



The Spoonbill

A Publication of the **O**rnithology **G**roup
Of the Houston Outdoor Nature Club

October 2001

November Program

TEXAS RAPTORS

Jana Steingreaber, a local wildlife rehabilitator, will speak on Texas raptors. Jana holds state and federal permits to rehabilitate wild birds in Texas. She specializes in raptors and has extensive experience working with local hawks and owls.

7:00 p.m.

**Monday, November 5,
2001**

**Bayland Community
Center**

6400 Bissonnet

Learning Corner: 6:30 p.m.

DUCKS!

Bring your field guide.

*Update on the Rockport/
Corpus Christi Quarterly
Field Trip*

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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	Skip Almony	713-524-4285
Treasurer	Patsy Lawrence	713-661-8954
Secretary	Margret Simmons	
Clhouse	David Sarkozi	713-520-5906
SB Editor	M.P. Haddican	281-589-0005

**For membership information,
see the back cover.**

Minutes of the October Meeting Margret Simmons

Learning Corner: David Bradford talked about bird field guides and other books about birds and books on where to go to see them.

Bob Ohmart and Skip Almony conducted the meeting.

Bird sightings: Black-crowned night herons have been seen on Brays Bayou, both morning and evening. Bill Saulmon commented that the Smith Point Hawk Watch has been excellent this year. David Marrack saw osprey and white-tailed hawk at San Barnard NWR but no geese yet. Bob Honig reported peregrine falcons at the Medical Center and a very large hummingbird in their back yard, but no positive id.

Kathy Hubbard reported that the walks in the Arboretum with the Boy Scouts were very successful and there were about five birders who helped lead them, some OG volunteers and some from Tex-birds.

David Marrack spoke about the upcoming Proposition 8, said that Texas Parks & Wildlife supports it, and encouraged people to vote for it.

Quarterly Field Trip: Skip Almony announced that the quarterly field trip to Rockport has a leader, Michael Marsden. An attempt is still being made to locate a less expensive boat. People are encouraged to make a deposit if they wish to go on the trip.

Conservation Issues: Mary Dodson spoke about several conservation issues and provided a hand-out detailing them. The US Senate may try to attach legislation to allow drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to the Defense Authorization Bill, and she urged us to oppose the ANWR drilling. The US House of Representatives may vote on the Farm Bill this week and wildlife would be helped by the Boehlert, Kind, Gilchrest, Dingell amendment to the Farm Bill.

October Field Trip: Glen Olsen reminded members of the October 20 field trip to Jessie H. Jones Park & Nature Center to be led by Carmine Stahl.

Program: Mike Austin had a very interesting talk and slide presentation about confusing fall warblers and what to look for to differentiate them.

Chairman's Message

This article is about fund raising and giving to organizations that help conserve the birds we spend so much time observing. As I have mentioned in previous writings and at OG meetings, I would like the OG do a fundraiser to raise money for the purchase or maintenance of bird habitat. However, to date we have not been able to determine an appropriate event to accomplish this. Hopefully, the leadership team will arrive at a program that will be implemented this year or next. As before, I ask for any suggestions you have.

One suggestion that I received is the basis for this article. It was suggested that we publish information about organizations where you can contribute to preserving of bird habitat. I will list three organizations below that I believe are vitally important for preserving habitat here on the Upper Texas Coast. These are by no means all the groups that are doing a wonderful job, but they are major players.

The first is our own parent, The Outdoor Nature Club (ONC) of Houston. The ONC needs funds to maintain and possibly enlarge the Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary. This sanctuary of 655 acres was begun in 1950 and has been a natural haven for locally nesting birds since that time. You can send checks to The Outdoor Nature Club, P.O. Box 270894, Houston, Texas 77277-0894. If you wish, you can restrict the use of the funds for a) support of particular operating activities, b) acquisition of long-lived assets, or c) use in a specified future period. If you are a newcomer to the OG and the Outdoor Nature Club, I urge you to visit the LTNS on one of the Visitors Weekend. The next one is November 16-18. This weekend will also include Trail Trimming on Saturday for those who would like to volunteer to work.

The second organization is the Katy Prairie Conservancy. This organization's mission is "to protect a sustainable portion of the Katy Prairie for the benefit of its wildlife and all Texans forever". There are two ways to give to the Katy Prairie Conservancy. The first is to send funds to their office at 3015 Richmond Ave. Suite 230, Houston, Texas 77098. The second is to participate in the Katy Prairie Conservancy Bird-a-thon. This fundraiser is the second Christmas Count Bird-a-thon sponsored by the KPC. You pledge a particular amount per species counted during the Cypress Creek Christmas Count. Pledge forms can be obtained on the Internet at www.katyprairie.org or from the office listed above.

The final organization is the Houston Audubon Society. This organization maintains a large number of sanctuaries throughout the upper Texas Coast. Some of these we are most familiar with, namely Bolivar Flats Bird Sanctuary, and the High Island sanctuaries of Lewis Smith/Boy Scout Woods and Smith Oaks. We have all birded these areas and enjoyed the miraculous variety of birds they provide habitat for. The HAS has just finished a fundraising drive that raised over \$743,000 to purchase additional acreage contiguous with the Bolivar Flats Bird Sanctuary. Because of the success of this effort, Houston Audubon has expanded the project and is trying to raise enough funds to purchase an additional 750 acres to include Horseshoe Marsh. You can send your contribution to Houston Audubon Society, 440 Wilchester, Houston, Texas 77079.

All of these organizations are 501(3C) tax-deductible entities. I encourage you to consider a donation to any or all of these organizations as the protection of remaining prime bird habitat is a necessity if we are going to continue our hobby and preserve the opportunity for future generations to enjoy this activity as we do.

— Skip Almoney

Beginning Birding

ID Ducks on the Wing

I ran across a reference, a long time ago, that was printed by the federal government, dealing with the identification of ducks in flight. I lost my copy and soon found that it was no longer in print. Its title is "Ducks at a Distance" by Robert W. Hines. To my delight, I have found that it is reproduced on the Internet at

<http://www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/tools/duckdist/duckdist.htm>.

It, in conjunction with several other sources, provided much of the material in this article. This guide was, I believe, produced with hunters in mind. Hunters need to be skilled in the identification of waterfowl on the wing. They must know what they are aiming at in order to adhere to various hunting limits and restrictions. I have found the information in the guide very helpful in my birding activities.

Many birders study, at length, marks on ducks which help in identification. Mostly, it seems, they study those things which identify the duck while sitting on the water or land. Ducks in the air are often ignored by birders, and there is often more identification help in literature aimed at hunters than at birders.

The things which are helpful with ducks in flight and at a distance are differences in size, shape, plumage patterns and colors, wing beat, flocking behavior, voice, and habitat. The way they maneuver differs. Shovelers and teal fly by in small compact groups while Mallards and Pintails appear in looser flocks. Silhouettes and shapes are important. You may recognize a Wood Duck by its short, broad, shovel like-tail and its crested head. A pintail appears long necked and sometimes shows its long pin tail. Colors and patterns on the parts that can be seen in flight are very helpful. The location of white on the wing differs in the Gadwall and American Wigeon. A field of blue atop the wing says this is a Cinnamon or Blue-winged Teal. The color of and border around the speculum can clinch the ID of a difficult female. Most ducks vocalize as they fly and they don't all quack. Many whistle, squeal, and even grunt. Not only vocalizations but wing noises can be clues. Flying goldeneyes make a whistling sound; wood ducks move with a swish; canvasbacks make a steady rushing sound. Even the surrounding habitat tells us things. The "puddle" or "Dabbling" ducks would seldom be swimming in deep water, while diving ducks are not often found in fields or shallow wet marshes.

The identification of ducks in flight and at a distance is probably the subject of a book rather than a short article. I hope you'll visit the web side I mentioned above. I'll discuss some identification points here, but you'll benefit with some further research and study.

White on the tops of wings is common in ducks, but in the "puddle" or "dabbling" ducks a large patch of white on the top of the wing indicates a Gadwall or American Wigeon. The American Wigeon (and other Wigeons) have this white patch toward the front of the wing. The Gadwall is the only "puddle" duck with a white speculum, which means the white is near the trailing edge. When birding in agricultural areas like harvested grain fields or other shallow wet areas, knowing about these white areas and their location can absolutely nail the ID. There are some other factors about these ducks. Wigeons are quick to take alarm. They leap upward from

of the land or water into a fast and irregular flight with many twists and turns. If there are a number of them, they will stay in a tight bunch. Gadwalls also fly quickly and in a tight bunch but in a straighter line.

Green headed ducks include Mallards and Northern Shovelers. Close up, the difference in the bill shape and color makes for an easy ID. Both of these ducks have a combination of rust and white on the underside. The pattern of these colors, however, are reversed. The Mallard has a rusty breast and white (or light) underbelly while the Shoveler has a white breast and a rusty underbelly.

Teal (drakes) are fairly easy to ID but females are difficult. In flight, there are some nice clues on the wing tops. Both Blue-winged and Cinnamon have blue on the top forewing. Green-winged, however, have a green speculum and a dark grayish forewing. Once again, many of the colors on the wings of ducks are not visible when the bird is grounded. Clues are available when in flight that are not otherwise seen.

There is white on the tops of wings of a number of the diving ducks. Three that look somewhat similar are Ring-necked Duck and the Lesser and Greater Scaup. All three have a lighter speculum and trailing edges to primaries. In Ring-necked, none of these are white. In Lesser Scaup, the speculum is white but there is no white in the primaries, just gray. In Greater Scaup, the speculum is also white and the white extends about half way out into the trailing edge of the primaries.

Another group of diving ducks that have white in the wings holding clues to their identity are the Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, and Barrow's Goldeneye. The female Bufflehead plus the male and female Barrow's Goldeneye have a white speculum and a white bar in front of that, centered front to back. The Bufflehead female, however, has a white mark on the cheek while the Barrow's Goldeneye does not (the male Barrow's Goldeneye has white on the face but it is just behind the bill). Three bars of white on the wing (speculum, mid wing and in front of that, but behind a dark leading edge) point to the female Common Goldeneye. Note that Common and Red-breasted Mergansers also have these three bars of white, but the rest of their look is so different that they should not be confused with this Goldeneye. Male Buffleheads and male Common Goldeneyes have white speculums that extend into a large white field covering most of the inner wing top. Only the leading edge is dark. The male Bufflehead has a large patch of white behind the eye that extends completely around the rear of the head. The male Common Goldeneye only has a white spot behind the bill.

Yes, ducks can be tough. Females are even tougher. By studying ducks in flight, you will gain many tools that will help with duck identification in general. Many times the wing patterns and speculum patterns and colors are similar in the male and female of the same species, even where, on the water, the sexes are very different. The Internet site I mentioned above, is a great place for this information, as is Hines' original publication. There are other sources for ID tips with ducks and geese. Identification in flight is a concern for hunters, so sometimes literature prepared for them is a great help.

Don is a regular writer and lecturer about birds and teacher of beginning birding. Contact him at (281) 997-0485 or cdplace@concentric.net.

Treasurer's Budget October 2001

	2001 Budget	2001 YTD	2001 Projected	Proposed 2002 Budget
<i>Income</i>				
Dues	\$3,800	\$2,898	\$3,100	\$3,100.00
Sales	\$400	\$133	\$150	\$200
Totals	\$4,200	\$3,031	\$3,250	\$3,300.00
 <i>Expense</i>				
Spoonbill	\$3,000	\$2,200	\$2,800	\$3,000
Speakers	1,000	\$0	\$0	\$500
Facilities	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Library	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$50
Supplies	\$50	\$0	\$50	\$10
Hawk Count	\$200	\$0	\$0	\$0
Christmas Count (boat)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Checklist Committee	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Postage (Spoonbill)	\$500	\$230	\$283	\$300
Totals	\$4,750	\$2,430	\$3,133	\$3,860

The Clearinghouse will
return next month.

Clearinghouse Submissions

Bird sightings can be reported by mail, e-mail or on the OG web page.

By mail: David Sarkozi

111 Welch Street, Apt. B

Houston TX 77006

By e-mail: dsarkozi@flash.net

Please use the following format:

Species,date,county,location,count,observer.

On the OG web page: www.ornithologygroup.org (click on Add Records to the Clearinghouse or, if the bird requires notes, Report a Rare Bird).

Field Trips

Shorebirds Saturday, November 17 7:30 am

Richard Peake will be our leader in search of the many shorebirds to be found on the Upper Texas Coast this time of year. Uncommon or even rare species are quite possible for these sites. If you own a scope, this is an excellent opportunity to put it to good use. The weather should be great! The trip will last at least until noon with the possibility of some afternoon birding. Those wanting to bird longer may explore other areas. Bring lunch and water.

Directions: From Houston, take I-45 south to Galveston. Just as you enter Galveston, I-45 turns into Broadway. Continue on Broadway to the intersection of Broadway and Seawall Blvd. Turn left (east) on Seawall Blvd. Continue straight east on Seawall to dead end. Boddeker Rd. intersects Seawall at the end of Seawall. Meet at the end of Seawall Blvd. Shortly after turning left from Broadway onto Seawall Blvd, Hwy 87 (Ferry Rd.) curves to the left and goes to the ferry.

Rockport/Corpus Christi Field Trip November 31-December 2, 2001

Our leader will be Michael Marsden, who has birded throughout the world and is a well-known local birder from the Rockport area. Many of us know him as the previous owner of the Cayman House Bed & Breakfast in Rockport. Michael knows the area very well and will guide us to see the large variety of birds in the area. We will travel by van and will visit the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge by boat to see the Whooping Cranes.

We will be staying in the Best Western Inn by the Bay with rates from \$70.50 (double double beds) to \$75.70 (double queen beds). These prices are for double occupancy.

Additional costs are estimated below. No estimate was given for meals, as meals will be "on your own." At this point, the itinerary is not complete enough to determine what arrangements will be made for lunches. The boat trip is estimated to be about \$40.00 based upon initial contacts. The boat trip may also be an option, with those who do not wish to participate able to bird on their own during that time.

Transportation (gas)	\$ 5.00
Lodging (two nights)	75.00
Boat Trip	40.00
Leader (shared cost)	20.00
Total	\$140.00

To date 12 people have shown interest in this trip and 3 have put down a deposit. The trip is limited to 20 people. If you wish to participate, please contact Margaret Butler (713-665-0851/mbutler@sleh.com) or Skip Almoney (713-524-4285/skipalm@aol.com) and send a deposit check for \$40.00 (to Ornithology Group) to Skip Almoney, 1653 Bonnie Brae, Houston, Texas 77006.

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

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TO START OR RENEW A MEMBERSHIP:

Name: _____

Address: _____

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