING BIRDING CLASSES** for the late winter, spring and early summer of 1995 will be conducted as a joint venture by the Houston Audubon Society and Don Richardson. Classes are limited to 12 participants. The cost is \$125 per person. To sign up for this action-packed birding series contact Don Richardson, Phone/Fax: (713) 661-1365.

.....**MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 9, 1995 OR MEETING:** Chairman David Bradford discussed sparrow identification for the Learning Corner. David opened the meeting with a reminder that dues are now past due! Also, there are now some new books in the OG library, so watch for them next time you browse.

The budget as presented by Treasurer Mike Gremillion and published in the *Spoonbill*, was voted on and passed.

Don also discussed the recent petition against poisoning foxes which has been passed around. The petition contained misinformation, and Don warned that we really need to be sure not to sign petitions unless we're really certain of the information they contain.

Steve Bennett introduced the evening's speaker Bill Goloby, who spoke to us about Purple Martins. Bill gave an excellent and very informative discussion of Purple Martin identification, natural history, status as a "favorite species," houses, and the Houston colony, for which the OG provided the home. *Maggie Honig, Secretary*

Houston Christmas Bird Count 1994-95

BY P. D. HULCE

The 56th consecutive Houston Christmas Bird Count (HCBC) enjoyed temperatures in the fifties and endured grey, overcast skies all day long. Fifty-seven observers, two more than last year, were still not enough to overcome two major obstacles to equalling last year's species total. First, the lack of any serious cold fronts and their accompanying northern passerine birds eliminated several species that are usually seen on this count. Then, after considerable effort to arrange the use of the Galveston Bay Foundation's (GBF) Bay Ranger, the engine blew up less than a week before the count. The GBF did arrange for a smaller Coast Guard boat which allowed us to census Cedar Bayou and some of the adjacent coastal areas. The important areas of Atkinson and Hog Islands and Mosquito Knoll were not reached. Several species normally found only in these areas were missed.

The species total for the count was 150, down about 12% from last year's total. This was consistent for many bird counts on the Upper Texas Coast. An impressive 217,264 individuals observed included over 120,000 gulls around the Baytown landfill.

Appearing for only the fourth time in the 61-year history of the HCBC, the Western Tanager seen by several participants in Area Five, garnered best-bird-of-the-count honors. Equally impressive was the adult Bald Eagle seen in Area Six, as it made life exciting for the Snow Geese.

Brown Pelicans were present for the seventh consecutive

year, but only eight individuals were seen this year. Other interesting and uncommon birds seen on the count included Horned Grebe, Redhead, Common Goldeneye, Black and White-winged Scoter, Merlin and Peregrine, Semi-palmated Plover, Tree Swallow, Sprague's Pipit, two White-eyed Vireo, Wilson's Warbler, Rufous-sided Towhee, Harris' Sparrow, Pine Siskin and House Finch.

Many common species missed included Reddish Egret, Green Heron, White-faced Ibis, Canada Goose, Bobwhite, Clapper Rail, American Avocet, Long-billed Curlew, Ruddy Turnstone, Short-billed Dowitcher, Woodcock, Bonaparte's Gull, Black Skimmer, Common Ground Dove, Short-eared Owl, Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Black and White Warbler, Field Sparrow, Boat-tailed Grackle and Purple Finch. Species that occurred with low numbers included one Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, two Sharp-shinned Hawk, one Cooper's Hawk, eight Dunlin, one Red-headed Woodpecker, four Marsh Wren, seven Common Yellowthroat, eight Lincoln's Sparrow and seven White-crowned Sparrow.

Area Two leader, David Bradford, received this year's leadership award for recruiting the most observers. David and his 11 participants also had the most species with the highest individual totals of any of the count areas.

This year we welcomed two new area leaders to the Houston count. Rob Van Zandt took over the heavily urbanized

Area Four. They observed three more species than last year, including a count exclusive King Rail and 11 species with the highest individual totals of any of the count areas. Area Ten in La Porte was taken over by John LaGroue. That area had the second highest list on the count with 90 species. They also captured count exclusives including Peregrine, Cooper's Hawk and Redhead. Many thanks to both leaders for a job well done.

My special thanks again to Judy Behrens, for obtaining permission for us to enter the wonderful private property that produced Western Tanager, Bullock's Oriole and Harris' Sparrow. While viewing Horned Grebe, Goldeneye and several other great birds, we ate lunch on her backyard deck. Thanks Judy!

We thank all of the private businesses, public utilities and individuals that graciously grant access to their property. Houston Lighting and Power, Chevron, the Port of Houston authority and many others we thank you very much. The Houston Christmas Bird Count was ranked 20th out of over sixteen hundred counts in North America in 1993.

Our most important resource on the Houston count is our excellent roster of area leaders, who come back year after year and recruit the people to find those birds. Our sincere thanks to each and every one of you and all of the stalwart participants who brave the wilds of Baytown. I hope to see each and every one of you again next year.

Freeport CBC

Total Species: 204

Participants: 135

Best Bird: Masked Duck/Great Kiskadee

December 18: The Masked Duck was new to the Freeport cumulative count and the Great Kiskadee has been seen only once before on the count in 1980. Also noteworthy was the close and careful observation of a Black Rail, only seen on three previous occasions and last observed in 1972.

Other "good birds" included Harris' Hawk, White-winged Dove (2), Least Flycatcher, Couch's Kingbird, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Barn Swallow (2), Yellow Warbler and American Redstart. As in some other counts, these rarities included a number of "Valley birds."

Species present in unusually high numbers were Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (252), Canvasback (455), Redhead (1301), Short-eared Owl (12!), Long-billed Curlew (715), Black-throated Green Warbler (4) and LeConte's Sparrow (344).

As in 1993, the Freeport CBC was well below its long-term average of 214 species.

Contributing factors included a dearth of irruptive northern and western species and low numbers of lingering neotropical migrants. Habitat destruction in the southern third of the count circle is another possible factor in the overall performance of the last two counts. Two years do not constitute a trend but this bears watching. This is precisely what these counts are all about!

The count compilers thank all participants and property owners for their help on count day and Dow Chemical for the countdown dinner.
Jim Morgan

San Bernard CBC

Total Species: 176

Participants: 39

Best Bird: Glossy Ibis/Anna's Hummingbird

December 20: The count total of 176 tied for the second highest in the count's ten-year history. We had one airboat and two marsh buggies operating all day. Phillips Petroleum Company sponsored a delicious shrimp gumbo dinner cooked by Ron Bisbee and Margaret DuCroz and Bob O'Leary brought two briskets.

This count recorded the highest individual numbers for several species including: Mottled Duck (245); American Wigeon (2234); Gadwall (3150); Piping Plover (47); Snowy Plover (24); Marbled Godwit (8); Sedge Wren (685); and Marsh Wren (565).

Unfortunately, we did not see some species normally present on the refuge for the count: Peregrine Falcon, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Bobwhite, American Woodcock and Fox Sparrow.

Many areas of the count circle were not covered. With more participants, this count could rival the more popular counts along the coast. Next year, come on down to San Bernard NWR and bring friends! *Rick Speer, Compiler*

Attwater CBC

Total Species: 160

Participants: 44

Best Bird: Zone-tailed Hawk

December 21: The best bird of the count was undoubtedly the Zone-tailed Hawk found by Marilyn Crane's group. Zone-tailed Hawks have been reported in Colorado County before, but never on a Christmas count. I think everyone was happy to have good weather for

the count, especially after the cold rainy count last year.

Unusual species recorded were Black-bellied Plover (25), American Avocet (19), Stilt Sandpiper (30), Laughing Gull (1) and Rufous Hummingbird (2). The numbers of regular species also proved interesting. Some species of ducks were very numerous--Green-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, and Northern Shoveler. Most areas in the count circle reported fewer ducks than usual. Most of the ducks were on the refuge itself (9000 in a single pond). Blackbird numbers were also way up, but Eur. Starlings were low. Sparrow numbers were lower than usual, but there hasn't been much cold weather up north to push them down. Again, no Prairie-Chickens were seen.

The recently published *Audubon Field Notes* ranked the 1993 Attwater CBC 27th out of the 1636 counts in North America. It was again the best inland count in the nation thanks to the efforts of area leaders and participants. The 1995 Attwater CBC will be December 20. Save that date and join us. *Winnie Burkett, Compiler*

Mad Island Marsh CBC

Total Species: 205

Participants: 56

December 19: This count was created in 1993 to showcase the properties managed by The Nature Conservancy of Texas and southern Matagorda County and to produce a count of regional and national significance. We are there, folks! We produced 205 wild species and one species of unknown origin. This gives us about the same species tally as Freeport, but well behind the Corpus Christi CBC, which reported 213 species on a very rainy Saturday. Congratulations are extended to Gene Blacklock and his volunteers.

We reported 2.9 million birds with 56 field observers in 186 party-hours. This was an increase of eight species over last year. We added 24 species not reported last year and missed 13 species seen in 1993. The count now has a cumulative total of 218 species.

[Some of the] species with extraordinary high tallies were Brown Pelican, White Pelican, Ross' Goose, Canvasback, White-tailed Hawk, Sora, Least Sandpiper, Sandhill Crane, Eur. Starling, Tricolored Heron, Osprey, King Rail, Bufflehead, Com. Goldeneye, Barn Owl, Short-eared Owl, LeConte's Sparrow, and Brown-headed Cowbird.

Year-to-year fluctuations in species abundance are very common in nature and with the 60% increase in numbers of observers, it was expected that most species tallies would be up. More individuals of 143 species were reported than last year, but lower numbers were reported for 66 species. Diving ducks and shorebirds showed the biggest declines. [These] two highly mobile groups of species move in and out of areas depending on their day-to-day conditions. The declines might have been more due to count day conditions, rather than a population change. *Jim Bergan, Compiler*

Galveston CBC

Total Species: 154

Participants: 61

Best Bird:

December 28: Everything seemed to be against the Galveston CBC this year. Disaster, flooding, scheduling mixup, bad timing, illness, missed announcements, you name it. In spite of all these, it was a great count and as always and above all, everyone had a great time. *Compiler, Arch Dillard, hampered*

by the loss of participant and telephone lists when his house flooded, decided to let it all hang out and to trust the organization of the previous dozen years to carry things through. A trusty band of seasoned area leaders and topnotch birders came through in grand style covering the familiar eight major areas with great expertise.

Undaunted by the all-day rain, these great birders really turned up the birds--even finding some species never before reported on the Galveston count. Highlights: Dwight Peake and the East Beach crew found a Rufous-sided Towhee; Dave Dauphin's Bolivar Beach Band found an amazing 120 species in just over a square mile of territory including Parasitic Jaeger, Black-headed Grosbeak and four Short-eared Owls; P.D. Hulce and crew found Harris' Hawk on Texas City Dike; Ruth Dillard and the mainland area birders got Red-crowned Parrot and Monk Parakeets; and Martha Micks and Aaron Stoley and the Houston Gang found a Bullock's Oriole in the Galveston residential section.

What other Christmas count requires written details for American Crow and yet annually find Piping Plover, Red Knot, American Avocet and Black-necked Stilt? One participant, Trudy Belz, stayed up till after midnight, just so she could report her backyard Screech Owl on count day.

The countdown dinner at Hill's Pier 19 was a time of friendly fun and good cheer, as usual. species. Best of all, there were 62 participants, possibly the all-time record! Out-of-town visiting celebrities included Dick Peake of Wise, Virginia, Will Russell and Karen McBride of Arizona, and John Llast of Dallas. Come again next year! You're all invited. *Arch Dillard*

Brazos Bend CBC

Total Species: 138

Participants: 62

December 31: Stormy weather, pouring down rain, plenty of food and drink in front of a hot fire, Masked Ducks for the the third straight year, and lots of fun... what does all this have in common? The Brazos Bend Christmas Count, of course.

Yup! Sixty-two hardy birders scoured the fields, ponds and air of the Brazos Bend count circle December 31, 1994, the tenth anniversary of this count. Rivers and creeks were swollen from past floods, but weather conditions aside, we registered our first ever Yellow-throated Warbler and spotted three Masked Ducks, two Harris' Hawks, one absolutely gorgeous Krider's Hawk and a very unusual Laughing Gull (last seen in 1989). The paucity of ducks and geese was extremely surprising. One of the major ponds at Davis Estates has been drained and while it now provides LeConte's Sparrows (an intrepid Mike Austin found one), ducks were not to be found.

At the end of the day we tallied 138 species, the lowest number since 1988 when we recorded 139. This count now has a cumulative total of 199 species!

Birding in this jewel just outside the city of Houston is a wonderful experience. We topped off this count with a hot fire, hot cider, hot lasagne with plenty of trimmings and libation (yes, some of us did) and ending the year with old and new friends and a sneak preview of Peter's trip to Antarctica. But for the weather, a perfect day. *Lynne Aldrich and Peter Gottschling, Compilers*

BUFFALO BAYOU CBC

Total Species: 112

Participants: 62

January 2: With 62 observers in the field (our highest ever) and 18 at feeders, the Buffalo Bayou CBC for the third consecutive year had more participants than any other CBC on the UTC, except Freeport (I feel very confident making this statement, even though I haven't yet seen the results of other counts). High participation means more thorough coverage: unfortunately, this year that coverage did not result in a third consecutive high species total. The cold front that blew in on 1 January did not produce an influx of wintering birds, although a respectable total of 112 species was observed; in fact many observers felt they had to work especially hard to find the birds this year.

Observations of note: one American Woodcock in the Houston Arboretum; Royal Tern along Braes Bayou; four Golden-crowned Kinglets (I hear these are very tough to find this year); seven Catbirds; seven Rufous-sided Towhees; and one Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (new to count). A Roseate Spoonbill was observed count week, as was a Merlin, which was seen the day before and the day after the count. Also just missed were Ash-throated Flycatcher, seen in Barker Reservoir a week before the count, and Summer Tanager, back at Bill Pinkston's feeder for at least the sixth year, seen four days after the count. On the down side, we missed Barred Owl (for the first time since 1983), Barn Owl (the stone tower in which our stake out pair lived had been demolished -- its on a Superfund site being remediated), and Ringed Turtle-dove.

Thirteen species of waterfowl were observed, including three Hooded Mergansers in an out-of-the-way pond in Barker Reservoir. The site of the Barker Reservoir wetlands project (spearheaded by Bill Stransky and The Park People) attracted numerous waterbirds and promises to consistently provide a diversity of ducks and shorebirds. Barker also produced White-tailed Hawk for the first time since 1988, when the Cullen-Barker Park shooting range was built on their nest site.

Feeders added several species to our field total, including Rufous Hummingbird, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern (Bullock's) Oriole, Brewer's Blackbird, and Pine Siskin. Feeders also produced 90 White-winged Doves (1 more was seen in the field).

Finally, a note on the dark Red-tailed Hawk that has wintered for many years on Alief-Clodine Road between Eldridge and Synott, perching on the electric transmission towers. Although this has been reported previously on the Buffalo Bayou CBC as a Harlan's, we now believe that it is a black morph western Red-tailed Hawk, in part due to the extensive white mottling on its back. *This mottling has not been observed in prior years.* This is a very interesting bird. If any of you go and look at it, tell me what you think. *Bob Honig, Compiler (665-6963).*

Kingsville CBC

Total Species: 150

Participants: 32

Best Bird: Ringed
Kingfisher/Ash-throated
Flycatcher

December 18: Two species are new to our count: Ringed Kingfisher, found by Ro Wauer's team in "the marsh," and Ash-throated Flycatcher, recorded by the Chaney

and Langschied team on the King Ranch. Unusual birds for our count included Common Goldeneye, Wood Duck last reported in 1982, and Ruby-throated Hummingbirds. Ruby-throats, normally absent in winter were reported in record numbers and for the first time since 1982.

The total number of individual birds (63,706) counted was the highest ever. Lowest numbers of Common Ground-Dove, Curve-billed Thrasher, Pyrrhuloxia, and Bronzed Cowbird (!) were reported. It was disappointing to see numbers of Least Grebes (24), Wild Turkeys (25), Green Jays (119) and Olive Sparrows (21) lower than in recent years. No Lark Buntings.

The flying was particularly productive this year and accounted for more than half the total goose count (10,278). It also provided the opportunity to learn how to identify flying Ross' Goose (7) from above. It's a snap! *Paul Palmer, Compiler*

NOEL'S NICHE

BY NOEL PETTINGELL

10 YEARS AGO/FROM JANUARY 1985 SPOONBILL

Clearing House Notes, December 1984: Chimney Swift: Last seen in vicinity of Cotton Exchange Bldg. chimney on November 30 at dusk. Bird roosted there until at least Dec. 1. Site was checked Dec. 3 and 10, but no swifts were seen in the vicinity. Latest ever recorded departure date in Houston was Dec. 7, 1978. Three swifts were seen going to roost in U. of H. Downtown Bldg. chimney at One Main Plaza on Dec. 6 and were not present when site was next checked on Dec. 16. *Noel Pettingell*

Clearing House

DECEMBER 1994

EDITORS: PHYLLIS AND TONY FRANK

Well another year is completed. A special Christmas count issue will be prepared that focuses on the species seen during area Christmas counts. A total of 179 species were reported for the month. Masked Duck, Harris' Hawk, Least Flycatcher and American Redstart are all unusual species for the UTC in winter, although Masked Duck has been a regular the past two years.

Reports for next month are due by February 3rd, but early reports are welcomed. Readers are reminded that all decisions regarding checklist status are made by the checklist committee. Publication of a rarity does not imply acceptance of the record by the editors or the committee. The CH format remains the same this month. The listing uses the following format: bird name, early late dates, reports/total and summary by county or detailed listing. The format of the county summary is as follows: county designation - number of reports/number of birds. The detailed listing format is as follows: county-(number of birds) day, observer code. Very rare birds are underlined. Birds with no previous record on date or vagrant status appear in bold. Birds new to the checklist are capitalized and underlined. Please remember to submit notes on all those good birds. And with all the reminders completed - on to the birds.

Loon, Common 19-19 1/9 GA-TCD(9)19,WW
 Grebe, Least 24-24 1/1 CO-(1)24,X
 Grebe, Pied-bill 9-24 7/72 CH-1/10 CO-1/8 GA-3/43
 HA-1/10 JE-1/1
 Grebe, Horned 17-17 1/2 HA-(2)17,X
 Grebe, Eared 10-24 5/34 CO-1/3 GA-3/19 HA-1/12
 Gannet, Northern 10-10 1/14 GA-(14)10,DGP
 Pelican, Amer Wht 11-23 5/840 GA-3/712 HA-1/25 JE-1/103
 Pelican, Brown 10-23 6/212 BR-1/1 GA-4/210 JE-1/1
 Corm, Dbl-crested 10-24 8/347 CH-1/1 CO-1/6 GA-4/42
 HA-1/250 JE-1/48
 Corm, Neotropic 9-23 5/73 GA-2/41 HA-1/1 JE-2/31
 Anhinga 9-9 1/1 JE-(1)9,JW
 Heron, Great Blue 9-24 11/45 BR-1/1 CH-2/4 CO-1/5
 GA-4/27 JE-3/8
 Egret, Great 9-24 12/67 CH-2/5 CO-1/6 GA-3/7
 HA-2/16 JE-4/33
 Egret, Snowy 9-23 8/93 CH-2/7 GA-2/28 HA-1/3 JE-
 9-17 3/4 CH-1/2 GA-1/1 JE-1/1
 Heron, Little Blu 9-17 3/4 CH-1/2 GA-1/1 JE-1/1
 Heron, Tricolored 11-23 2/7 CH-(2)11,WBW; JE-(5)23,JW
 Egret, Reddish 10-23 3/6 GA-(1)10,DGP; GA-(3)17,JJW;
 JE-(2)23,JW
 Egret, Cattle 10-19 6/76 CH-2/11 GA-3/45 HA-1/20
 Heron, Green 26-26 1/2 CH-(2)26,X
 Nt-Heron, Blk-crn 9-11 2/7 CH-AW(6)11,WBW; JE-(1)9,JW
 Ibis, White 9-23 5/268 CH-1/50 GA-2/45 JE-2/173
 Ibis, Glossy 20-20 1/1 BR-SB(1)20,X
 Ibis, White-faced 9-23 8/809 CH-2/540 FB-1/6 GA-2/210
 JE-3/53
 Spoonbill, Roseat 9-23 4/9 GA-(6)11,WBW; GA-(1)19,WW;
 JE-(1)9,JW; JE-(1)23,JW
 Whsl-Duck, Fulvs 9-9 1/23 JE-(23)9,JW
 Goose, Gr Wht-frn 11-24 3/360 CH-2/160 CO-1/200

Goose, Snow 9-30 8/21215 CH-2/20020 CO-1/1000
 GA-2/60 HA-1/35 JE-2/100
 Goose, Ross' 11-11 1/1 CH-AW(1)11,WBW
 Goose, Canada 11-11 1/45 CH-(45)11,WBW
 Teal, Green-wing 11-24 5/689 CH-1/250 CO-1/400 GA-2/35
 JE-1/4
 Duck, Mottled 9-24 9/219 CH-1/25 CO-1/12 GA-2/12
 HA-1/40 JE-4/130
 Mallard 9-11 3/13 CH-1/4 GA-1/4 JE-1/5
 Pintail, Northern 9-24 5/212 CH-1/2 CO-1/150 HA-1/30
 JE-2/30
 Teal, Blue-winged 9-11 3/37 CH-1/20 GA-1/5 JE-1/12
 Teal, Cinnamon 24-24 1/20 CO-(20)24,X
 Shoveler, Northrn 9-24 8/1371 CH-1/250 CO-1/500
 GA-2/60 HA-1/500 JE-3/61
 Gadwall 11-24 5/328 CH-1/100 CO-1/200 GA-2/16
 HA-1/12
 Wigeon, American 11-24 3/110 CH-1/25 CO-1/75 GA-1/10
 Canvasback 19-19 1/1 GA-(1)19,WW
 Redhead 11-17 3/14 GA-2/6 HA-1/8
 Duck, Ring-necked 9-12 4/45 CH-1/3 GA-1/2 HA-1/20 JE-
 1/20
 Scaup, Greater 12-20 2/5 BR-SB(1)20,X; HA-(4)12,X
 Scaup, Lesser 11-23 5/294 CH-1/5 GA-2/24 HA-1/60 JE-
 1/205
 Scoter, Black 20-20 1/3 BR-SB(3)20,X
 Scoter, Surf 10-10 1/1 GA-(1)10,DGP
 Goldeneye, Common 11-19 3/55 GA-TCD(30)11,BG;
 GA-(5)19,WW; HA-(20)12,X
 Bufflehead 11-24 4/63 CO-1/1 GA-2/12 HA-1/50
 Merganser, Hooded 12-12 1/40 HA-(40)12,X
 Merganser, Red-br 11-19 4/45 GA-3/25 HA-1/20
 Duck, Ruddy 9-24 7/215 CH-1/10 CO-1/50 GA-2/20
 HA-1/100 JE-2/35
 Duck, Masked 4-18 3/4 BR-(1)18,X; FB-BB(2)4,JWR;
 FB-BB(1)11,JWR
 Vulture, Black 11-24 3/7 CH-1/3 CO-1/2 JE-1/2
 Vulture, Turkey 10-24 7/55 CH-3/8 CO-1/35 GA-2/5 JE-
 1/7
 Osprey 11-17 2/2 GA-YBR(1)11,WBW;
 GA-(1)17,JW
 Kite, White-tail 11-23 8/62 BR-1/6 CH-2/12 GA-2/40 JE-
 3/4
 Eagle, Bald 18-24 2/2 BR-BW(1)18,X; CO-(1)24,X
 Harrier, Northern 9-24 11/74 BR-1/1 CH-2/24 CO-1/20
 GA-4/22 JE-3/7
 Hawk, Sharp-shin 17-23 2/3 JE-(1)17,JJW; JE-(2)23,JW
 Hawk, Cooper's 12-12 1/1 HA-(1)12,X
 Hawk, Harris' 28-28 1/4 GA-TCD(4)28,X
 Hawk, Red-shouldr 9-9 1/1 JE-(1)9,JW
 Hawk, White-tail 18-24 2/3 BR-(2)18,X; CO-(1)24,X
 Hawk, Red-tailed 9-24 13/175 CH-3/58 CO-1/25 GA-4/42
 HA-1/3 JE-4/47
 (Hawk, Harlan's) 24-24 1/1 CO-(1)24,X
 Hawk, Ferruginous 21-21 1/2 CO-(2)21,X
 Caracara, Crested 22-24 2/5 CH-AW(2)22,BG; CO-(3)24,X
 Kestrel, American 9-24 14/160 BR-1/6 CH-3/34 CO-1/22
 GA-4/50 HA-1/4 JE-4/44
 Merlin 23-23 1/1 JE-(1)23,JW
 Falcon, Peregrine 11-12 2/2 GA-BF(1)11,WBW; HA-(1)12,X
 Rail, Clapper 23-23 1/1 JE-(1)23,JW
 Moorhen, Common 9-23 4/123 CH-1/100 JE-3/23
 Coot, American 9-24 6/485 CH-1/100 CO-1/100 GA-2/250
 JE-2/35
 Crane, Sandhill 10-24 3/570 CO-1/350 GA-2/220
 Plover, Blk-belli 10-23 6/455 GA-4/430 HA-1/1 JE-1/24
 Plover, Snowy 10-23 5/18 BR-2/4 GA-2/4 JE-1/10
 Plover, Semipalm 11-23 4/32 GA-2/20 HA-1/10 JE-1/2
 Plover, Piping 10-23 4/110 BR-1/42 GA-2/52 JE-1/16
 Killdeer 9-24 11/308 CH-3/38 CO-1/20 GA-2/10
 HA-2/18 JE-3/222

Oystercatcher, Am 11-19 3/5 GA-(2)11,WBW; GA-(1)17,JJW;
GA-TCD(2)19,WW
Stilt, Black-neck 9-17 3/55 GA-2/30 JE-1/25
Avocet, American 9-24 5/879 CO-1/3 GA-2/850 JE-2/26
Yellowlegs, Great 9-23 4/9 GA-1/2 HA-1/1 JE-2/6
Yellowlegs, Less 11-23 4/36 CH-1/1 GA-1/5 JE-2/30
Willet 10-23 4/72 GA-3/60 JE-1/12
Sandprr, Spotted 12-23 2/8 HA-(6)12,X; JE-(2)23,JW
Curlew, Long-bill 11-17 3/42 CH-1/5 GA-2/37
Godwit, Marbled 11-17 2/45 GA-(25)11,WBW;
GA-(20)17,JJW
Turnstone, Ruddy 11-19 2/6 GA-(5)11,WBW; GA-TCD(1)19,WW
Knot, Red 18-23 2/13 HA-BF(7)18,JWR; JE-(6)23,JW
Sanderling 10-23 5/781 GA-4/730 JE-1/51
Sandprr, Western 11-23 5/844 GA-2/770 HA-1/14 JE-2/60
Sandprr, Least 12-23 3/12 GA-1/5 HA-1/4 JE-1/3
Dunlin 9-23 5/1782 GA-3/1514 JE-2/268
Dowitcher, S-bill 17-17 1/500 GA-(500)17,JJW
Dowitcher, L-bill 9-24 5/430 CO-1/25 GA-1/200 JE-3/205
Snipe, Common 17-17 1/1 CH-(1)17,DB
Gull, Laughing 9-23 7/2019 GA-4/1800 HA-1/1 JE-2/218
Gull, Bonaparte's 10-23 4/12 GA-3/6 JE-1/6
Gull, Ring-billed 9-23 9/1701 CH-1/1 GA-4/610 HA-1/2
JE-3/1088
Gull, Herring 10-23 4/10 GA-3/9 JE-1/1
Tern, Gull-billed 30-30 1/2 CH-(2)30,X
Tern, Caspian 10-23 4/12 BR-1/1 GA-2/5 JE-1/6
Tern, Royal 10-23 5/379 GA-4/352 JE-1/27
Tern, Sandwich 10-10 1/5 GA-(5)10,DGP
Tern, Common 11-17 2/4 GA-BF(2)11,WBW; GA-(2)17,JJW
Tern, Forster's 10-23 6/289 GA-4/250 HA-1/4 JE-1/35
Skimmer, Black 11-23 3/1202 GA-2/1200 JE-1/2
Dove, Rock 11-24 6/179 CH-1/1 CO-1/50 GA-2/27
HA-1/100 JE-1/1
Dove, Mourning 11-30 8/78 CH-2/7 CO-1/25 GA-1/4
HA-2/30 JE-2/12
Dove, Inca 24-24 1/1 CO-(1)24,X
Parakeet, Monk 12-30 3/19 GA-(2)19,WW; GA-(5)28,X;
HA-(12)12-30,PM
Owl, Barn 23-23 1/1 JE-SW(1)23,JW
Hummer, Buf-belly 3-17 2/4 GA-HI(2)3,GM; GA-HI(2)17,JJW
Hummer, Rufous 1-24 3/6 HA-(1)1,X; HA-(4)1,JWR;
HA-(1)24,X
Kingfisher, Beltd 9-24 9/27 CH-2/6 CO-1/2 GA-3/9
HA-1/1 JE-2/9
Wdpeckr, Red-bell 17-24 2/5 CH-(4)17,DB; CO-(1)24,X
Wdpeckr, Lddr-bck 21-21 1/1 CO-(1)21,X
Wdpeckr, Downy 17-23 2/6 CH-(2)17,DB; JE-(4)23,JW
Flicker, Northern 9-17 2/5 CH-(4)17,DB; JE-(1)9,JW
Flycatch, Least 26-26 1/1 CH-(1)26,X
Phoebe, Eastern 9-24 6/18 CH-1/1 CO-1/8 GA-2/2 JE-2/7
Flycatch, Vermiln 18-18 1/5 BR-(5)18,X
Flycatch, Ash-thr 21-21 1/1 CO-(1)21,X
Kingbird, Cch/Trp 21-21 1/1 CO-ATT(1)21,X
Flycatch, Ss-tail 9-18 2/2 BR-(1)18,X; JE-(1)9,JW
Swallow, Tree 9-23 3/220 GA-1/20 JE-2/200
Jay, Blue 1-31 6/27 CH-1/4 CO-1/6 GA-2/10
HA-1/5 JE-1/2
Crow, American 17-24 3/36 CH-1/25 CO-1/10 JE-1/1
Crow, Fish 9-9 1/200 JE-(200)9,JW
Chickadee, Carol 9-17 2/5 CH-(4)17,DB; JE-(1)9,JW
Titmouse, Tufted 17-17 1/1 CH-(1)17,DB
Wren, Carolina 24-24 1/2 CO-(2)24,X
Wren, Bewick's 24-24 1/1 CO-(1)24,X
Wren, House 23-24 2/4 CO-(3)24,X; JE-(1)23,JW
Wren, Winter 11-17 2/2 CH-(1)17,DB; FB-BB(1)11,JWR
Wren, Sedge 17-24 2/2 CH-(1)17,DB; CO-(1)24,X
Kinglet, Gold-crn 21-21 1/2 CO-(2)21,X
Kinglet, Ruby-crn 11-24 5/19 CH-1/8 CO-1/8 GA-2/2 JE-1/1
Gnatcatch, Blu-gra 11-23 3/8 CH-1/2 GA-1/1 JE-1/5
Bluebird, Eastern 9-9 1/1 JE-(1)9,JW
Thrush, Hermit 24-24 1/2 CO-(2)24,X
Robin, American 11-17 3/3 CH-(1)17,DB; GA-(1)11,WBW;
JE-(1)11,WBW

Mockingbird, N 1-24 8/38 CH-1/6 CO-1/15 GA-1/3
HA-2/4 JE-3/10
Thrasher, Brown 17-23 2/2 GA-HI(1)17,JJW; JE-(1)23,JW
Pipit, American 11-23 3/90 HA-1/40 JE-2/50
Pipit, Sprague's 4-17 2/24 CH-(20)17,DB; FB-DE(4)4,JWR
Shrike, Loggerhed 9-24 13/99 BR-1/1 CH-3/19 CO-1/10
GA-3/27 HA-1/2 JE-4/40
Starling, Euro 9-30 10/1795 CH-1/50 CO-1/200
GA-2/1200 HA-2/180 JE-4/165
Vireo, White-eyed 17-17 1/2 HA-(2)17,X
Vireo, Solitary 11-17 3/4 CH-1/1 GA-2/3
Warb, Orange-crn 23-24 2/4 CO-(3)24,X; JE-SW(1)23,JW
Warb, Yellow-rump 11-24 5/59 CH-1/20 CO-1/25 GA-2/13 JE-
1/1
Warb, Pine 11-17 2/11 CH-(10)17,DB;
GA-HI(1)11,WBW
Redstart, Amer 18-18 1/1 BR-(1)18,JW
Warb, Wilson's 15-18 3/4 BR-(1)18,X; HA-(1)15,JWR;
HA-(2)17,X
Tanager, Western 17-28 2/2 HA-(1)17,X; HA-(1)28,BG
Cardinal, Northrn 9-30 6/41 CH-1/4 CO-1/20 GA-1/5
HA-1/2 JE-2/10
Towhee, Rfus-side 24-24 1/2 CO-(2)24,X
Sparrow, Field 21-24 2/18 CO-(12)21,X; CO-(6)24,X
Sparrow, Vesper 24-24 1/12 CO-(12)24,X
Sparrow, Lark 21-21 1/3 CO-(3)21,X
Sparrow, Savannah 9-24 6/60 CH-1/18 CO-1/25 HA-1/1 JE-
3/16
Sparrow, Le Conte 21-21 1/8 CO-(8)21,X
Sparrow, Seaside 17-17 1/1 GA-(1)17,JJW
Sparrow, Fox 21-21 1/1 CO-(1)21,X
Sparrow, Song 17-17 1/3 CH-(3)17,DB
Sparrow, Lincoln's 17-24 2/2 CH-(1)17,DB; CO-(1)24,X
Sparrow, Swamp 17-17 1/4 CH-(4)17,DB
Sparrow, Wht-thrt 17-24 3/24 CH-1/10 CO-1/12 JE-1/2
Sparrow, Wht-crn 24-24 1/6 CO-(6)24,X
Sparrow, Harris' 21-21 1/10 CO-(10)21,X
Blackbird, Red-wg 9-24 4/7060 CH-1/550 CO-1/500 JE-
2/6010
Meadowlark, East 9-24 5/98 CH-1/40 CO-1/30 GA-1/7 JE-
2/21
Blackbird, Yel-hd 24-24 1/1 CO-(1)24,X
Grackle, Gr-tail 9-23 6/350 CH-1/50 GA-1/10 JE-4/290
Grackle, Common 1-24 3/870 CH-1/250 CO-1/600 HA-1/20
Cowbird, Brn-head 9-24 3/2029 CH-1/4 CO-1/2000 JE-1/25
Oriole, Northern 17-17 1/1 HA-(1)17,X
Goldfinch, Amer 17-24 2/65 CH-(55)17,DB; CO-(10)24,X
Sparrow, House 11-24 3/37 CH-1/2 CO-1/30 JE-1/5
TOTAL INDIVIDUALS: 55980

LIST OF OBSERVER CODES: Bob Gallant (BG); David Bradford (DB); David Bradford, Ramiro Garcia, Garland Porter (DGP); Gretchen Mueller (GM); John & Jana Whittle, Ross Foreman (JJW); John Whittle (JW); Jan & Will Risser (JWR); Peggy Milstead (PM); John Whittle, Bryant Woods (WBW); John & Jana Whittle (WW); P. D. Hulce (X)

LIST OF LOCATION CODES: Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR (ATT); Anahuac NWR (AW); Brazos Bend St. Park (BB); Bolivar Flats (BF); Brazoria NWR (BW); Davis Estates Road (DE); High Island (HI); San Bernard NWR (SB); Sabine Woods (SW); Texas City Dike (TCD); Yacht Basin Road (YBR)

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

Least Grebe - P.D. Hulce December 24, 1994

Small medium gray grebe. Thin black bill. Yellow eye. Dark crown. White undertail coverts.

Masked Duck - J. & W. Risser December 4, 11, 1994

Two masked ducks in basic plumage. Notes published in Nov. CH.

Buff-bellied Hummingbird - G. Mueller December 3,

1994 Two birds observed, highly territorial over two respective clumps of shrimp plant and very vocal. First observed bright green gorget and large size. With 10X binoculars observed bright rufous tail and bi-colored bill. Bill was strongly decurved, red with black tip. Belly was buffy. Both birds observed as long as we wanted to watch, minimum of ten minutes, over the course of an hour. Other observers: Winnie Burkett, Karen & Phil Beckman

Also documented by J. Whittle on Dec. 17, 1994.

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher - J. Whittle December 9, 1994

Typical Tyrannus flycatcher/kingbird shape, but with very long tail. The bird was light gray below, slightly darker gray above, with darker gray wings. The axillaries were a deep salmon color, the flanks were a

paler salmon color. The tail was very long-longer than the rest of the bird. The longest (outer) tail feathers were white except of the outmost one third which was black.

American Redstart - J. Whittle December 18, 1994

Warbler. Brownish-green upperparts, pale underparts. Yellow patch on wing. Extensive yellow from near base of tail out approximately 2/3 of length. Yellow area just in front of wing-body joint, extending back a little on the body under the wing.

Western Tanager - Bob Gallant December 28, 1994

Recognized as tanager by shape and markings. Identified as Western Tanager by wing bars. Pale, stout bill. Mottled bright and pale yellow on face, chin, throat and breast. Dark gray wings with two light wing bars separated by black. Upper wing yellow. Black unmarked upper tail, notched. Bright yellow rump. Olive wash on crown and nape. Olive-brown upper back. Bird observed at approx. 8 am in El Lago residential area. One minute using 8X42 Elites.

Yellow-headed Blackbird - P.D. Hulce December 24,

1994 Bright yellow head and breast. All black body. Some white in wing. In flock of several thousand cowbirds and redwings. East of Attwater NWR.

Houston Outdoor Nature Club
ORNITHOLOGY GROUP
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Houston, Texas 77277-0894

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