



# The Spoonbill

A Publication of the Ornithology Group  
Of the Houston Outdoor Nature Club

March 2001

## April Program

### Birds and Migration

We all know that many birds migrate, but why do they migrate, and how do they migrate? Why would a bird living in the tropical rain forests of Central America go all the way to the permafrost of the Arctic tundra to breed and raise a family?

Why do some birds migrate nearly two months earlier than others? How do they know when to start? Why would a bird that breeds in Siberia fly all the way to Alaska, then south to Central America, when there are much closer and more direct jungles in southern Asia?

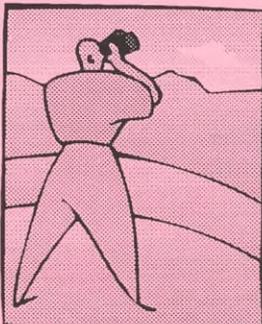
Don Richardson will present the April program on why and how birds migrate. Don is a regular writer and lecturer about birds and teaches a beginning birding field course.

**7:00 p.m.**  
**Monday, April 2, 2001**  
**Bayland Community Center**  
**6400 Bissonnet**

**Learning Corner: 6:30 p.m.**

### Warbler Identification

David Bradford will provide tips on warbler identification. Please bring your field guide.



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#### OG Website

[www.ornithologygroup.org](http://www.ornithologygroup.org)

To add your name to the e-mail list, send a message to [Listserv@listserv.uh.edu](mailto:Listserv@listserv.uh.edu).

On the first line of the message, put "subscribe HOUSTON-OG first-name last-name". You will receive a confirmation within a few minutes.

## About the Ornithology Group

The Ornithology Group (OG) is a member of the Outdoor Nature Club (ONC), a non-profit organization dedicated to greater knowledge about the environment and wildlife of the Upper Texas Coast. The OG is a club of individuals interested in all aspects of birding, including bird identification, listing bird sightings, competing in birding events and preserving bird habitat. Some members study bird behavior, biology, distribution and migration, while others just enjoy watching birds. The organization is designed to accommodate these diverse birding interests. Monthly meetings and field trips provide an opportunity to interact with and learn from experts in local and international birding.

### Officers:

Chair	David Sarkozi	713-520-5906
Vice-Chair	Skip Almoney	713-524-4285
Secretary	Pat Pease	713-789-3306
Treasurer	Bob Simmons	713-776-2511
Clearinghouse	David Sarkozi	713-520-5906
SB Editor	MP Haddican	281-589-0005

### Clearinghouse Submissions:

Bird sightings can be sent to:  
David Sarkozi  
111 Welch Street, Apt. B  
Houston TX 77706

Or e-mailed to dsarkozi@flash.net using the following format:

species,date,county,location,count,observer.

Clearinghouse submission forms are available at monthly meetings or can be downloaded from the OG web page.

Although not all sightings are published because of space, please continue to send them in. They do get used and are very important to updating the regional checklist.

### Volunteers Needed!

The OG needs volunteers to fill the slate of new officers for 2001. Please contact David or Skip if you can serve as **Vice Chairman** or **Secretary** of the OG this year.

David Sarkozi 713-743-5906  
dsarkozi@flash.net  
Skip Almoney 713-524-4285

### Newsletter submissions:

Mary Pat Haddican  
mphdd@worldnet.att.net  
(by the 10th of the month)

**2001 dues are due now!**

For membership information,  
see the back cover



**Minutes of the March Meeting**  
**March 5, 2001**  
**Pat Pease**  
**Recording Secretary**

Learning Corner: Identifying Ducks (Puddle Ducks) conducted by David Bradford.

Chairman David Sarkozi conducted the meeting.

**Announcements:**

Bob Honig: Friends of the Katy Prairie Conservancy have a tour of the Conservancy properties on March 24, 2001. Call the Conservancy office at (713) 523-6135 for details and to attend.

Photography Group's annual photo contest entry date has been extended to March 20, 2001. Forms and information were distributed for those interested in participating.

Anahuac NWR has two new moist soils areas between Shoveler Pond Road and Cross Road. These are proving to be excellent places to see shore birds.

Anahuac NWR new Visitor Information Station Open House will be March 17, 2001. Two free tours by pontoon boat and special tour of Shoveler Pond by the refuge manager.

**Business:**

Election of officers. Nominations accepted and voted in for next fiscal year: Skip Almoney for Chair and Patsy Lawrence for Treasurer. We are still looking for a Secretary and a Vice Chair. Anyone with suggestions for filling these positions should contact David Sarkozi or Skip Almoney.

**Bird Sightings:**

Migrants beginning to be seen: N. Parula, Scarlet Tanagers.

Possible Anna's Hummingbird at Russ Pitman Park, Bellaire; Red-tailed Hawk in Montrose; Peregrine Falcons on UT Medical Center building at Fannin and Brae's Bayou; Purple Finch at Kirby and Bissonnet; House Finches in west Houston backyard.

**Program:**

"High Island and Beyond" by Winnie Burkett, Sanctuaries Manager for Houston Audubon Society. Winnie told us about lots of less traveled and visited areas in High Island and Bolivar Peninsula to look for birds, as well as lots of great information about Audubon's sanctuaries in that area.

**Field Trips**  
**Glenn Olsen**

Please wear weather-appropriate outdoor clothes and shoes and bring water, insect repellent and lunch. If you have special needs, plan accordingly. For further information, contact Glenn Olsen at 281-345-4151 or hgolsen8@hal-pc.org.

**March 31 (Saturday 7:00am)**

**Sabine Pass Area**

Mike Austin will lead this trip to see rails and waders at Texas Point; migrants in Sabine Woods; and swallows, gulls and terns in Sea Rim Park. Meet at the McDonalds in Winnie, Texas.

Directions: Go east on I-10 to Winnie and take the 829 Exit. The McDonald's is on the north (left) side. Meet in the west parking lot

**April 29 (Sunday 8:00am)**

**High Island**

Skip Almoney will lead this trip to seek out migrants. This is a great weekend for migration and an excellent site to see almost anything! Meet at Houston Audubon's Boy Scout Woods. See their website for more info: [www.houstonaudubon.org](http://www.houstonaudubon.org)

Directions: Take I-10 east to Winnie, Texas. At Winnie, take State Rd 124 south (right off I-10) to High Island. In High Island, turn left off 124 onto 5th Street, go about two blocks (look for cars parked along the roadside) and enter through the gate.



## Thrush Identification: Brown and "Speckled"

Don Richardson

Brown thrushes with speckled breasts are in our Upper Texas Coast (UTC) areas at any time of the year. They are not all here all the time. The Hermit Thrush resides here in winter, and the Wood Thrush arrives here to breed. Migrants include the Veery, Swainson's Thrush and Gray-cheeked Thrush. At certain times in migration they can all be found, though less so in fall. The key words in this ID Tips article are **warm** and **cool**. Looking for brown colors in these birds which are **warm** or **cool** provides a great tool for separating the species.

First, look at the color of the back (head to toe) and look, specifically, for a difference in the color of the head/nape and the tail. If you find a difference, you have one of the easiest two, a Wood Thrush or a Hermit Thrush. The Wood Thrush has a **warm**, reddish-brown head/nape and a **cool** brown tail, while the Hermit Thrush has a **warm**, reddish-brown tail and a **cool** brown head/nape. It is this contrasting difference between the head and tail that tells the story. One other noteworthy thing about the Wood Thrush is that the spots on the breast are bigger and bolder than on the other thrushes discussed here.

Veeries are usually fairly **warm** brown on the back. The western and eastern races of Veery pass through the UTC in migration. The eastern race is warmer than the western race, but both are a **warm** tone. The key word for the Veery is "plain." The breast is just faintly spotted. The other thrushes are much more distinctly spotted. The face is plain, too, and, if there is an eye-ring, it is not very prominent and it is gray.

Migrating thrushes that seem to give the most trouble are Swainson's and the Gray-cheeked. Both have **cool** brown backs. I like to look for a **warm** or **cool** face. Both can have eye-rings of sorts, but in Gray-cheeked, any eye-ring is either broken and gray-white or nonexistent. Swainson's has an eye-ring that is bright and buffy (**warm**). The lores (in front of the eye) are also **warm** and buffy, resembling a pair of **warm** buffy spectacles. The Gray-cheeked Thrush, on the other hand, has a face of **cool** gray—no warmth at all.

Check those thrushes, they're **cool** (or **warm**).

Contact Don at (281) 997-0485 or [cdplace@concentric.net](mailto:cdplace@concentric.net) with questions or comments.

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### Bald Eagle Nest on the Web

M. P. Haddican

Although we would always opt for an outdoor birding experience over sitting in front of a computer screen, the growing use of nature webcams presents some incomparable opportunities for studying birds.

At [www.nu.com/eagles](http://www.nu.com/eagles), a solar-powered camera is positioned to view an eagle nest on an island in the Connecticut River in Massachusetts. A pair of bald eagles has recently returned to

the nest and, unfazed by the recent snowstorm, are caring for three eggs.

The picture is updated every five minutes, giving viewers an opportunity to see every aspect of the process of rearing and fledging the (hoped for) baby eagles. As discussed in the commentary, eagle nesting attempts are not always successful. But in 2000, the website broadcast the progress of two eaglets hatching, receiving feedings from the adults, testing their wings and leaving the nest.

Stay tuned.

## Clearinghouse February 2001 David Sarkozi

I've always called February a dull month because there never seemed to be much birder activity for the month. This month showed how wrong I was. 733 reports were received for a total of 18,824 birds reported. 188 species were reported. Snow Goose was the most common bird reported.

A stunning **twenty-six** reports of Peregrine Falcon were received. This has been the winter for this species within Houston proper with at least three sites hosting birds.

Notable birds reported in February were Thayer's, California, and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Ruby-throated and Black-chinned Hummingbirds, Couch's Kingbird, and Cliff Swallow.

This month I tried to glean a few reports from Texbirds, the Audubon Society e-mail list for Texas.

The format this month is Species, date, County(location) # of birds, Observer. Those birds that are listed at uncommon to abundant in **A Birder's Checklist of the Upper Texas Coast 8th edition** for the whole month are summarized at the end.

Birds in **Bold** are very rare or new to the checklist. Notes are requested for those species listed in bold. Not all notes received for February are printed here because of space limitations.

**Key to Locations:** ANWR=Anahuac NWR, BCP= Bear Creek Park, BF=Bolivar Flats, BBSP=Brazos Bend SP, C7=Challenger 7 Park, EB=East Beach, KP=Katy Prairie, PI=Pleasure Island, TP=Terrell Park, HAR=Houston

**Key to Observers:** AM=Art Mackinnon, BH=Bob Honig, BP=Brian Poirier, BSH=Barbara & Sam House, BMH=Bob & Maggie Honig, DM=Debra MacSorley, DP=Dwight Peake, DS=David Sarkozi, GH=Gary Hodne, JM=Jim Hinson, JW=John Wittle, JMS=Julia M. Starr, KR=Kathy Reiser, KH=Ken Hartman, KR=Kenneth Russell, NB=Nicholas Block, ONC=ONC field trip led by Bob Honig, RAB=Bob Behrstock, RB=Randy Beavers, RJ=RB=Randy Beavers, RWP= Ron Weeks, Jennifer Wilson, Warren Pruess, RW=Ron Weeks and Warren Pruess

Common Loon birds=178 reports=3  
Pied-billed Grebe birds=48 reports=7  
American White Pelican birds=57 reports=3  
Brown Pelican birds=13 reports=2  
Double-crested Cormorant birds=205 reports=6  
Neotropical Cormorant birds=13 reports=3  
Anhinga birds=9 reports=2  
American Bittern birds=7 reports=2  
Great Blue Heron birds=29 reports=10  
Great Egret birds=28 reports=9  
Snowy Egret birds=28 reports=6  
Little Blue Heron birds=6 reports=2  
Tricolored Heron birds=4 reports=2  
Cattle Egret birds=30 reports=1  
Green Heron 2/4 JEF(TP) 1 AM  
Black-crowned Night-Heron birds=1 reports=1  
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron birds=1 reports=1  
White Ibis birds=177 reports=7  
Glossy Ibis 2/4 JEF(TP) 1 AM  
White-faced Ibis birds=171 reports=11  
Roseate Spoonbill birds=17 reports=4  
Black Vulture birds=18 reports=5  
Turkey Vulture birds=35 reports=6  
Black-bellied Whistling-Duck birds=9 reports=1  
Greater White-fronted Goose birds=556 reports=3  
Snow Goose birds=3,344 reports=3  
Ross's Goose birds=1 reports=1  
Wood Duck birds=39 reports=3  
Gadwall birds=149 reports=5  
American Wigeon birds=2 reports=1  
Mallard birds=2 reports=1  
Mottled Duck birds=6 reports=3  
Blue-winged Teal birds=80 reports=4  
Cinnamon Teal birds=2 reports=1  
Northern Shoveler birds=185 reports=5  
Northern Pintail birds=165 reports=2  
Green-winged Teal birds=86 reports=4

Canvasback birds=1 reports=1  
Ring-necked Duck birds=1 reports=1  
Greater Scaup birds=16 reports=2  
Lesser Scaup birds=18 reports=2  
Black Scoter 2/11 GAL(BF) 2 GH  
Bufflehead birds=9 reports=1  
Common Goldeneye birds=4 reports=1  
Hooded Merganser birds=1 reports=1  
Red-breasted Merganser birds=12 reports=1  
duck species birds=30 reports=1  
Ruddy Duck birds=1 reports=1  
Osprey birds=4 reports=1  
White-tailed Kite birds=5 reports=3  
Bald Eagle birds=1 reports=1  
Northern Harrier birds=20 reports=8  
Sharp-shinned Hawk birds=1 reports=1  
Cooper's Hawk birds=3 reports=3  
Red-shouldered Hawk birds=10 reports=6  
White-tailed Hawk birds=2 reports=2  
Krider's Red-tailed Hawk birds=1 reports=1  
Red-tailed Hawk birds=40 reports=11  
Ferruginous Hawk 2/18 HAR 1 KH  
Crested Caracara birds=3 reports=3  
American Kestrel birds=28 reports=8  
Merlin 2/4 JEF(PI) 1 AM, 2/18 HAR(BCP) 1 KH  
Peregrine Falcon 2/1 HAR 1 JMS, 2/2 HAR 2 JMS, 2/4 HAR  
1 BH, 2/5 HAR 2 JMS, 2/6 HAR 1 DM, 2/6 HAR 2  
JMS, 2/7 HAR 2 JMS, 2/8 HAR 2 JMS, 2/13 HAR 1  
JMS, 2/14 HAR 2 JMS, 2/15 HAR 1 DM, 2/15 HAR  
2 JMS, 2/16 HAR 1 DM, 2/20 HAR 1 DM, 2/20  
HAR 2 JMS, 2/21 HAR 1 DM, 2/21 HAR 1 JMS,  
2/22 HAR 1 DM, 2/22 HAR 1 JMS, 2/23 HAR 1 DM,  
2/23 HAR 2 JMS, 2/25 CHA(ANWR) 1 DS, 2/25  
HAR 1 BH, 2/26 HAR 1 DM, 2/27 HAR 1 DM, 2/27  
HAR 2 JMS

Continued on page 6

Northern Bobwhite birds=2 reports=1  
 Common Moorhen birds=64 reports=6  
 American Coot birds=201 reports=6  
 Sandhill Crane birds=144 reports=2  
 Black-bellied Plover birds=1 reports=1  
 Wilson's Plover birds=1 reports=1  
 Killdeer birds=58 reports=8  
 Black-necked Stilt birds=4 reports=2  
 American Avocet birds=23 reports=2  
 Greater Yellowlegs birds=16 reports=5  
 Lesser Yellowlegs birds=5 reports=3  
 Willet birds=2 reports=1  
 Spotted Sandpiper birds=5 reports=2  
 Long-billed Curlew birds=3 reports=2  
 Western Sandpiper birds=15 reports=1  
 peep species birds=10 reports=1  
 Least Sandpiper birds=7 reports=2  
 Dunlin birds=1 reports=1  
 Short-billed Dowitcher birds=31 reports=3  
 dowitcher sp. birds=3,000 reports=1  
 Long-billed Dowitcher birds=781 reports=4  
 Common Snipe birds=31 reports=3  
 American Woodcock 2/5 HAR(BCP) 3 JH, 2/6 BRA 2 RW  
 Laughing Gull birds=829 reports=4  
 Bonaparte's Gull birds=200 reports=1  
 Ring-billed Gull birds=160 reports=6  
 California Gull 2/2 BRA 1 RWP, 2/28 GAL(EB) 1 DP  
 Herring Gull birds=16 reports=1  
**Thayer's Gull 2/10 GAL(EB) 1 RAB**  
 Lesser Black-backed Gull 2/28 GAL(EB) 1 DP  
 Gull-billed Tern birds=1 reports=1  
 Caspian Tern birds=8 reports=3  
 Royal Tern birds=1 reports=1  
 Sandwich Tern 2/4 JEF(PI) 1 AM  
 Common Tern 2/4 JEF(PI) 4 AM  
 Forster's Tern birds=1 reports=1  
 Rock Dove birds=362 reports=7  
 Ringed Turtle-Dove birds=3 reports=2  
 Eurasian Collared-Dove birds=29 reports=4  
 Streptopelia sp. birds=3 reports=1  
 White-winged Dove birds=97 reports=5  
 Mourning Dove birds=144 reports=12  
 Inca Dove birds=25 reports=6  
 Common Ground-Dove 2/3 HAR(KP) 1 ONC  
 Monk Parakeet 2/4 HAR 0 BP  
 Eastern Screech-Owl birds=2 reports=2  
 Great Horned Owl birds=1 reports=1  
 Barred Owl birds=4 reports=4  
**Ruby-throated Hummingbird 2/1 HAR 1 KH, 2/2 HAR 1 KH, 2/3 HAR 1 KH**  
**Broad-tailed Hummingbird 2/3 HAR 1 BMH, 2/16 HAR 1 BH, 2/25 HAR 1 BH**  
 Belted Kingfisher birds=13 reports=6  
 Red-headed Woodpecker birds=3 reports=1  
 Red-bellied Woodpecker birds=22 reports=10  
 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker birds=7 reports=4  
 Downy Woodpecker birds=19 reports=9  
 Northern Flicker birds=5 reports=4  
 Pileated Woodpecker birds=6 reports=5  
 Eastern Phoebe birds=31 reports=9  
 Vermilion Flycatcher birds=2 reports=2  
 Ash-throated Flycatcher 2/18 HAR 1 KH  
**Couch's Kingbird 2/11 JEF(TP) 1 JW**  
 Loggerhead Shrike birds=33 reports=12  
 White-eyed Vireo birds=1 reports=1  
 Blue-headed Vireo birds=6 reports=3  
 Blue Jay birds=61 reports=10  
 American Crow birds=49 reports=8  
 Fish Crow birds=2 reports=1  
 Purple Martin 2/11 JEF(TP) 1 JW, 2/13 HAR 1 NB,  
 2/15 HAR 3 KH, 2/24 CHA(ANWR) 2 DS, 2/25 HAR 6 BH

Tree Swallow birds=18 reports=3  
**Northern Rough-winged Swallow 2/18 FB(BBSP) 10 RAB**  
**Cliff Swallow 2/4 JEF(PI) 2 AM**  
 Carolina Chickadee birds=37 reports=10  
 Tufted Titmouse birds=12 reports=4  
 Brown-headed Nuthatch 2/4 JEF(TP) 1 AM  
 Brown Creeper birds=7 reports=5  
 Carolina Wren birds=15 reports=7  
 House Wren birds=2 reports=2  
 Winter Wren birds=1 reports=1  
 Sedge Wren birds=1 reports=1  
 Marsh Wren birds=2 reports=1  
 Golden-crowned Kinglet birds=9 reports=4  
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet birds=43 reports=13  
 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher birds=3 reports=2  
 Eastern Bluebird birds=17 reports=5  
 Hermit Thrush birds=3 reports=2  
 American Robin birds=616 reports=15  
 Gray Catbird birds=6 reports=4  
 Northern Mockingbird birds=68 reports=16  
 Brown Thrasher birds=10 reports=5  
 European Starling birds=248 reports=11  
 American Pipit birds=135 reports=4  
 Sprague's Pipit birds=2 reports=2  
 Cedar Waxwing birds=357 reports=8  
 Orange-crowned Warbler birds=8 reports=6  
 Yellow-rumped Warbler birds=363 reports=15  
 Pine Warbler birds=40 reports=4  
 Common Yellowthroat birds=9 reports=3  
 Wilson's Warbler birds=1 reports=1  
 Eastern Towhee birds=1 reports=1  
 Chipping Sparrow birds=22 reports=3  
 Field Sparrow birds=9 reports=1  
 Vesper Sparrow birds=4 reports=3  
 Lark Sparrow birds=1 reports=1  
 Savannah Sparrow birds=273 reports=10  
 Fox Sparrow 2/3 HAR(BCP) 1 KH, 2/4 JEF(TP) 1 AM  
 Song Sparrow birds=10 reports=3  
 Lincoln's Sparrow birds=4 reports=2  
 Swamp Sparrow birds=20 reports=4  
 White-throated Sparrow birds=75 reports=9  
 White-crowned Sparrow birds=6 reports=2  
 Dark-eyed Junco 2/4 JEF(TP) 18 AM, 2/18 HAR(BCP) 1 KH  
 Northern Cardinal birds=121 reports=12  
 Black-headed Grosbeak 2/16 BRA 2 RJ  
 Indigo Bunting 2/16 BRA 1 RJ  
 Red-winged Blackbird birds=921 reports=11  
 Eastern Meadowlark birds=16 reports=4  
 Rusty Blackbird 2/3 HAR(BCP) 30 KH  
 Brewer's Blackbird birds=351 reports=2  
 Common Grackle birds=419 reports=8  
 Boat-tailed Grackle birds=20 reports=1  
 Great-tailed Grackle birds=177 reports=9  
 Brown-headed Cowbird birds=1,272 reports=5  
 Purple Finch birds=2 reports=2  
 House Finch birds=10 reports=3  
 Pine Siskin 2/4 JEF(TP) 1 AM  
 American Goldfinch birds=226 reports=13  
 House Sparrow birds=220 reports=8  
**Species: Thayer's Gull, Larus thayeri, apparently first year**  
 Located by other birders at Big Reef/East Beach, around 10:00 A.M., 10 Feb. 2001. Appreciably larger than near-by Ring-billed Gulls, Pale cocoa-colored speckling on wings, flanks, and I believe on rump as well. Dark tipped tail. Bill pale with black tip, not massive as in Great Black-backed Gull. From above in flight, dark margin to secondaries. From below in flight undersides of primaries frosty white.

# Texas Ornithological Society Spring Meeting in Corpus Christi

The spring meeting of TOS, hosted by the Audubon Outdoor Club, will convene in Corpus Christi on April 26, 27 and 28. The meeting schedule and field trip descriptions will be posted at [www.texasbirds.org](http://www.texasbirds.org).

The Holiday Inn Padre Island Drive (5549 Leopard Street, Corpus Christi) has a block of rooms reserved for TOS *until April 1, 2001* at a rate of \$69.00 + tax. Phone 361-289-5100 for reservations.

Spring migration will be in full swing at the end of April. Field trips will take in the coast, the local hot spots and unexpected treats at several private ranches. Field trip sign-up will be during registration on Thursday, April 26. Early breakfast and box lunches (vegetarian available) can be arranged during registration.

To register for the Spring Meeting, send the registration form and a check made out to Audubon Outdoor Club to:

Audubon Outdoor Club  
P.O. Box 3352  
Corpus Christi TX 78463

## TOS Spring Meeting Registration Form

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime phone \_\_\_\_\_

### Registration Fees:

\_\_\_\_\_ Members @ \$28.00 \_\_\_\_\_

Late fee (after Apr. 1) \$5.00 \_\_\_\_\_

Student discount (subtract \$10.00) \_\_\_\_\_

New Membership (1 yr.) \$20.00 \_\_\_\_\_

New Family Membership \$30.00 \_\_\_\_\_

Upgrade to family membership \$10.00 \_\_\_\_\_

(for spouse attending meeting /field trips)

\_\_\_\_\_ Banquet tickets @ \$22.00 \_\_\_\_\_

**Total** \_\_\_\_\_

**Make checks payable to: Audubon Outdoor Club**

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## MOTOR TO FORT DAVIS WITH FRED COLLINS of the Nature Discovery Center June 9-15

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

eMail: \_\_\_\_\_

Send \$22.00 (dues for ONC and OG) to

Outdoor Nature Club  
PO Box 270894  
Houston TX 77277-0894

You can also join at [www.ornithologygroup.org](http://www.ornithologygroup.org)