



THE SPOONBILL

VOLUME XV, No. 5

September, 1966

(Rec'd 9/26)

* Hark! how the cheerfull birds do chaunt theyr laies; *
* The merry Larkke hir mattins sings aloft; *
* The Thrush replyes; the Mavis descant playes; *
* The Ouzell shrills; the Ruddock warbles soft. . . *
* Edmund Spenser (1552-1599), Epithalamion *

PUBLISHED BY THE ORNITHOLOGY GROUP, OUTDOOR NATURE CLUB, HOUSTON, TEXAS

COMING EVENTS

- October 6 (Thursday) Regular OG meeting at the Downtown Recreation Center at 7:30 PM. Mr. Clayton Gilman will show slides from the Gilman's June vacation to the Pacific Northwest.
- October 16 (Sunday) Linda Snyder will lead a trip to Anahuac and High Island. Meet at 8:30 AM at the parking lot on the Galveston side of the Galveston-Bolivar Ferry.
- October 22 & 23 (Saturday and Sunday) ONG field trip to the Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary. See Nature Club Notes for details.
- November 19 & 20 (Saturday and Sunday) The OG will join the ONG in a field trip to Welder Wildlife Refuge and Aransas National Wildlife Refuge led by Mr. and Mrs. Daniel T. Washburn. There is tentatively planned an optional trip aboard the Whooping Crane on Sunday morning. Saturday: Welder; Sunday: Aransas and the Whooping Crane.

AUGUST FIELD TRIP by Sharon Davis

Twenty-six birders met on Almeda Road for the August OG Field Trip. Our leader, Dr. Hardin Craig, led the caravan to Kitty Hollow Lake near Arcola.

The morning was foggy, but the birds were there. Anhingas were the main attraction. They were everywhere: flying, swimming, and sitting about with their wings spread to dry after their breakfast.

There were flocks of Mottled Ducks and Blue-winged Teal along with the waders.

There were only a few shorebirds present, but some of them were rather puzzling for everyone as their plumages didn't quite match any of Peterson's plates. No doubt they were either immature or changing from Spring to Fall dress.

Always impressive, the Spoonbills were sweeping the shallows with their namesakes. Three rather ragged looking White Ibis flew over and a Great Blue Heron kept flying back and forth as if adding us all to his lifelist of birdwatchers.

While we were picnicing, a Blue Jay began making a awful ruckus. Dr. Craig informed us that it was no Blue Jay making that noise, but a Red-shouldered Hawk and sure enough he flew over screaming for all to see.

Altogether fifty-four birds were recorded and Dr. Marrack's children found a slightly beat up cow skull, so the day was a great success for everyone.

SUMMER HOME FOR SKIMMERS Reprinted from The Dow Texas, Vol 22, No. 8, August 11, 1966.

Would you believe a bird sanctuary inside a chemical plant?

Well, would you believe a nesting place?

That's exactly what the case is, and because a whole clan of black skimmers chose a Plant A parking lot to nest, they're being given sanctuary by Dow.

They've been there most of the summer. The mothers laying eggs on the shell, hatching them, and fussing at their young; and the fathers walking around yapping, giving encouragement, and flying about for food.

They also fly about diving at intruders with those long, sharp beaks aimed menacing. It looks like a murderous charge, but the birds veer off just in time, so that one's chance of being actually struck by them is slight.

The birds have located in the parking lot used by employees in Chlorine 5 and Power 3. The lot is used sparingly, and there are some barricades on it to indicate "no traffic."

Industrial Security keeps a watch, too.

Last year the skimmers nested across Base Road in the open area between the road and the plant. But when they returned to their chemical sanctuary this summer they chose the parking lot.

They are terrifically noisy when you disturb them. Yaps, adreams, and hoarse squawks pour out of them likewater from a pitcher, in startling contrast to the consummate grace and beauty of their flight.

The black is the only one of the five members of the skimmer genus that reaches United States water. You will often see it along the shore of the Gulf from Texas to Key West, thence north along the Atlantic Coast as far as Virginia and occasionally Long Island. These areas comprise the birds spring, summer, and autumn range, while in the winter many move southward to Mexico, Costa Rica, and sometimes the West Indies.

Nest building in May or June is hardly even a formality; the birds merely make slight hollows in the loose sand and shell by squatting down and turning round and round -- it's just as simple as that. Normally there are four white to pale buff eggs more or less blotched with darker colors that serve as good camouflage. The female apparently attends to all the incubation, but her old man frequently stands close by as though to assure her that he isn't off having a good time.

The sand colored youngsters hatch about 24 hours apart, and each is able to run around nimbly when no more than two days old. At this stage their bills are quite normal in appearance, with both mandibles of equal length. They do not begin to grow and take adult shape until the bird is old enough to fly and use them in quest of marine food.

If you observe the skimmers at their Dow summer place very long your respect for them grows. Apparently the flock has sort of a scout group which rings itself around the whole clan to fly first and give warning of an intruder. They need this "fighter service" because when they are on the ground, all face in one direction.

The birds are splendid in flight . . . fast, graceful, smooth.

And they offer a curious study flying and nesting in the very shadows of chemical processing units . . . particularly in this era of so much concern about pollution affecting our birds and wildlife.

--Submitted by Austin Evans, Freeport, Texas

CLEARING HOUSE, August, 1966

Pied-billed Grebe: (30)24 Cove AKM.

White Pelicans: (1)3 Cove AKM.

Anhinga: (150)24 Cove AKM.

Yellow-crowned Night Herons: (1 immature)20 Bellaire High School BW; (1-2)14-22 Cove AKM.

Blue-winged Teal (130)24 Cove AKM.

Common Gallinule (4)24 Cove AKM.

American Coots: (25)24 Cove AKM.

Rufous Hummingbird: (1)27,28,29 Cove AKM.

Vermilion Flycatcher: (1)31 Cove AKM.

Black-and-White Warblers: (1)3 Cove AKM.

Pine Warbler: (8)24 Cove AKM.

Robins (5)8, (11)13, (12; 3 or more immature)24 Glenbrook Golf Course, ^(Park Place) SE Houston; (8)23, (35+)28 Hermann Park, Houston WF.

CLEARING HOUSE NOTES

I was in the field less than ever before, and saw only 87 species, 72 in first half, 111 in 1960; and 60 in the second half, 121 in 1952.

A cardinal had a nest about 25 feet up a pecan tree on my lawn; the highest I have ever seen. Mrs. Shoemaker of Barterskill had a Summer Tanager nest near her home. The first I have known outside the pine woods area. They raised a tanager and a Cowbird.

AKM

CLEARING HOUSE CONTRIBUTORS

AKM	Arlie K. McKay
BW	Bill Wright
NP	Noel Pettingill

CHANGE OF ADDRESSES

Mrs. Joyce Wildenthal, 165 Waddel Circle, Oak Ridge, Tennessee
 Dr. and Mrs. W. S. Barwell, 11002 Landon Lane, Houston 77024.
 Mr. and Mrs. Forrest L. Raines, 6131 Bayou Bridge, Houston 77055.

ATTWATER'S PRAIRIE CHICKEN SANCTUARY at Eagle Lake (This is a condensation of an article by Hans A. Suter in the September, 1966 issue of Signal Smoke Newsletter of the Travis Audubon Society, Austin Texas. Vol. 15, No. 1, pp 5-6.)

The Texas Chapter of the Nature Conservancy sponsored on Saturday, July 9, 1966 a field trip to the Attwater's Prairie Chicken Sanctuary at Eagle Lake, some 50 miles west of Houston. The purpose of the meeting was to acquaint conservation-minded individuals with this project of Texas Wildlife, a joint undertaking of the Nature Conservancy and National Wildlife Federation. Presently, the sole purpose of Texas Wildlife is the collection of funds for the purchase of 3428 acres of bald prairie for this Sanctuary. This acreage is in Colorado County along the San Bernard River, some ten miles northeast of Eagle Lake. Most of the Refuge is flat, treeless prairie, never touched by a plow. Large parts of this land is covered with blue stem grass, the favorite forage of the prairie chicken.

A caravan of some 20 cars bearing around fifty avid birders assembled at 5:30 AM in front of the Eagle Lake Community Center to be led by sanctuary manager, Mr. T. T. Waddell, on an inspection of the refuge. Efforts are being made to supply additional feed for wildlife, by planting beans, cow peas, etc. in selected areas. It is also contemplated to put roads into the refuge to allow visitors to enter the refuge area. Some prairie chickens were sighted by the group but the predominant avian species were cowbirds and nighthawks. After this tour lasting some 2 1/2 hours, the group was taken to an area close to the shores of Eagle Lake. Here, thousands of cattle egrets established a rookery among anhingas and little blues. A spattering of flamingo red roseate spoonbills added color to this spectacular sight. Across a canal from this rookery, hundreds of wood ibis had staked out squatter rights to raise their families, the only known breeding ground of wood ibis in Texas.

In the afternoon, a conference was held where we saw a movie of dancing prairie chickens and some slides of the varied landscapes of Texas. Mr. Waddell, who has been a game warden in Colorado County for more than 30 years, summarized the main causes for the decline of the prairie chickens. Responsible for the near extirpation of this coastal bird were rice farming, which destroyed habitat and created water hazards drowning hundreds of chicks, use of arsenicals to control cotton pests, and last but not least an early season hurricane in 1932 dealing havoc among young chicks and adult birds alike.

During the conference Mr. Howard Dodgen, executive director of Texas Wildlife gave a thumbnail history of the organization and mentioned that the option for the land had been secured, but additional monies must be collected for the complete purchase of the refuge land. The owners of the land are very much in sympathy with the project, and are selling the land for roughly one half the market price.

(Those wishing to make a donation to the Prairie Chicken Fund may do so by mailing their contribution to our Treasurer, Miss Sarah Gordon, 1746 Wroxtton Court, Houston 77005.)

* * * * *

We extend HEARTY CONGRATULATIONS and BEST WISHES to Mr. and Mrs. Henry T. Fielding (formerly Mrs. Edna Miner) on their recent marriage. The Fieldings reside at 4141 S. Braeswood, Houston.

* * * * *

OFFICERS:

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|---------------------------------------|--|
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