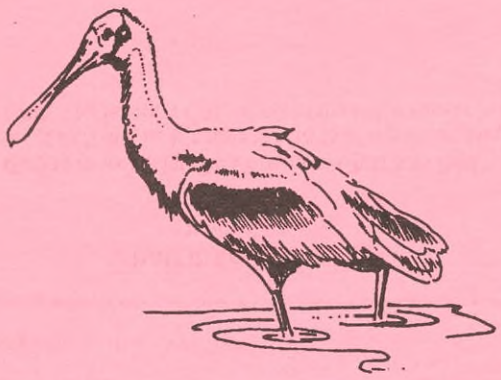

The Spoonbill

October/November 1999
Volume 48, No. 8

December Meeting Program

Monday, December 6, 1999 7:00PM
Bayland Community Center
6400 Bissonnet

Gulls in Texas
by
Willie Sekula

Willie will present slides with background on the rare gulls of Texas.

Willie is one of the foremost Texas gull aficionados. A current member of the Texas Bird Record Committee, Willie has traveled and birded extensively in Texas; he has one of the top lists in Texas.

Save the date!

LEARNING CORNER:

Woodpeckers. Bring your field guides!

Chairman's Message
David Sarkozi

It's starting to look a lot like Christmas, Christmas Bird Counts (CBC) that is. It's time to start thinking about doing ***our*** CBC. The Houston CBC is one of the oldest counts in the North America. December 18th, 1999 will be the 61st consecutive count and the 66th count done.

There are lots of good reasons to participate in the Houston CBC. It's a chance to be a part of the oldest and largest citizen science project. The data collected from CBCs is used to document the status of many species and has been instrumental in showing the decline and recovery of such species as Bald Eagle, Roseate Spoonbill, Osprey, and Brown Pelican. It's now showing how imperiled the Red Knot is. It's also a chance to learn from some of the best birders in the area. The Houston CBC is done by ten teams, and the leaders are some of the best birders we have. By participating you get a chance to be in the field all day with them.

OK, here's the best reason, its fun! When the weather is nice it's a glorious time to be in the field. Think of dawn flights of thousands of geese, the thrill of finding some great bird, and the camaraderie of your fellow birders. When the weather is bad, well you still have all that, plus the stories are better and told more often. And don't forget the fun at the Count Down Dinner at Luna's in Baytown.

I would like to challenge the OG to find 175 species of birds this year on the Houston CBC. For the past few years we've been just barely breaking 150 species. While its true that the count circle has lost lots of habitat over the years, there are plenty of great birds to be found there, we just need eyes and ears in the field.

Contact P.D. Hulce, our count compiler, at 713-863-1142 if you can help out.

Here's to hoping to see you in Area 3 of the Houston CBC on December 18, 1999.

1998 Annual Report for the Texas Bird Records Committee Published

David Sarkozi

The 1998 Annual Report for the Texas Bird Records Committee (TBRC), a standing committee of the Texas Ornithological Society*, has been published. The TBRC has reached a decision on several records on the Upper Texas Coast. The OG Checklist Committee defers to the TBRC on all birds considered Review Species by the TBRC.

Below, I've excerpted records from the TBRC annual report that affect records on the Upper Texas Coast.

The format of the report is: **Species***(binomial name)* (number of accepted records for Texas). The Texas Photo-Record File is abbreviated TPRF and the Texas Cooperative Wildlife Collection is abbreviated TCWC.

ACCEPTED RECORDS

Red-throated Loon (*Gavia stellata*) (34). One at Galveston, *Galveston*, from 1 April to 3 May 1998 (1998-53, TPRF 1599).

Brant (*Branta bernicla*) (17). One "American" Brant from the Katy Prairie, *Fort Bend*, in November 1971 (*TCWC 13337). The specimen is a mount donated to the TCWC.

Masked Duck (*Nomonyx dominica*) (52). One at Cullinan Park, *Fort Bend*, from 23 February to 4 April 1998 (TPRF 1594).

Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*) (8). One at Port Arthur, *Jefferson*, on 24 November 1994 (1994-186). One at Galveston, *Galveston*, from 30 April to 2 May 1997 (1997-80; TPRF 1625).

California Gull (*Larus californicus*) (48). An adult at Galveston, *Galveston*, from 1 December 1996 to mid February 1997 (1997-61; TPRF 1623).

Thayer's Gull (*Larus thayeri*) (39). A first winter bird at Galveston, *Galveston*, from 25 November to 28 December 1993 (1994-56; TPRF 1647).

Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) (87). Another adult was at Beaumont, *Jefferson*, on 30 December 1996 (1997-62).

Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*) (73). One in *Jefferson* on 15 April 1995 (1995-79). One at East Beach and Bolivar Flats, *Galveston*, from 16 November 1996 to 29 March 1997 (1996-167 & 1997-12, TPRF 1584).

Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*) (66). One at Bolivar Peninsula, *Galveston*, on 25 April 1997 (1997-111).

Mangrove Cuckoo (*Coccyzus minor*) (7). One at Quintana, *Brazoria*, on 11 May 1997 (1997-90; TPRF 1665).

Fork-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus savana*) (11). One near Anahuac NWR, *Chambers*, on 17 May 1997 (1997-154). Another near Anahuac NWR, *Chambers*, on 13 September 1997 (1997-144).

Black-whiskered Vireo (*Vireo altiloquus*) (12). One at High Island, *Galveston*, on 10 May 1997 (1997-95).

Bohemian Waxwing (*Bombycilla garrulus*) (8). One 8 miles north of Rosenberg, *Fort Bend*, on 7 February 1997 (1997-30).

UNACCEPTED RECORDS

A number of factors may contribute to a record being denied acceptance. It is quite uncommon for a record to not be accepted because the bird was obviously misidentified. More commonly, a record is not accepted because the material submitted was incomplete, insufficient, superficial, or just too vague to properly document the reported occurrence while eliminating *all* other similar species. The nonacceptance of any record simply reflects the opinion of the TBRC that the documentation, as submitted, did not meet the rigorous standards appropriate for adding data to the formal historical record. The TBRC makes every effort to be as fair and objective as possible regarding each record. If the committee is unsure about any particular record, it prefers to err on the conservative side and not accept a good record rather than validate a bad one.

Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*). One (1995-32) at Anahuac NWR, *Chambers*, on 27 January 1995.

Purple Sandpiper (*Calidris maritima*). Two (1997-82) on West Galveston Island, *Galveston*, on 19 April 1997.

Mew Gull (*Larus canus*). One (1997-63) at Galveston, *Galveston*, on 26 January 1997.

California Gull (*Larus californicus*). Two (1997-94) at Crystal Beach, *Galveston*, on 12 April 1997. Two (1996-91) at Galveston, *Galveston*, on 19 April 1996. One (1997-104) at Galveston, *Galveston*, on 30 April 1997. Two (1997-115) at Bolivar Flats, *Galveston*, from 25 May to 12 July 1997.

Chairman's Message continued....

We need your input!

Robin Gray, the ONC Membership Vice President, has been transferred out of state and will vacate his position as an officer of the ONC. Robin was also the person most responsible for getting your *Spoonbill* mailed to you.

We have a solution that will actually improve the time it takes to get your *Spoonbill* and won't require any extra work from the OG. We have found a bulk mail company that will process the Spoonbill and mail them for us. They will get them from the printer and get them to the US Post Office in about two days. This should get the *Spoonbill* to you about five days sooner.

Too good to be true? Not really, but it's not free. It's going to cost about 14 cents a *Spoonbill* to do this. We have the funds to do this for the rest of the year (3 more issues of *The Spoonbill*) **but we will need a dues increase of $2 per year** to cover this in 2000. This means your dues will now be $14 for the OG, and $8 for the ONC for a total of $22.

I intend to put this to a vote at the next OG meeting. If you would like to have input into this please be sure to attend this meeting.

Beginning Birding

About "Beginning Birding" and "Sneaking Up"

Don Richardson

About "Beginning Birding"

In a brief e-mail discussion between myself, your chairman and your editor, we decided to create a series of articles directed toward beginning birding. The material will range from help for the rank beginner to an intermediate level. Some of you may already be familiar with much of it. We hope you will find the articles interesting and helpful. We want your comments, so please let us know what you think.

"Sneaking Up"

Years ago, I read an account in a National Geographic book about Africa. It described a procedure the Cheetah uses to approach its prey. It was presented by Louis Leakey, a famous anthropologist who has done much of his work on the African continent. He called the Cheetah's approach a "diagonal approach". The Cheetah can run extremely fast but only for a fairly short distance. In order to succeed in catching its prey, it must find a way to position itself so it is fairly close to the prey before beginning the attack. The method gives the impression of walking past, rather than directly toward the prey. Hence, "diagonal approach". In examining this situation, you'll see that a trick like this might help us birders to position ourselves (without the attack) so that we get a great look. In many cases, you can move close enough to get a better look or photograph than you would get if you approached the bird directly. Viewing and photographing is improved when the light is just right and when there are few obstacles. With the right planning, you can pick your spot, taking all these things into consideration. Here's what to do.

First, of course, note the location of the bird. Look around to find a spot from which your view will be the best. Now, imagine a line from your current position to the point you have chosen and even through it. Relocate before beginning if the line cannot be traversed. Proceed very slowly along the line. Pause occasionally to look or take a photo, but don't turn your body toward the bird, just your head. When you arrive at the point you chose, pause and look some more. Continue along the same line and keep pausing to look. Try it, it works for the Cheetah.

The technique just outlined uses some basic principles that should be followed in all your birding. Remember that birds are very aware of their surroundings. It would be hard to be in an area where you can observe birds and have them not know you are there. The trick is to make them not care that you are there. The best advice I can think of is to be quiet and move slowly. Doing these two things alone will make you more aware of the environment you are in and present a situation more comfortable to the birds. This low pressure situation for the birds and higher concentration level for you will greatly contribute to your birding success.

Consider what you wear. While I don't think you need to wear full camouflage for regular birding, I would recommend wearing subdued colors. A small group I was with was doing quite well and finding lots of birds. It began to rain a bit and out came the rain slickers. Nearly every one was bright yellow and suddenly we looked like a small flock of very large Prothonotary Warblers. I'd say we should let the birds be the bright ones.

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

Don't forget! --- Don will appreciate your comments!

January Meeting Preview: **Mark Monday, January 4, 2000 on your calendar. Meeting topic and speaker to be in next month's newsletter.**

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 my 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 Checklist Committee. That should be up and running by the time *The Spoonbill* is published this month.

September 1999 CLEARINGHOUSE

Thanks to everyone who submitted these records:

Dick Benoit (DB)
Winnie Burkett (WB)
David Sarkozi (DS)
Kyle McCarty (KM)
Don Verser (DV)

Please continue to get those observations to:

Mike Gremillion
3304 Rice Blvd
Houston, TX 77005
e-mail: mgremillion@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**

*****

Black Vulture birds=3 reports=1
Turkey Vulture birds=1 reports=1
Osprey 8/29 Chambers(Smith Point) 1 KM
Osprey 8/30 Chambers(Smith Point) 0 DB
Swallow-tailed Kite 8/15 Chambers(Smith Point) 5 KM
Swallow-tailed Kite 8/18 Chambers(Smith Point) 10 KM
Swallow-tailed kite 8/22 Chambers(Smith Point) 1 KM
Swallow-tailed kite 8/24 Chambers(Smith Point) 9 KM
Swallow-tailed Kite 8/27 Chambers(Smith Point) 5 WB
Swallow-tailed Kite 8/30 Chambers(Smith Point) 6 DB
White-tailed Kite birds=2 reports=2
Mississippi Kite 8/15 Chambers(Smith Point) 3 KM
Mississippi Kite 8/16 Chambers(Smith Point) 2 KM
Mississippi Kite 8/18 Chambers(Smith Point) 15 KM
Mississippi kite 8/22 Chambers(Smith Point) 4 KM
Mississippi Kite 8/25 Chambers(Smith Point) 1 KM
Mississippi Kite 8/26 Chambers(Smith Point) 2 KM
Mississippi Kite 8/28 Chambers(Smith Point) 51 KM
Mississippi Kite 8/29 Chambers(Smith Point) 1,001 KM
Mississippi Kite 8/30 Chambers(Smith Point) 425 DB
Northern Harrier 8/16 Chambers(Smith Point) 1 KM
Sharp-shinned Hawk 8/27 Chambers(Smith Point) 1 WB
Cooper's Hawk 8/15 Chambers(Smith Point) 2 KM
Cooper's Hawk 8/30 Chambers(Smith Point) 3 DB
Red-shouldered Hawk birds=10 reports=4
Broad-winged Hawk 8/15 Chambers(Smith Point) 46 KM
Broad-winged Hawk 8/18 Chambers(Smith Point) 2 KM
Broad-winged Hawk 8/19 Chambers(Smith Point) 2 WB
Broad-winged Hawk 8/22 Chambers(Smith Point) 3 KM
Broad-winged Hawk 8/25 Chambers(Smith Point) 10 KM
Broad-winged Hawk 8/29 Chambers(Smith Point) 65 KM
Broad-winged Hawk 8/30 Chambers(Smith Point) 77 DB
Swainson's Hawk 8/15 Chambers(Smith Point) 4 KM
Swainson's Hawk 8/18 Chambers(Smith Point) 2 KM
Swainson's Hawk 8/28 Chambers(Smith Point) 2 KM
Swainson's Hawk 8/30 Chambers(Smith Point) 1 DB
Red-tailed Hawk 8/15 Chambers(Smith Point) 1 KM

TBRC Report continued ....

Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucoides*). One (1995-33) from *Jefferson* on 18 December 1994.

* To join the TOS send $20 to T.O.S., c/o Miss Jolene Boyd, 401 Pinn Oak, Ingram, Texas 78025. TOS members receive *The Bulletin of the Texas Ornithological Society* and the new magazine *Texas Birds.*

Lunch With The Birds

Fred Collins

Our first "Lunch with the birds" bird walk was Thursday, September 23. We had a few migrants. The day's list for the park follows:

White-wing Dove
Mourning Dove
Inca Dove
Chimney Swift
Rufous Hummingbird
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Downy Woodpecker
Empidonax
Blue Jay
Carolina Chickadee
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
N. Mockingbird
E. Starling
Nashville Warbler
Wilson's Warbler
N. Cardinal
House Sparrow

If you would like to join us, we have bird walks every Thursday from noon to 1:00 p.m. from September 23 till sometime in November. Our last walk will be announced in advance. Bring binoculars or borrow a pair from the Nature Discovery Center. Participation is free.

Meet at noon on the front porch of the Henshaw House in Russ Pitman Park, home of the Nature Discovery Center.

Although we call it lunch with the birds, plan on eating before or after. Picnics are permitted in the park and there are tables. We keep moving and no one manages to eat and bird too.

To contact Fred:

Fred Collins
Nature Discovery Center
Russ Pitman Park, PO Box 777
Bellaire, Texas 77402
713 667-6550

Texas Christmas Bird Count List Web Site

From the TEXBIRDS web site

TexBirders:

Melinda Parmer and P.D. Hulce have agreed again (for the fourth year) to host a web site to list all the Texas Christmas Bird Count dates, locations and contacts as their very own personal holiday present to TexBirders.

Their volunteer effort will save all of us a lot of long distance phone calls, it should encourage more folks to fill in their holidays with birding adventures and it will save a lot of regional web site hosts from having to recreate the same information. The updated URL for this year is:

http://www.io.com/~pdhulce/cbc99.html

Last year's site is still available for review and it has a lot of detailed information on many coastal counts. *Just change the URL to **cbc98** if you want to review last year's stuff.*

The first listing is BY DATE. There is also a listing BY LOCATION. If you would like your count publicized here, please e-mail the information to mparmer@io.com. Also e-mail any corrections of date, contact or phone right away to either Melinda or P.D. at that address.

I'd also like to encourage Texas birding web site hosts to create a link to this site from their regional sites to encourage as much participation as possible this year, especially on some of the smaller counts that don't often get much help.

Thanks to Don Richardson for finding this and sending it in!

Clearinghouse continued ....

Ferruginous Hawk 8/27 Chambers(Smith Point) 1 WB
American Kestrel 8/16 Chambers(Smith Point) 1 KM
Peregrine Falcon 8/26 Chambers(Smith Point) 2 KM
Whimbrel 8/8 Galveston(Bolivar Flats) 3 DV
Eastern Wood-Pewee birds=1 reports=1
Red-eyed Vireo birds=3 reports=1
Blue-winged Warbler 8/7 Chambers(Smith Point) 1 DV
Louisiana Waterthrush 8/7 Galveston(High Island) 1 DV
Hooded Warbler birds=1 reports=1

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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. The Spoonbill needs to go to print on or about the 10th of every month, so try to have them to Mike by the 5th or 6th day of the month.

Activity Reminder List

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

Saturday November 13, 1999 7:00AM

Jones State Forest: Jones State Forest is just about the best place on the Upper Texas Coast to see **woodpeckers**. With some luck, we might see eight species in one outing, including the endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker. Jones is also a great place to see brown-headed Nuthatches.

Leader John O'Brien. No charge.

Wednesday November 17, 1999 7:00AM

Huntsville State Park: Howard Patton will lead this trip. Howard will meet the group at the entrance office to Huntsville State Park at 7:00AM. The park entrance is at Exit 109 off IH 45 North.

Saturday December 11, 1999 8:00AM

Quintana Jetty Seawatch: Meet at the base of the jetty. Bring a chair and water. We'll spend the morning on the end of the jetty looking for Northern Gannets, Black, White-winged, and Surf Scoters, gulls and terns. Possible rarities are Black-legged Kittiwake and Oldsquaw.

Leader David Sarkozi. 713-520-5906 or dsarkozi@flash.net
No charge.

*****

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.

TBA To be announced CFD Call for details_

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.

October 1999 Meeting of the Ornithology Group

Pat Pease, Recording Secretary

Minutes of Meeting of the Ornithology Group

An informative and helpful learning corner conducted by David Sarkozi preceded the meeting.

Chairman David Sarkozi welcomed all new members and visitors.

The following announcements were made:

Interesting bird sightings: 300 Wood Storks were seen at Brazos Bend State Park on Oct. 2

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 $20.00 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 confimation 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

Yellow-headed Blackbird seen in a pond near Quintana dike on Oct. 3

The Spoonbill mailing was delayed again this month. A bulk-mail company could do our mailings for us to assure a timely mailing, but it will cost an additional $50 per issue. This will probably require an increase in membership dues. We will vote on that next meeting.

OG Library Survey was distributed. This survey can also be found on our web site.

Programs: Photo Fest Program in March or April. Members who have 5-10 interesting wildlife programs would present their photos and share with the club the experience that made the picture special.

Most monthly programs will be coordinated with field trips to enhance identification on field trips.

Adult Lecture Series For the Inquisitive Naturalist at Russ Pitman Park in Bellaire. Call Russ Pitman Park for information.

Memorial Park Advisory Board member again requested support and aid in keeping Memorial Park natural. The park board is under pressure from the trail bikers who want to expand their trails. This activity is extremely destructive to the park. Contact Gene Kelly to protest.

Nov. 13 field trip – Jones State Forest

Directions for Field Trips

To Jones State Forest:

From Houston go north on IH-45 30 miles to FM1488 about 5 miles north of Oak Ridge North. Go west (left) on FM 1488 about 2 miles to the headquarters on the right side of the road. The main part of the park is on the south (left) side of the road.

To the Quintana Jetty:

From Freeport go 2 miles southwest on FM 1495. After you cross the swing bridge over the inter coastal waterway turn left at the 4-way stop. Go about 2 miles to the end of the road and turn right. Follow the road to the parking area at the base of the jetty.

We Need You!

The OG needs a new Aluminum Can Chairman to collect aluminum cans and turn them in for recycling. You then need to get the money to Bob Simmons, our treasurer. Call David Sarkozi at 713-520-5906 to sign up.

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

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

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