



The Spoonbill

July 1999
Volume 48, No. 5

Chairman's Message by David Sarkozi

Welcome back everyone. Thanks for electing me chairman. A big welcome to other new officers, Skip, Pat, and Bill. Also a big thanks to Glenn Olson who is helping with field trips. Look for a schedule of all we have planned so far in this issue of the Spoonbill.

Speaking of the Spoonbill, we're at kind of a crisis for the OG right now. We need a new editor right away. The Spoonbill makes this organization possible; it's how we communicate. You do not have to be a writer, but you will have to chase articles for the Spoonbill. There are lots of talented people in the OG and the state who can write articles for the Spoonbill. Your main job as the editor will be to prevail on them to write. Please, if you're interested in the being the Spoonbill editor, let me know as soon as possible.

I want to start a new program for the OG. We should be doing more things ornithological since we are the *Ornithology Group*. I plan to start a winter raptor monitoring program. The procedure will be pretty simple and I think it will appeal to many OG members. Look for the article announcing it in this issue of the Spoonbill.

Membership in the OG has dropped in the last couple of years. That's puzzling since birders and birdwatchers are the fastest growing group of outdoor recreationists. I can only conclude there are two problems: One, we are not recruiting members for ourselves very well. I would like to get a committee together to do just that, make sure that interested parties can find our meetings and know about our programs. Two, we are not meeting the needs and interests of our members. We're not holding their interest and giving them a reason to stay a member. That's going to be harder to figure out, but as a member you are going to have to take the responsibility to let me and the other officers know what you want.

Up Coming Activities

August Meeting Program

Monday August 2, 1999 - 7:00 p.m. at the
Bayland Community Center, 6400 Bissonett.

Smith Point Hawkwatch 1999 Kickoff

Three short programs:
History of the Smith Point Hawk Watch
by Cecilia Riley
Raptor Identification and Migration Calendar
by Dick Beniot
Weather Patterns and Radar Tracking of Hawk Migration
by Frank Peace.

You will also have a chance to sign up as a volunteer observer at the Hawk Watch.

Field Trips

(Directions to field trips at the end of *The Spoonbill*)

Thursday August 19, 6:00 p.m.

Meet at the car barrier at the Houston Audubon Society's **Bolivar Flats Sanctuary**. Sonny Fisher will lead.

Saturday August 21, 9:00 a.m.

Meet at the **Smith Point Hawkwatch Tower**. Leader GCBO Executive Director Cecilia Riley. We'll start by looking for Swallow-tailed Kites at the Hawkwatch tower, then make the loop though the Bolivar Flats for migrant shorebirds 713-789-GCBO, or criley@nol.net

Saturday September 4, 7:00 a.m. Meet at **Challenger Park** (near I-45 and NASA Rd. 1). Leader Don Richardson. We can leave cars at the park or at nearby Baybrook Mall if you want to car pool. We will spend some time in Challenger Park then move on to Galveston Island. There are several wooded areas in which to search for migrant perching birds (including Lafayette Park). There are also lots of marsh and

shoreline areas like Sportsman's Road, San Luis Pass and East Beach. We'll bird in that area. What we do will depend on what's hot and what's not at the time. Bring your scope, if you have one, and your lunch. If there's enough interest, we'll do a talk about migration during lunch. We'll finish in the afternoon before dinnertime and it will be easy to pick up any cars we left as we head back toward Houston.

Saturday October 2, 8:30 a.m.

Smith Point Hawkwatch Tower. Meet at the Tower. Leader David Sarkozi. 713-520-5906 or dsarkozi@flash.net

Saturday November 13

Jones State Forest, leader John O'Brien. Jones State Forest is just about the best place on the UTC 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.

Saturday December 11, 8:00 a.m. Quintana Jetty Seawatch. Meet at the base of the jetty. Leader David Sarkozi. 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. 713-520-5906 or dsarkozi@flash.net

Many Thanks, Damien

Damien Carey, who has edited and published *The Spoonbill* for the last three years, has resigned that position. On behalf of the OG membership, we would like to express our appreciation for your dedicated efforts in a sometimes-thankless job.

Past Chairman's Message by Bob Ohmart

As my term in office ends I would like to thank all of the officers, coordinators, (Lin Chen, Sonny Fisher, Robin Gray, Mary Dodson, Janet Rathgen) field trip leaders and other volunteers for their efforts during the past year. Especial thanks go to David Sarkozi for the many tasks he has taken on and to David Bradford who is completing his second year as program coordinator.

Your help is needed. We are still seeking personnel to fill several positions for the coming year. These are Spoonbill editor, program coordinator, and learning corner coordinator. Mike Gremillion has stepped forward to take over the Clearing House. Thanks, Mike. Our organization can only function when members are willing to devote the necessary time and effort. So, get involved and help out.

Our new officers (see paragraph on elections) will soon be planning for the coming year. Several issues need to be

addressed. Among these is our rather limited budget, how best to handle the Clearing House data, whether to continue the learning corner in its present format, etc. Make your ideas known. What do you want from the organization. Keep in mind that if people want something the question is always "Great, but who is going to do it?"

Election of Officers for 1999

The annual election of officers was held at the May meeting. Elected Officers: Chairman - David Sarkozi; Vice-Chairman - Skip Almoney; Secretary - Pat Pease; Treasurer - Bob Simmons.

Painted Buntings by Don Richardson

On Sunday, June 2, 1996, my beginning birding class and I witnessed one of the most exciting sights I have seen in my 20 plus years of birding. Admittedly, part of the thrill was in the fact that the birds involved were Painted Buntings, some of the most beautifully colored birds in the world. We were standing at the edge of the south bank of Big Creek, just north of Old and New Horseshoe Lakes in Brazos Bend State Park. We could look straight down where ten feet below was a flat grassy place, and in the middle was a three foot circle of bare earth.

Twenty feet in front of us, at eye level, stood a willow tree, its base reaching to the creek. A Painted Bunting sang his high busy song, too intricate and complicated to describe. His bright hues of red, blue, yellow and green dazzled in the sun, while the soft, light green willow provided the perfect background.

A less colorful greenish-yellow female busily scurried in and out of the branches just below him. When she was near, his song intensified and he partly extended his wings and shook them vigorously in his excitement. Suddenly, the female dropped to the ground and stood at the edge of the bare spot. The male stopped his singing, dropped to the same spot, and began his courting dance. He crouched and spread his wings. He began to circle in front of the female - round and round he went in an 18-inch circle, shaking his fully stretched wings the whole time. His bright colors flashed as he moved in and out of the light filtered by the willows.

Our vantagepoint was perfect. We saw all the colors of his "Joseph's" coat, and the softer colors of the female as well as anyone could ever see them. That dance is over, but certainly more will follow. And more of those beautiful Painted Buntings will be the result. Oh, what a moment!

Winter Raptor Monitoring by David Sarkozi

I'd like to announce a new program I want to start for the OG. Wintering raptor monitoring on the UTC. Raptors, being on the top end of the food chain, can tell us a lot about the health of the environment they live in (or don't live in). Birding for wintering raptors has always been popular with the OG. Now I'd like the OG members to put in about ½ day to gather some data that we can use to judge how many raptors are here, and how that population changes from year to year.

The protocol will be simple and is based on the Breeding Bird Survey protocol. We will survey 25-mile routes with a stop every ½ mile, for a total of 50 stops. At each stop one will get out of the car and count all the raptors observed for three minutes. Perched and soaring raptors will be counted separately to help account for the concentrating effect of the roadside. Simple habitat descriptions will also be gathered.

Routes will be run during the six weeks between January 1 and February 15, and they only have to be run once.

I'm working on setting up routes now, but if you'd like to establish your own route, let me know. My only stipulation is that routes are no closer than 10 miles to each other, but that's the only limitation.

If you'd like to volunteer for a route call me at 713-520-5906 or e-mail at dsarkozi@flash.net

OG Mexico Field Trip set for June 2000

Michael Delesantro of Vamonos! Nature Tours has put together a nice, relaxed itinerary for NE and E. Central for the OG. Mexico that is not too hard on driving and gets at least 150 possible "tropicals" into the bird mix. All together, this trip should turn up 250 species and about 50 true tropical birds you can't see in the US. It focuses on the "cloud forest" habitat types. Trip dates will be June 10-17, 2000

June 10 (half day): to bridge, through customs and down to Victoria or Gomez Farias.

June 11: El Cielo area

June 12: El Salto/El Naranjo area

June 13: Taninul Resort area

June 14: Xilitla area

June 15: Tlanchinol area

June 16: Tlanchinol area

June 17 return to El Cielo area

June 18: (half day or three-quarters): return home to Valley

We should be able to do this for \$645 per person for 8 people. If less sign up, the price will be slightly higher.

Interested parties contact Michael Delesantro at:
956-969-8610 or mdele@worldnet.att.net

1105 West Fifth Street
Weslaco, TX 78596

A \$25 non-refundable (unless we have to cancel the whole trip for some reason) deposit will hold a reservation. Full payment is not due until 4 to 6 weeks before the trip date.

Smith Point TX Hawk Watch and Nature School

The Smith Point Hawk Watch began as an all-volunteer effort in 1991, with most of the hours logged from a lawn chair in the back of Winnie Burkett's pick-up truck. Inspired by the substantial numbers of hawks the volunteers counted, HawkWatch International and the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory (GCBO) have been working together to conduct standardized, full-season counts for the past two years. In 1997, Smith Point observers counted 42,993 raptors of 19 species during the 94-day count. Seventy-one percent of those birds (30,147) were Broad-winged Hawks. Other birds that were seen included Sharp-shinned Hawk (4,780), Mississippi Kite (2,124), American Kestrel (1,297), Turkey Vulture (1,225), Cooper's Hawk (1,137), Northern Harrier (445), Red-tailed Hawk (331), Swainson's Hawk (137) Black Vulture (130), Merlin (88), Peregrine Falcon (65), Osprey (54), Swallow-tailed Kite (40), White-tailed Kite (11), Red-shouldered Hawk (45), Crested Caracara (6), Golden Eagle (3), and Bald Eagle (2). Though still being compiled, 1998 data were comparable to 97.

Every year a half-day hawk identification workshop has been offered to attract volunteers, who continue to be an essential part of the Smith Point Hawk Watch. When times are slow at this hawk watch near High Island, TX, butterflies and dragonflies migrating through have entertained the volunteers. This year, the workshop is being expanded into a weekend long Hawk Watch and Nature School, and will be the major fundraiser to support the hawk watch. The first workshop will be offered during the weekend that the raptor-per-hour count is traditionally highest, when thousands of Broad-winged Hawks wing their way through, September 24-26. The second workshop will take advantage of the Columbus Day weekend, October 8-11, when we should see a good variety of birds. Workshops will include a variety of slide and video presentations on topics like dragonflies, butterflies, spiders, and local (Native American) history. The presenters will also lead walks and, throughout the day, we will have experts on the hawk watch tower who will help you learn to identify hawks in flight.

The workshop will be based at the Spoonbill RV Park and Lodge in Smith Point. The fee, \$75 day visits only, \$235 in September and \$305 in October (double occupancy), includes a donation to support the hawk watch, lectures and walks, time on the tower with experts, all meals including an all-you-can eat fish and oyster fry, a shrimp boil, and lodging. Lodging is rustic but clean with separate, shared bathrooms for men and women.

The GCBO was created to conserve the birds of the Gulf Coast through research, conservation and education. Working with public and private landowners, the GCBO now has 30 site partners along the Gulf Coast from Alabama to the Yucatan, MX. For information on the GCBO and the Smith Point Hawk Watch, including visiting or helping observe

through out the season, please contact Cecilia Riley at 713-789-4226, criley@nol.net, www.nol.net/~criley. For information or reservations for the Hawk Watch and Nature School, please contact trip coordinator Sandra Skrei at Naturally Curious Inc 888-258-4687 or sskrei@swbell.net

OG Website Looks New

The website has been reworked including a great new Spoonbill photo by John Ingram. The URL is <http://texasbirding.simplenet.com/hog/>

Clearinghouse for June 1999

Well, good news everyone, we've finally found a permanent replacement for the Clearinghouse editor. Mike Gremilion will take over next month. Please start sending reports to Mike at 3304 Rice Blvd, Houston TX 77005, or e-mail at mikeg@ghg.net

Great Blue Heron birds=1 reports=1
 Great Egret birds=5 reports=1
 Snowy Egret birds=1 reports=1
 Little Blue Heron birds=6 reports=1
 Tricolored Heron birds=15 reports=1
 Cattle Egret birds=136 reports=3
 Green Heron birds=3 reports=1
 Black-crowned Night-Heron birds=10 reports=1
 Yellow-crowned Night-Heron birds=5 reports=1
 White Ibis birds=1 reports=1
 Roseate Spoonbill birds=40 reports=1
 Wood Stork 6/25 Waller() 50 David Sarkozi
 Black Vulture birds=1 reports=1
 Turkey Vulture birds=1 reports=1
 Greater White-fronted Goose 6/10 Jefferson(McFaddin NWR) 1 Matt Whitbeck
 Wood Duck 6/13 Harris() 2 Ken Hartman
 Mississippi Kite 6/29 Fort Bend() 5 Helen Baines
 Cooper's Hawk 6/12 Harris() 1 Ken Hartman
 Red-shouldered Hawk birds=1 reports=1
 White-tailed Hawk 6/13 Harris() 1 David Sarkozi
 Killdeer birds=5 reports=2
 Willet birds=9 reports=1
 Rock Dove birds=3 reports=1
 Mourning Dove birds=10 reports=3
 Yellow-billed Cuckoo birds=9 reports=3

Common Nighthawk birds=1 reports=1
 Chimney Swift birds=2 reports=1
 Ruby-throated Hummingbird 6/13 Harris() 1 Ken Hartman, 6/27 Harris() 1 Ken Hartman
 Red-headed Woodpecker 6/12 Harris() 2 Ken Hartman, 6/15 Orange() 2 Ken Stzarky, 6/24 Orange() 2 Ken Stzarky
 Red-bellied Woodpecker birds=1 reports=1
 Downy Woodpecker birds=3 reports=2
 Acadian Flycatcher birds=1 reports=1
 Western Kingbird 6/13 Jefferson() 1 Ken Stzarky, 6/13 Jefferson() 2 Ken Stzarky
 Eastern Kingbird birds=4 reports=1
 Scissor-tailed Flycatcher birds=3 reports=2
 Loggerhead Shrike birds=3 reports=1
 White-eyed Vireo birds=8 reports=3
 Red-eyed Vireo birds=2 reports=1
 Blue Jay birds=1 reports=1
 American Crow birds=10 reports=3
 Fish Crow 6/13 Jefferson() 1 Ken Stzarky
 Purple Martin birds=735 reports=9
 Barn Swallow birds=4 reports=1
 Carolina Chickadee birds=11 reports=4
 Tufted Titmouse birds=12 reports=3
 Carolina Wren birds=6 reports=2

Eastern Bluebird 6/13 Harris(Bear Creek Park) 4 Ken Hartman, 6/15 Orange() 2 Ken Stzarky, 6/19 Orange() 2 Ken Stzarky, 6/27 Harris(Bear Creek Park) 2 Ken Hartman
 Wood Thrush 6/12 Harris() 1 Ken Hartman
 American Robin birds=1 reports=1
 Northern Mockingbird birds=9 reports=3
 European Starling birds=32 reports=3
 Cedar Waxwing 6/13 Jefferson(Sabine Woods) 1 Ken Stzarky
 Northern Parula birds=3 reports=1
 Prothonotary Warbler birds=3 reports=1
 Swainson's Warbler birds=2 reports=2
 Kentucky Warbler 6/12 Harris() 1 Ken Hartman
 Hooded Warbler birds=1 reports=1
 Yellow-breasted Chat 6/13 Harris() 1 Ken Hartman
 Chipping Sparrow 6/13 Harris() 1 Ken Hartman
 Northern Cardinal birds=34 reports=4
 Painted Bunting birds=6 reports=2
 Common Grackle birds=10 reports=3
 Great-tailed Grackle birds=5 reports=2
 Brown-headed Cowbird birds=3 reports=2
 American Goldfinch 6/7 Harris() 1 Jean Ashmore
 House Sparrow birds=4 reports=2

Directions for Field Trips

To Houston Audubon Society Bolivar Flats Bird Sanctuary

To reach the Bolivar Flats Bird Sanctuary from Galveston take the free ferry across the channel to Port Bolivar. Take SH 87 about three miles to Loop 108. Turn right on Rettilon Road to the beach. Turn right on the beach and go about 3/4 of a mile to the entrance at the telephone poles in the sand.

To the Smith Point HawkWatch from Houston:

Take IH-10 east 45 miles to the SH61 exit at Hankamer. Go south on SH61 four miles to SH65. At SH65 continue straight onto FM 562. Go eight miles to the junction of FM562 and FM 1985. Turn right. Go about 20 miles to the end of the road. The Candy Abshier WMA is on the left side of the road. The turn off is by some oil storage tanks. You should be able to see the watch tower from there.

To the Challenger Seven Park:

Leave Interstate 45 (Gulf Freeway) at exit number 25. This is the NASA Rd. 1 exit. Go west (actually slightly southwest) on W. NASA Rd. DON'T GO TOWARD NASA. You'll see a fork about 0.3 miles from I 45. The right is FM 528. and W. NASA Rd. continues straight ahead. Continue with W. NASA Rd. for another one or two tenths of a mile and you'll see the entrance to Challenger Seven Park to the left. Enter the park's parking lot and look for restrooms on the right. We'll meet in the parking area nearest the restrooms.

To the Quintana Jetty

From Freeport go 2 miles southwest on FM1495. After you cross the swing bridge over the intercoastal 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.

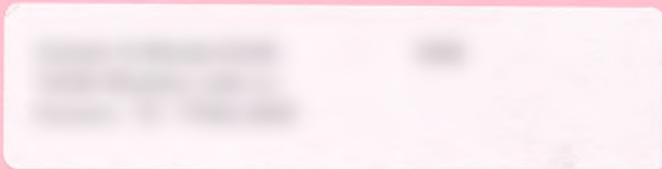
To Jones State Forest:

From Houston go north on IH-45 30 miles to FM 1488 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.

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

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