



Volume 46, No. 8

August 1997

# The Spoonbill

## Galveston Bay Breeding

by Winne Burkett

### September Meeting Speaker & Topic

#### **"Texas Wildlife Rehabilitation: Saving Birds in an Oil Spill"**

a presentation by  
**Rebecca McKeever**

Rebecca McKeever has been a wildlife rehabilitator for many years. She's worked full time for the Texas Wildlife Rehabilitation Coalition for the past 4 years. She is most interested in pelagic birds, shorebirds, and raptors.

Rebecca's presentation starts after OG business and announcements are wrapped up.

### September Learning Corner

#### **An Interesting & Enlightening Subject**

led by  
**Don Richardson**

Don always has some great ideas and pointers on birds and birdng. Happily for us he's always willing to share.

Please join Don and other OG members at 6:30 p.m.

### October Meeting Speaker

**TBA**

Please watch for the next Spoonbill for our speaker and program.

Galveston Bay's colonial waterbirds had a very productive breeding season.

*Brown Pelicans* nested on Little Pelican Island (25 nests) and Jig Saw (83 nests), with fewer nests than 1995 but more than 1996. Most nests fledged one chick with a couple fledging two.

*Neotropic Cormorants*, *Great Blue Herons*, *Great Egrets*, *Snowy Egrets*, *Tricolored Herons* and *Cattle Egrets* bred in good numbers at all monitored colonies and raised 2-3 chicks per nest.

*White Ibis* were spectacular with at least 20,000 pairs on North Deer. Parents raised 2-4 chicks per nest; that island was packed. Rollover and Smith Point Island had their usual numbers.

*White-faced ibis* virtually absent from Galveston Bay as a nester last summer had at least one hundred nests on North Deer. Down from 1995 but better than '96.

There were at least 500 *Spoonbill* nests in island colonies, 300 on one small island at Rollover Pass. Most parents raised an impressive  
*cont'd on last page*

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Mail, fax or e-mail submissions *by the 15th of every month* for possible inclusion. *Include the author's name, address and phone number.*

## Field Trip Report

*August 9, 1997 East Beach and Bolivar Flats*-About twenty birders gathered with great weather (OK hot and sunny, but that's a good as it gets in August!) at East Beach for the first field trip of the year. We started at Big Reef Nature Park (East Beach).

If you've never checked out Big Reef you should. The relatively new park on the east end of Galveston Island is a nice little complex of beach, grassy dunes, brackish ponds, and marsh grasses. This area is pretty heavily used by fishermen and the birds here are used to people and often can be approached very close.

We started on one of the sand bars and had a clapper rail calling close by. On the sand we had of course lots of *Laughing Gulls*, and couple of *Least Terns*. A few shorebirds were about: *Piping Plover*, *Sanderling* and *Ruddy Turnstone*. On the rocks a *Snowy Egret* and a *Tricolored Heron* fished.

We moved down the road to one of the ponds with a large gull and tern flock. Here we quickly found *Royal Sandwich*, *Common*, and *Black Terns*. A handsome breeding plumage *Black-bellied Plover* roamed around the edges of the flock. Way in the back we spotted a couple of *American Oystercatchers*. Around the edges we also found a couple of *Marbled Godwits*, *Black-necked Stilts*, and a *Greater Yellowlegs*. Most of the group also got a look at a *Clapper Rail*. Way up high over the ship channel we found about a half dozen

## *Magnificent Frigatebirds.*

We rode the ferry across to Boliver Flats. On the Ferry we were treated to some close views of Frigatebirds harassing gulls.

On the flats we immediately found *Wilson's Plover*, *Snowy Plover*, *Piping Plover*, *Semipalmated Plover*, and *Black-bellied Plover*. Two long winged larger calidrid sandpipers jumped out of the crowd; a couple of *Baird's Sandpipers*. Checking out a the *Least Tern* nesting area (from a prudent distance of course) we spotted a still downy chick running around. In the vegetation we spotted a resting *Common nighthawk* and a trio of *Horned Larks*. Looking back out on the flats a couple of *Caspian Terns* made an appearance.

Right in front of us we had a small dark peep with dark legs. Once I saw it raise its foot I could see it had no webbing. Even though "stint fever" was rising in me I had to conclude that this was nothing more than a dirty legged *Least Sandpiper*.

Our final close approach bird was a couple of *Semipalmated Sandpipers* that were "high stepping" so you could easily see the partial webbing in the feet. If you've never looked for the webbing on the feet of Semipalmated Sandpipers and *Western Sandpiper*stry it sometime. If you see it or its absence its a valuable clue to the identity of a troublesome sandpiper. We wrapped up about noon. Thanks to everyone, it was a good trip.

## Next Field Trip

*When:* Saturday September 13, 1997 at 8:30 a.m.  
*Where:* High Island.

High Island is well known as a spring migration hot spot, but many overlook it in the Fall. Join us for Fall migration and see migration from the other end.

*Submitted by David Sarkozi*

## Cans Can & Do Help

Thanks to all OG members who brought aluminum to the August meeting. We collected 59 pounds of cans, netting the OG treasury \$26.55. Let's do even better next month. This is an easy way for all of us to contribute a little extra money to our club.

*Submitted by Lee Richardson*

## Hawk Watch Weekend

Spend the weekend of September 19-21 in Los Gansos Lodge on the shores of Galveston Bay just a short distance from Candy Abshier Wildlife Management Area site of the spectacular Smith Point Hawk Watch. Workshops, field trips and evening programs focus on hawk identification and Smith Point history fill the weekend.

The \$175 fee includes two nights lodging, dinner Friday and Saturday, and breakfast Saturday and Sunday, lunch Saturday, workshops, talks and field trips. Proceeds from the weekend will be used to support this year's Hawk Watch. To register call GCBO at 713-789-4226.

## Hawk Watch '97 Begins

*When:* August 15 to November 15, 1997. *Where:* Candy Abshier WMA. *Who:* Hawk Watch is cosponsored by the OG, TDPW and the GCBO.

The Mississippi Kites start migrating in August so we figured we better start count-



ing in August. We have expanded Hawk Watch to get a better idea of what happens through the whole migration period. Migration on the Upper Texas Coast is always fascinating and there is no better place to watch it happen than the tower at Smith Point. Thousands of hawks, swallows, dragonflies and butterflies pass the tower each year. Every day is different and every Hawk Watch season is full of surprises. Visitors are always welcome.

This year, thanks to the help of Hawk Watch International, we will have a full time hawk-watcher, *but volunteers are still needed.* There should be two official hawk watchers in the tower as much as pos-

sible. It's difficult for one watcher to keep track of wandering kettles of Broad-wings, new hawks, swallows and answer questions all at the same time. If you would like to volunteer please call 281-992-5640.

To get to Candy Abshier WMA from Houston take I-10 east to the Hankamer exit (Rt. 61). Turn right on Rt. 61 and follow it to Rt. 562, then take Rt 562 to Smith Point. When you get to Smith Point follow the "Hawk Watch" signs, turn left to the tower site.

Please follow instruction signs and be considerate of the neighbors.

*Submitted by Winnie Burkett*

## The Big Sit

Big Sit? Have you never heard of it? Well it is *the latest* in birding competitions, and it is easy.

Pick a good place and spend the day birding from it. The Big Sit was started in New England and is now done at 48 sites in 21 states. The annual Big Sit will be held October 19, 1997.

There was only one Big Sit site in Texas last year and they saw 33 species. An easy record to break almost anywhere on the Upper Texas Coast.

I have the rules and regulations for those who wish to participate. I'll keep a list of who is sitting where. So form your team, pick your site and get ready to sit. Oh, by the way, my team and I will be sitting on the Hawk Watch tower at Smith Point. As always, please contact Winnie Burkett at 281-992-5640.

3-4 chicks per nest. We even had 15 Spoonbill chicks fledge from 4 nests at High Island. *Royal* and *Sandwich Terns* did well on Smith Point Island and on Jig Saw.

*Skimmers* raised more chicks than they have for the last two years on Ving-et-un Island and in Swan Lake.

*Forster's Terns* did poorly. They are early nesters and were well into their breeding season when they were totally washed out by unusually high tides on April 25-26. Some parents attempted to renest in their regular sites but disappeared most likely due to predation by Laughing Gulls. They are usually almost finished with nesting before Laughing Gulls start to set up in colonies. *Caspian Terns* did not do as well as usual. They seem to suffer more from the high April tides than the other large terns.

It appears that *Least Terns* also did not do well, monitored areas produced only a few late chicks.

All *Oystercatchers* were washed out by the April high tides but many pairs renested and did ultimately produce young.

## Chairman's Message

I'm pleased to announce that Don Richardson and David Sarkozi have joined Ed Rozenburg to complete the OG Checklist Committee. As Ed pointed out last month, we have about a one year supply of checklists remaining, so the time is at hand for the committee to begin planning the next printing.

Lin Chen has provided Robin Gray with the necessary information on mailing the *Spoonbill* each month—thanks to Robin and Myra for coming forward to help with this task. And thanks to Lin for the excellent follow-up.

Bob Ohmart will be coordinating the Learning Corners for the next several months. If you have ideas on topics of interest, or if you would like to present a Learning Corner, please contact Bob.

Enjoy the Labor Day holiday, and don't forget to come out to the meeting the second Monday of September—the 8<sup>th</sup>. Good Birding!

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