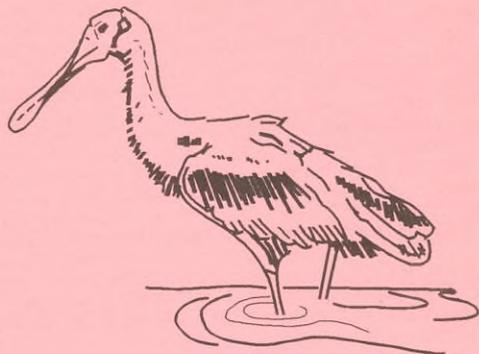


# The Spoonbill



Published by the Ornithology Group, Outdoor Nature Club Houston, Texas  
Judith Mueller Boyce, Editor; Don Richardson, Technical Consultant

VOLUME XLI, No. 3  
March, 1992

## COMING EVENTS

IF YOU HAVE NOT PAID YOUR 1992 DUES, THIS WILL BE YOUR LAST ISSUE OF THE SPOONBILL. PLEASE SEE "CONTACTS" SECTION ON PAGE NINE OF THIS ISSUE FOR MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION!

**Monday, April 6:** ORNITHOLOGY GROUP MEETING. 7:30 P.M. Harris County Bayland Community Center (north side of Bissonnet just west of Hillcroft). After election of officers, ONC member, Calvin Blakley, will present a short slide presentation on the Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary. OG member David Dauphin will present the main program of the evening on identification of spring warblers and vireos. Co-author of the UTC Checklist, David is a former OG Chairman and currently serves as Vice President of the Texas Ornithological Society. In his own words, David has been birding since "the beginning of time." Come join David for this special spring migration warm-up. Come to the meeting early (7:00 P.M.) for Learning Corner's Don Richardson and his wrap-up on the discussion of terns.

**Saturday, April 4:** REUNION DAY AT LITTLE THICKET NATURE SANCTUARY. Come share in the potluck dinner, join in the hikes, compete on the scavenger hunt or just enjoy the beauty of the Sanctuary and the fellowship of friends. Directions to the Little Thicket are in the ONC yearbook/directory or you may call Aaron Stoley at 781-1372. Come for dinner at noon, half a day, all day or camp Friday through Sunday. Be sure to bring water.

**Thursday, April 9:** OUTDOOR NATURE CLUB MEETING. 7:30 P.M. Houston Arboretum, 4501 Woodway. Dr. Donna H. Canney will give an illustrated lecture, "Night Flight-The Life of Bats." Dr. Canney received her Ph.D. from Cornell University in 1988. She will discuss the behavior of bats, how they eat and live, and their importance in the web of life.

**Friday-Sunday, April 10-12:** ONC/ALL GROUPS FIELD TRIP TO MC KINNEY FALLS STATE PARK near Austin. Trip will include birding Saturday morning with a member of Travis Audubon Society, a visit to the Congress Street bridge to view Mexican Free-tailed Bats and wildflower identification. For camping reservations and motel information, call Cissy Donaldson at 649-6543.

**Saturday, April 11:** OG TEXAS BREEDING BIRD ATLAS BLOCKBUSTING EXPEDITION. Leader: Winnie Burkett. Area: Plantersville and west of Lake Conroe. Call Winnie at 992-5640 for more information.

**Saturday, April 18:** OG FIELD TRIP TO BOLIVAR FLATS, HIGH ISLAND and other areas in the vicinity. We expect to see numerous shorebirds and migrant passerines. This is one of the most exciting field trips of the year. We will meet our leader at Bolivar Flats at 7:45 A.M. From Houston take I-45 south to Galveston. Take the ferry from Galveston's east end to Bolivar Peninsula. Where the 108 loop intersects Highway 87 the second time (3.7 miles from ferry), turn right toward the beach. Turn right onto the beach and follow the shore to the bollards protecting the "flats." Be careful: the sand is loose occasionally. Bring plenty of water, bug spray and a sack lunch.

**Saturday, April 25:** BOLIVAR FLATS SHOREBIRD SANCTUARY DEDICATION AND CELEBRATION AND THE GREAT TEXAS BEACH TRASH OFF. 9:00 A.M.-Noon. Bring your friends and family to Bolivar Flats, see some great birds and help clear the area of trash. Bring gloves. Then--at 11:00 A.M. representatives from Houston Audubon, the Texas General Land Office and Texas Parks and Wildlife will dedicate the newly-established Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary, the first shorebird sanctuary on the Texas coast. Come break a bottle of champagne in celebration (then pick it up!). To get to Bolivar Flats, take the ferry from Galveston's east end to Bolivar Peninsula. Drive east on Hwy. 87, 3.7 miles. Turn right toward the beach at Loop 108. At the beach, turn right and drive southwest along the beach to the bollards. This is your bird sanctuary and it needs you. We will be cleaning rain or shine!

**Sunday, April 26:** OG TEXAS BREEDING BIRD ATLAS BLOCKBUSTING EXPEDITION. Leader: Aaron Stoley. Area: north of Huntsville. Call Aaron for more information at 781-1372.

**Saturday, May 2:** OG TEXAS BREEDING BIRD ATLAS BLOCKBUSTING EXPEDITION. Leader: Gail Luckner. Area: north of Liberty and Davis Hill area. Call Gail for details at 328-6236.

**Monday, May 4:** ORNITHOLOGY GROUP MEETING. 7:30 P.M. Harris County Bayland Community Center. Dawn Carrie will present a program on the endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker. Dawn will discuss their breeding biology, habitat requirements and management, and will outline U.S. Forest Service efforts to aid in the recovery of the species. As a District Wildlife Biologist for the U.S. Forest Service at Sam Houston National Forest, Dawn is directly involved with the woodpecker's management and recovery and trains other biologists and technicians to capture and band the birds. Be sure and join us for this very special program. At the Learning Corner at 7:00 P.M., Don Richardson will present a discussion on the birds of Jones State Forest using visuals and bird song recordings.

**Saturday, May 9:** OG TEXAS BREEDING BIRD ATLAS BLOCKBUSTING EXPEDITION. Leader and area to be announced at a later date.

**Friday-Sunday, May 8-10:** OG FIELD TRIP TO COMCAN, TEXAS on the Frio River in Uvalde County. Here we hope to locate Black-capped Vireo and Golden-cheeked Warbler as well as nesting and migratory birds of the Edwards Plateau. We will be staying at Neal's Lodge, a family-type resort used by many birding groups. Seven rustic cabins with kitchenettes, each of which can sleep a maximum of four people, have been reserved for the OG. The cabins do not have A/C, however they are equipped with swamp coolers which utilize evaporation to cool the air. If you plan on participating, you must call me as soon as possible. The lodges are reserved for Friday and Saturday night. For more information, call David Bradford at 855-2615.

**Sunday, October 4:** OG PELAGIC TRIP OUT OF PORT ARANSAS on the Scat-Cat. Leave Port Aransas at 5:30 A.M. and return about 6:00 P.M. Details to follow in April issue of The Spoonbill. Call David Bradford for more information at 855-2615.

## NEWS BRIEFS

.....PLEASE NOTE IN THE "COMING EVENTS" SECTION SEVERAL DATES in April and May for Texas Breeding Bird Atlas Project Blockbusting Expeditions. This is your chance to participate in TBBA Project in areas close to Houston that have not been surveyed completely. Call the individual leaders listed if you want to help. Anyone interested in "atlasing" areas outside the upper Texas coast, especially in west Texas which has many areas needing attention, call Bob Honig at 665-6963.

.....MINUTES OF OG MEETING, MARCH 2, 1992: Chairman Bob Honig commenced with business by announcing elections for next year's OG officers will be held at the April 6 membership meeting. Nominated are: Bob Honig, Chairman; David Bradford, Vice Chairman; Christine Bourgeois, Secretary; and Frank Peace, Treasurer.

Bob Honig moved that the OG, using funds from the aluminum fund, be used to purchase a new Purple Martin house for Hermann Park. A plaque recognizing OG's contribution would be placed at its base. OG membership will vote on this contribution at the April 6 meeting.

Ed Lebeau, Treasurer, noted an increase to 70% membership dues paid. Librarian, Julie d'Ablaing welcomed suggestions for book and video purchases for the library. Bob Honig presented Dr. Keith Arnold, director of the Texas Breeding Bird Atlas Project, with a check for \$450.00 as the Ornithology Group's monetary contribution to the project.

Dr. Arnold reported that all data forms submitted to the project for the first four years have been entered into their computers. In his presentation, Dr. Arnold shared some interesting finds such as the Western and Clark's Grebe pair nesting in west Texas. Among the new recent records for nesting were Hooded Merganser, Sooty Tern and Thick-billed Kingbird. He stressed that more data needs to be collected during this last year of the project and encouraged "mopping up" the gaps through "blockbusting" in areas yet to be surveyed. [See "Coming Events" on pages one and two for Blockbusting trips planned. Ed.] Writing species accounts, drawing bird sketches and financial support would also be of assistance in publishing the Texas Breeding Bird Atlas. Christine Bourgeois, Secretary

.....LOCAL BIRDER, BILL TARBOX, SENT A MESSAGE TO OG MEMBERS about three, ten-day birding trips planned by David Hanson to Paraguay in April, August and September/October 1992. Cost is approximately \$2300. For more information, you may call David Hanson at 512/581-0945.

.....LEARN THE SECRETS TO ATTRACTING BIRDS/BUTTERFLIES TO YOUR YARD AND GARDEN. City of Houston Horticulturist Dee Howell will share some of her gardening wisdom at the Houston Arboretum & Nature Center on Saturday, May 9, 10:00 A.M.-12:00 Noon. For more information, call the Arboretum at 681-8433.

.....SPRING MIGRATION SOON FOR WHOOPING CRANES. Spring migration of endangered Whooping Cranes usually begins in early April as they travel from their wintering grounds on the Texas coast to their traditional nesting grounds in Wood Buffalo Park in the Canadian prairies. To aid biologists tracking the movements of migrating whoopers, anyone who sees a Whooping Crane during the migration is encouraged to report the sighting, said Catrina Martin, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's assistant program leader for nongame resources. Whooping Cranes travel in small family groups and seldom are seen traveling in groups of more than three or four. Similarly marked white birds, such as White Pelicans and Snow Geese, are usually seen in large flocks. When reporting a sighting, provide as many details as possible. Martin said pertinent information includes the number of birds seen, their location, the date and time of day and the behavior of the birds (flying, feeding, etc.). Most importantly, however, is to report the color of any leg bands and on which leg the bands are located. Most of the cranes have leg bands on one or both legs, but birds produced since 1988 have not been banded. Whooping crane sightings can be reported by calling TPWD at 1-800-792-1112 or 1-512-389-4771. TPWD News.

.....NOEL PETTINGELL'S The Pettingell Book of Birding Records, 2nd Edition, revised, is available at The Chickadee Nature Store, 1330L Wirt Road, 956-2670. Noel will sign your copy at OG meetings. A copy is also available in the OG library.

.....THE ARMAND BAYOU NATURE CENTER'S SPRING NATIVE PLANT SALE runs Friday through Sunday, April 3-5, 9:00 A.M.- 5:00 P.M. You may call Armand Bayou for information at 474-2551.

.....HELP PROTECT EXOTIC BIRDS...My memories of boating on the Amazon are dominated by stunning, multicolored birds perched in lush trees along the banks. But the birds are getting rare. Too many people want to bring a bit of the exotic rain forest into their homes, and the birds pay the price. Macaws, Amazon parrots and many other gorgeous birds are being captured for cages in the suburbs.

Experts say between 8 million and 20 million birds are taken from the wild each year. Half die before export. Fourteen percent of the survivors die in transport from inadequate care, disease and stress. Though U.S. regulations specify a limit of 50 birds per crate, as many as 800 birds sometimes are crammed together.

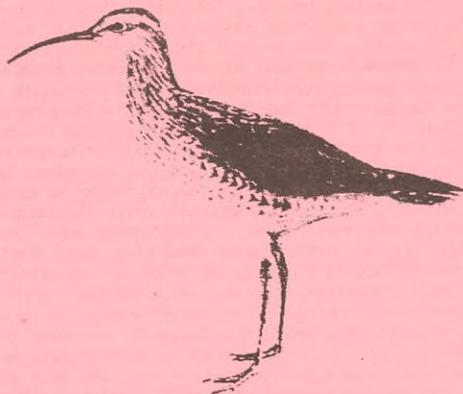
"Birdnapping," deforestation and industrial development have placed 1,000 tropical bird species in danger of extinction. For instance, just 3,000 of the world's Hyacinth Macaws survive, down from 100,000 in 1970. Even though trade in endangered species is banned internationally, they still sell for as much as \$15,000 apiece. To help stop this tragic trade:

**Don't buy exotic birds unless the store can certify domestic breeding.**

**Write to international airlines to ask them not to transport wild birds.**

**Ask your representatives in Congress to support the proposed Wild Bird Protection Act, which would outlaw the importation of wild birds into the U.S. for sale as pets, while allowing it under certain conditions for zoos, scientific research and captive breeding.**

by Denis Hayes, an organizer of the original Earth Day and president of the environmental organization Green Seal. USA WEEKEND, January 17, 1992.



**UNCOMMON BIRD OF THE UPPER TEXAS COAST**  
Eskimo Curlew (*Numenius borealis*)

by P. D. Hulce

Teetering on the brink between existence and extinction, the Eskimo Curlew has taken on a legendary, near mythical status in all of its former haunts, especially on the Upper Texas Coast. Incredibly abundant during the 19th century, the Eskimo Curlew basically disappeared from Texas by 1875, due primarily to unrestricted shooting on both its migration routes and its wintering grounds in South America. Prairies and grasslands are the preferred habitat of this bird, though it may sometimes appear in pastures, fields and on coastal beaches and their associated dunes.

It is most likely seen in the company of Lesser Golden Plovers, and occasionally with either Whimbrels or Hudsonian Godwits. It is said to be an unsuspecting bird, that may allow a close approach, and is reported to be sluggish and less inclined to move around than the Lesser Golden Plover. These traits may have helped contribute to its decline, allowing hunters to easily slaughter thousands as they congregated on the Texas prairies and elsewhere.

The Eskimo Curlew is noticeably smaller than its most common relative, the Whimbrel, with a shorter, more slender bill that is slightly less decurved. It is basically a warm, buffy-brown or cinnamon bird that appears much darker, often almost black, on its upperparts, and lighter buff on its underparts. The Whimbrel is basically a uniform grey-brown, cooler color, and does not show such a strong contrast between upper and lower parts. The Eskimo Curlew's back feathers may have buffy-brown tips and spotting, presenting a more patterned appearance than the Whimbrel. The warm buff underparts of the Eskimo Curlew are streaked from the sides of the head, down to the upper breast. On the sides and flanks, the streaking appears as a series of dark chevrons or Y-shaped markings.

Compared with the prominently striped head of the Whimbrel, the head of the Eskimo Curlew appears rather plain, with a dark, sooty crown, covered with pale buff streaks. The crown may or may not show a paler median stripe, and there is an indistinct buffy eyebrow or supercilium. The slender bill can be reddish-brown to black.

The wings of the Eskimo Curlew are quite distinctive, and if seen well, can be a great aid in proper identification of this bird. The wing linings are bright cinnamon colored, as are the barred axillaries. The primary

feathers and coverts are uniform brown, with no barring. This is one of the more definitive field marks for Eskimo Curlew. The secondaries and tertiaries are lighter, with paler, buffy edges. The wings are relatively long, and project beyond the tail when the bird is standing. When landing, the Eskimo Curlew will usually hold both wings straight up, for just a moment, perhaps allowing an attentive observer to note the cinnamon linings and unbarred primaries.

The rump and upper tail coverts are cinnamon-brown with buffy spots, and the tail is more of a grey-brown, with dark brown barring and a narrow buff tip. The legs are described as being blue-grey, although several older works list them as being green to greenish-grey.

The Eskimo Curlew has a melodious whistle, described as soft and tremulous, and very similar to the whistles of the Eastern Bluebird. It also give a fairly sharp squeak, much like the call of the Common Tern.

There is one other bird with which the Eskimo Curlew could be easily confused, although there is very little possibility of that bird occurring in Texas. This bird is the Little Curlew (*Numenius minutus*), which normally occurs in north-east Siberia, and rarely straggles to Alaska. There is at least one record for California in 1984. The Little Curlew is slightly smaller than the Eskimo Curlew, with a shorter bill. Its underwing is pale buff, rather than cinnamon, it has a whiter belly and has less streaking on the breast and sides. Its wings are shorter and do not project beyond the tail of the standing bird, and it also has somewhat longer legs than the Eskimo Curlew.

Due to its extreme rarity, identification of an Eskimo Curlew should be based on as many field marks as possible and supported with a photograph.

There are very few documented sightings of the Eskimo Curlew in this century. Beginning in 1959, Eskimo Curlews were observed on Galveston Island, in the spring, every year for at least six or seven years. During the last 20 years, however, sightings on the UTC are virtually non-existent. At least one individual was well described in The Spoonbill during the mid-1980's. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that there may be as many as 100 Eskimo Curlews still in existence. Most Texas sightings occur during the last three weeks of March and the first three weeks of April.

If you are seriously interested in the Eskimo Curlew, contact Fermata, Inc. at 713/863-0581, and you can volunteer to help search for these rare birds.

## NOEL'S NICHE LOOKING BACK

By Noel Pettingell  
10 YEARS AGO/FROM MARCH 1982 SPOONBILL  
PANAMA, 1982 by Jim Morgan

On February 5 I departed for Panama to participate in a Peregrine Inc. tour led by fellow OG members T. Ben Feltner and Bob Behrstock, both of whom are able and experienced neotropical birders. I was to spend the next 16 days seeing more species of birds than I had ever seen before in a like period of time...

...It would not be right to bird the western highlands and ignore possibly the most sought-after bird of Latin America--the Resplendent Quetzal. We were not to be

denied, nor disappointed, as we came upon a pair which put on a beautiful display for us. This species, hanging on under the pressure of forest destruction, deserves all the protection that can be afforded it. It is truly a marvel of the rich tropical birdlife of Central America...

...Using any measure the trip was truly a success. All-in-all the tour participants saw 432 bird species and heard an additional seven more species. Making no real effort to find water (shore) birds this is quite a total in 16 days. With a little patience, a lot of perseverance, some homework before the trip and some luck, I personally saw 395 species and heard five more for an even 400 species seen and/or heard in 16 days of intensive birding. My species totals (tour totals in parentheses) for some of the larger neotropical families were 10 (11) pigeons/doves, 10 (10) parrots/parakeets, 24 (27) hummingbirds, 9 (10) woodpeckers, 10 (10) woodcreepers, 8 (9) ovenbirds, 17 (17) antbirds, 46 (51) tyrant flycatchers, 13 (14) wrens, 26 (28) warblers, 14 (15) icterids, 33 (37) tanagers, and 22 (24) fringillids. Among the species seen I recorded 207 life birds for my world list, thus exceeding my goal of 200 I had set for the trip.

This article would not be complete without mentioning the enjoyment and learning experience I received while birding with Ben and Bob, two experts on neotropical birds. They were especially helpful to me on the more difficult ID's such as some of the flycatchers and the female hummingbirds. Also very helpful was the tape recording of the songs and calls of many species that Bob was doing. Bob recorded about 70 species on the trip, and we used these calls to help lure some of the more secretive birds into the open.

## ARTICLES

### EARED TROGONS NEST IN RAMSEY CANYON by Sheri Williamson, Huachuca Audubon Society

[Reprinted from *The Trogon News*, Huachuca Audubon Society, Sierra Vista, Arizona, with permission of the author. Ed.]

The long-awaited discovery of an Eared Trogon nest in the United States occurred in autumn in the Huachuclas, not in summer in the Chiricahuas as had been predicted. The nest was located in the Coronado National Forest, upstream from The Nature Conservancy's Ramsey Canyon Preserve. Unfortunately, the nesting attempt failed when a winter storm dropped temperatures at the nest site to well below freezing. In spite of its tragic ending, this first documented nesting has allowed us to expand our knowledge of these rare and exquisite birds and may help us ensure the success of future attempts.

The trogons were originally discovered in upper Ramsey Canon in early August by Sue Perger, a staff member at Ramsey Canyon Preserve, and John Porter, a herpetologist from California conducting a long-term study of the canyon's rare rattlesnakes. The birds' extremely shy and wary nature was evident in this first encounter, but Sue was able to make a positive identification even though the birds would not allow a close approach. The discovery of a third bird in Ramsey Canyon brought the number of Eared Trogons known to be in Arizona at the time to five, though reports from other areas eventually raised the trogon tally to at least nine individuals.

Within a few days, word of the discovery had spread across the country, and the Hamburg and Comfort Springs trails in the Coronado National Forest were soon jammed with birders. Unfortunately, some either left their sense of

ethics at home or lost it in the excitement; there were many reports of birders running up and down the canyon, shouting to each other and into walkie-talkies, leaving the trail to chase the birds, and playing taped calls repeatedly at full volume. This harassment may have caused the birds to move from the area where they were originally seen, within one mile of the Ramsey Canyon Preserve boundary, to the lower part of Pat Scott Canyon, more than a half-mile further upstream. Only after the crowds thinned out in mid-September did the trogons come back downstream to nest.

In late August and early September, one bird was observed entering a cavity in a large dead conifer in lower Pat Scott Canyon, but the site finally chosen was very close to the spot where the pair was originally discovered. The nest was in an old woodpecker hole 29 feet up in a dead maple. The female was videotaped entering the cavity on October 10, but it was not until October 12, when an observer reported the male carrying food into the cavity, that we began to believe that the birds were really nesting. Feeding was reported again on October 13, and I was able to hear voices of two chicks in the nest the next day.

To protect the parent birds from disturbance and to gather data on their nesting behavior, volunteers were stationed at the nest site every day to take notes and monitor visitor activity. Unseasonably warm weather made conditions pleasant for all concerned, resulting in many hours of valuable notes on the birds' behavior at the nest. Though both parents were wary, the male showed extreme nervousness at the presence of up to a dozen admirers at a time and seemed particularly distressed when observers wearing white were present; at one point, the bird refused to enter the nest until an observer had removed and hidden his white shirt and cap. As a precaution, monitors were issued camouflage ponchos for themselves and for loan to inappropriately dressed visitors.

On October 26, the first storm of winter season blew in, dropping temperatures drastically. The next day was cold, wet, windy and thoroughly miserable. There was only one report of a parent bird at the nest, and that was very early in the day. When the adults were discovered together the next day a mile downstream from the nest, we feared the worst. The pair was never seen at the nest again, and on October 30 volunteers from the Bisbee Fire Department climbed the tree and recovered the bodies of the two ill-fated young trogons.

One of the chicks died of unknown causes several days before the other. Its nest mate appears to have survived until the storm, then succumbed to hypothermia. It was heartbreaking to see how healthy its tiny, well-preserved body looked: well-fleshed, full-bellied, and partly covered in a coat of black and yellow down. It was perhaps as much as two weeks from fledging at the time of death.

As the storm was not unusually early, the question arises: What caused this pair to begin nesting so late in the season? Observations in Mexico indicate that Eared Trogons normally nest in the rainy season. Egg-laying evidently occurs between mid-July and mid-August, and the young would presumably fledge before the arrival of the first winter storms. If this as a young pair in their first nesting season, as we believe it was, their inexperience might be responsible for some delay. The poor summer rains and unusually warm temperatures may also have played a role, but it is unlikely that these factors completely account for the lapse of five weeks between arrival and nesting.

Though we will never know for certain, the evidence strongly suggests that the intense human activity in the upper canyon between mid-August and Labor Day discouraged the birds from settling down to nest. But whether the nest failure was ultimately the result of the unethical and

inconsiderate behavior of a few "listers," the sheer numbers of people in the upper canyon, or factors beyond our control, it is sobering to consider the negative impact that birding and other non-consumptive outdoor recreation can have on wildlife of all kinds.

Many conservationists are concerned that apparent declines in populations of some species in "hotspot" areas may be due to birding pressure. Mere human presence is enough to disrupt feeding, mating and care of young, and many birders and hikers have never been taught wildlife-watching etiquette. Common mistakes are talking too loud, moving too fast, and wearing brightly-colored clothing (haven't we all been guilty of these a time or two?). "Taping in" or flushing a bird for a better look, very popular with some tour leaders and many "listers," wastes valuable energy reserves that may be critical for migration, territorial defense, or reproduction. Some people are simply unaware of the effects of their behavior, while others seem completely uncaring, as long as they "get" the bird.

Wild animals and plants are under enough pressure from habitat destruction, pollution, commercial exploitation and other threats; those of us who care about their future should avoid adding to their problems. Unfortunately, our existing wildlife laws do little to protect non-endangered non-game species from the actions of a thoughtless minority. Until they do, those of us who really care must do all we can to ensure that Eared Trogons and other sensitive species are around for future generations to enjoy. Following these three simple steps can help you make a difference:

1. Adopt a code of ethics, such as that of the American Birding Association, and let it guide your behavior whenever you go afield to watch wildlife. Above all, never let your desire to see a bird (or other animal) overwhelm your concern for its welfare.
2. Set a good example for others, especially beginners, and whenever and wherever you encounter unacceptable behavior, voice your concerns to those responsible, including hikers, photographers, picnickers, bicyclists, motorcyclists, four-wheelers, hunters and tour leaders as well as fellow birders.
3. If you can't reason with the offenders, get their names, descriptions, license plate numbers, etc., and report them to the appropriate federal, state or local authorities, or, in the case of privately owned sanctuaries, to the owner, manager or organization (this includes the National Audubon Society and The Nature Conservancy). And, in the case of unethical birding practices, report the offenders to the American Birding Association.

My thanks to the following for their assistance with the Eared Trogon project: U.S. Forest Service, Tucson Audubon Society, Jean Combs, Ken Combs, Pati Dalton, Tom Deecken, Carol de Waard, Dan Fischer, Tony Godfrey, Paul Hammerton, Dave Heck, Kira Hirsch, Jim Horton, Karen Horton, Dave Krueper, Dwight Lee, Neil Markowitz, Kyle Mitz, Allan Morgan, Beth Morgan, Gloria Morton, Howard Morton, Sue Perger, John Porter, Ruth Russell, Dale Stahlecker, Lynn Taylor, Rick Taylor, Sandy Upson, Robb Watkins, Tom Wood, Dale Zimmerman, Marian Zimmerman and the many concerned birders who reported their observations.



## A WINTER OF MANY OWLS by P. D. Hulce

Can you imagine going on a 4-day birding trip a thousand miles from Houston and only seeing 39 species of birds? What if 12 of them were lifers and several of them were on the ABA's most wanted list? On Saturday, February 8th, Mark Scheuerman and I flew to Duluth, Minnesota, to experience some real winter birding. Temperatures in Duluth ranged between 20 and -20 degrees, and we enjoyed generally beautiful, clear weather, although it did snow all day, one day.

Within minutes of leaving the Duluth airport in our rented 4X4, we saw our first bird, a beautiful Northern Shrike. As pale as the snow, it seemed a longer, more powerful version of our more familiar Loggerhead Shrike. Heading east, our first stop was at the grain elevators across the bay in Superior, Wisconsin. We saw redtails and Rock Doves, but no Gyrfalcon, so we proceeded north to the Two Harbors area. In the last two hours before dark, we didn't see too many birds, but three of them were Great Gray Owls, including one that allowed us to approach to within 20 feet, sitting on a fence post. Amazing!

It was 18 degrees below zero early the next morning as we drove to a dawn meeting with, we hoped, a Ruffed or Spruce Grouse. An hour of cold observation had turned up very few birds, when a black speck in the road ahead turned into a lovely male Spruce Grouse, that allowed us to approach to about 12 feet away. This bird was very tame and obliging, and when it finally flew, it was powerful and direct.

Our next destination was the Sax-Zim bog area, some distance to the west, and it was here that we saw our first Northern Hawk-Owl. At one point, this bird made a quick, silent glide to a spot about 75 yards away, hovered, and then dropped into the snow. As it flew away, however, it appeared to be empty-handed.

About five miles further south, an adult Snowy Owl was calmly sitting on a snow-covered stack of wooden railroad ties. When he closed his golden-yellow eyes, he blended in perfectly with his snowy surroundings. In the next two hours, we saw another Snowy and another Northern Hawk-Owl, dozens of Black-capped Chickadees and Red-breasted Nuthatches, two White-breasted Nuthatches and an elusive Boreal Chickadee.

Heading back to Duluth, our first stop was back at the General Mills grain elevator, where we immediately spotted a grey phase Gyrfalcon, calmly sitting out in full view. For over 20 minutes, this regal bird posed for us, did a little head-bobbing and made a complete pirouette, letting us see every feather. The day kind of slowed down at this point, but we had no complaints.

The next morning, it was snowing fairly hard as we headed west to Aitken county. Shortly after dawn, a Snowy Owl appeared on the wing, a phantom among the swirling snow, and landed on the pole right by the road. Awesome! Shortly afterwards, we made a u-turn to check our another possible Snowy Owl, but instead found a bare tree hosting a flock of 19 Bohemian Waxwings and a lone Evening Grosbeak. It was still snowing, and the Waxwing tableau had the subtle beauty of a Japanese painting. The frozen Mississippi River and another Northern Hawk Owl rolled by, and we soon came to an area of snow-covered prairie and scrub that contained at least eight Northern Rough-legged Hawks, most of them dark phase individuals. There were also six Sharp-tailed Grouse, perched up in small, bare trees that allowed excellent examinations. At this point, I had never dreamed that grouse would be so easy to see. Another Boreal Chickadee was less elusive than yesterday's bird, and we headed back for Duluth, cold and content. It had finally stopped

snowing, the sun was shining, and the light was perfect, when a flock of over 50 Snow Buntings flew up by the side of the road. They worked this area for a while and then flew to a lone, bare tree, where we could see all of them at once. Their stark black and white plumage, muted by patches of buff and reddish-brown, was a beautiful reflection of the snowscape.

Pressing on, we stopped to look at another Snowy Owl on a lightpost, and as we were watching, two more Snowy Owls flew by. Most excellent!

We spent the afternoon searching for gulls at the dump, but only managed to add 300 Northern Starlings. Again, the day had slowed down considerably, and four o'clock found us combing the back roads just north of Duluth, looking for the thus far elusive Ruffed Grouse. For an hour and 15 minutes, we drove slow, stopped, looked, listened, got out, got back in and-nothing. With the light beginning to fade, we decided to drive by the Hawk Ridge Sanctuary, but the road there was only open to snowmobiles in the winter, and we were forced down a narrow, winding road, with a series of elegant stone bridges. It was cold, quiet and still, and the setting sun lit up the bare trees on the hillsides. Suddenly, out of the corner of my eye, I saw them—a pair of Ruffed Grouse, quietly feeding in the upper levels of the bare trees. We stood in the cold and watched them until the sun went down, and then headed off for dinner, feeling absolutely elated.

Our final day in the Duluth area was very relaxed and low key, considering that we had already seen practically every species of bird that we had been seeking. We added several species of gull and some more Common Goldeneye and Common Merganser. Three Great Gray Owls posed serenely for photographs, and a final Ruffed Grouse flew right in front of our windshield. That night we celebrated with one of the most incredible shrimp dinners I have ever had and tallied up our lists. Five Snowy Owls, four Great Gray Owls, three Northern Hawk-Owls, a Spruce Grouse, six Sharp-tailed Grouse, three Ruffed Grouse, the Gyrfalcon and a lovely mix of northern dicky birds more than made up for the low trip total of 39 species. The only to-be-looked-for birds that we missed were the Boreal Owl, Black-backed Woodpecker and White-winged Crossbill, but Mark said, "You've got to leave something for next time."

## CLEARING HOUSE

CLEARING HOUSE  
February, 1992

Editors: Phyllis and Tony Frank

A total of 201 species were reported in February including early migrants and three hummingbird species.

Many thanks to everyone who submitted reports. As always early reports will be appreciated, but they are due by April 3rd. The CH format remains the same this month. The listing uses the following format: bird name, early late dates, reports/total and summary by county or detailed listing. The format of the county summary is as follows: county designation - number of reports/number of birds. The detailed listing format is as follows: county-(number of birds) day, observer code. Very rare birds are underlined. Birds with no previous record on date or vagrant status appear in bold. Please remember to submit notes on all those good birds. And with all the reminders completed - on to the birds.

Loon, Common 2-29 8/99 GA-6/94 JE-2/5  
 Grebe, Pied-bill 1-29 21/117 U-2/14 BR-3/31 CH-3/18  
 FB-1/1 GA-7/43 HA-1/4 JE-4/6  
 2-22 3/4 GA-2/3 HA-1/1  
Grebe, Eared  
Grebe, Western 23-23 1/2 GA-(2)23,WC  
 Gannet, Northern 23-23 1/1 GA-(1)23,WC  
 Pelican, Amer Wht 1-29 16/1710 U-1/150 BR-2/51  
 CH-2/11 GA-9/1459 HA-2/39  
 Pelican, Brown 2-29 9/101 U-1/1 GA-8/100  
 Corm, Dbl-crested 1-28 19/623 U-2/90 BR-3/167 CH-2/32  
 FB-1/3 GA-7/272 HA-2/26 JE-2/33  
 Corm, Olivaceous 7-28 12/126 U-1/6 BR-1/4 CH-2/20  
 GA-6/74 HA-2/22  
 Anhinga 1-28 9/34 BR-4/19 CH-4/14 HA-1/1  
 Bittern, American 16-16 1/1 BR-SB(1)16,X  
 Heron, Great Blue 1-29 25/149 U-1/10 BR-3/25 CH-4/15  
 FB-1/1 GA-7/67 HA-4/20 JE-5/11  
 Egret, Great 1-29 26/364 U-1/12 BR-3/42 CH-5/45  
 FB-1/6 GA-8/95 HA-4/67 JE-4/97  
 Egret, Snowy 1-29 22/324 U-1/8 BR-2/36 CH-4/49  
 FB-1/1 GA-7/85 HA-1/48 JE-6/97  
 Heron, Little Blu 2-29 10/23 U-1/4 BR-1/1 CH-2/7  
 GA-3/8 JE-3/3  
 Heron, Tricolored 1-28 14/72 U-1/3 BR-3/12 CH-3/34  
 GA-5/17 HA-1/5 JE-1/1  
 Egret, Reddish 2-29 9/33 U-1/3 CH-1/3 GA-7/27  
 Egret, Cattle 1-29 13/208 U-1/12 BR-2/36 CH-2/40  
 GA-4/101 HA-3/16 JE-1/3  
 Heron, Grn-backed 9-9 1/1 BR-BW(1)9,WP  
 Nt-Heron, Blk-crn 1-28 8/124 U-1/60 BR-2/20 CH-1/1  
 GA-2/2 HA-2/41  
 Nt-Heron, Yel-crn 29-29 1/2 HA-(2)29,PTF  
 Ibis, White 1-24 12/995 U-1/500 BR-3/249  
 CH-2/30 GA-5/196 JE-1/20  
 Ibis, White-faced 1-24 8/1317 U-1/800 BR-2/211  
 CH-2/130 GA-1/6 JE-2/170  
 Spoonbill, Roseat 2-29 13/161 U-1/12 CH-1/20 GA-7/18  
 HA-1/6 JE-3/105  
 Whsl-Duck, Blk-bd 23-28 2/5 CH-(1)28,G; FB-DE(4)23,BH  
Swan, Tundra 7-7 1/1 CH-(1)7,G  
 Goose, Gr Wht-frn 1-28 13/4515 U-1/500 BR-2/44  
 CH-5/1067 FB-2/4 HA-3/2900  
 Goose, Snow 1-29 16/30215 U-1/5000 BR-3/1909  
 CH-4/1027 FB-2/704 GA-2/5375 HA-4/16200  
 7-13 2/3 GA-(1)13,G; HA-(2)7,G  
 Goose, Canada 9-23 2/127 BR-BW(27)9,WP; FB-DE(100)23,BH  
 Duck, Wood 1-28 3/11 BR-2/7 CH-1/4  
 Teal, Green-wing 1-28 12/1013 U-1/12 BR-2/9 CH-3/569  
 FB-1/10 GA-1/2 HA-3/311 JE-1/100  
Duck, Amer Black  
 Duck, Mottled 23-23 1/2 CH-AW(2)23,WC  
 1-29 17/133 U-1/10 BR-2/18 CH-4/26  
 FB-1/6 GA-6/50 HA-1/14 JE-2/9  
 Mallard 1-28 7/46 CH-2/4 GA-2/5 HA-2/17 JE-1/20  
 Pintail, Northern 1-28 10/1194 BR-3/144 CH-2/37  
 FB-1/6 HA-3/1005 JE-1/2  
 Teal, Blue-winged 1-29 13/372 U-1/120 BR-3/45 CH-4/147  
 FB-1/12 GA-3/44 JE-1/4  
 Teal, Cinnamon 9-9 1/1 BR-BW(1)9,WP  
 Shoveler, Northern 1-29 16/1409 BR-2/558 CH-4/256  
 FB-1/25 GA-4/52 HA-2/500 JE-3/18  
 Gadwall 1-29 17/1262 U-1/15 BR-3/968 CH-3/184  
 FB-1/30 GA-5/40 HA-2/20 JE-1/4 WA-1/1  
 Wigeon, American 1-29 13/1212 BR-3/1036 CH-2/91  
 FB-1/15 GA-5/56 HA-1/12 JE-1/2  
 Canvasback 1-23 6/173 BR-2/104 FB-1/1 GA-1/3  
 HA-1/45 JE-1/20  
 Redhead 7-8 2/5 GA-(2)7,AU; HA-WHC(3)8,TD  
 Duck, Ring-necked 1-24 12/311 U-2/11 BR-2/252 CH-1/1  
 GA-4/31 HA-3/16  
 Scaup, Greater 7-29 4/24 BR-1/7 GA-3/17  
 Scaup, Lesser 1-29 12/323 BR-1/12 CH-2/10 FB-1/15  
 GA-6/136 HA-1/130 JE-1/20  
 Goldeneye, Common 2-28 7/31 CH-2/4 GA-4/21 HA-1/6  
 Bufflehead 2-29 8/146 BR-1/6 CH-2/12 GA-2/17  
 HA-1/6 JE-2/105  
 Merganser, Hooded 8-8 1/16 HA-SJ(16)8,G

Merganser, Red-br 2-29 11/713 GA-7/625 HA-2/47 JE-2/41  
 Duck, Ruddy 1-29 10/709 BR-1/18 CH-2/262 GA-3/182  
 HA-2/35 JE-2/212  
 Vulture, Black 1-28 12/98 U-1/2 BR-3/15 CH-3/52  
 FB-1/13 HA-4/16  
 Vulture, Turkey 1-28 16/166 U-1/20 BR-3/83 CH-3/21  
 FB-1/2 HA-5/34 JE-3/6  
 Osprey 1-28 7/8 BR-3/3 CH-1/1 GA-2/2 HA-1/2  
 Kite, Blk-shouldr 1-29 11/62 U-1/6 BR-2/12 CH-1/1  
 GA-6/40 JE-1/3  
 Eagle, Bald 1-1 1/2 HA-WHC(2)1,BBT  
 Harrier, Northern 1-29 22/135 BR-3/21 CH-5/23 FB-1/1  
 GA-8/50 HA-2/20 JE-3/20  
 Hawk, Sharp-shin 7-28 3/3 CH-(1)7,G; CH-(1)28,G;  
 GA-(1)7,AU  
 Hawk, Cooper's 7-29 3/3 FB-(1)8,TD; HA-(1)7,G;  
 JE-(1)29,PTF  
 Hawk, Red-shouldr 2-28 10/22 U-1/4 BR-2/4 CH-2/5  
 FB-1/1 GA-1/1 HA-2/6 JE-1/1  
 Hawk, Swainson's 2-2 1/1 BR-(1)2,BH  
 Hawk, White-tailed 1-1 1/2 HA-CP(2)1,NP  
 Hawk, Red-tailed 1-29 29/421 U-2/23 BR-3/72 CH-5/73  
 FB-1/1 GA-6/77 HA-6/73 JE-6/102  
 Hawk, Ferruginous 7-15 2/2 HA-(1)7,G; HA-(1)15,DB  
 Eagle, Golden 2-2 1/1 BR-DE(1)2,BH  
 Caracara, Crested 23-23 1/1 FB-(1)23,BH  
 Kestrel, American 1-28 31/515 U-2/52 BR-3/80 CH-5/81  
 FB-1/2 GA-7/100 HA-8/59 JE-5/141  
 Merlin 15-23 2/2 GA-(1)23,WC; HA-WHC(1)15,HL  
 Falcon, Peregrine 13-13 1/1 GA-(1)13,G  
 Turkey, Wild 9-9 1/1 FB-(1)9,HL  
 Bobwhite, Northrn 8-8 1/2 HA-(2)8,TD  
 Rail, Clapper 2-16 4/7 U-1/1 GA-3/6  
 Rail, King 1-1 1/1 BR-(1)1,DR  
 Moorhen, Common 1-28 12/269 U-1/12 BR-3/206 CH-4/41  
 GA-3/5 JE-1/5  
 Coot, American 1-29 22/2452 U-2/600 BR-3/1010  
 CH-4/310 GA-6/393 HA-3/10 JE-4/129  
 Crane, Sandhill 1-24 7/312 U-1/100 BR-2/69 FB-1/12  
 GA-3/131  
 Plover, Blk-belli 2-29 11/335 U-1/25 GA-7/297 HA-2/12  
 JE-1/1  
 Golden-Plover, Ls 29-29 2/3 GA-(1)29,PTF; JE-(2)29,PTF  
 Plover, Snowy 7-24 4/35 GA-(2)17,AU; GA-BF(6)9,JW;  
 GA-BF(2)23,WC; GA-SL(6)24,ALL  
 Plover, Wilson's 23-23 1/2 GA-BF(2)23,WC  
 Plover, Semipalm 7-24 4/213 GA-3/212 HA-1/1  
 Plover, Piping 7-24 4/154 GA-4/154  
 Killdeer 1-29 24/328 U-2/25 BR-3/38 CH-2/5  
 FB-1/1 GA-7/68 HA-4/156 JE-5/35  
 Oystercatcher, Am 2-29 5/19 GA-5/19  
 Stilt, Black-neck 7-24 8/200 U-1/2 GA-5/123 JE-2/75  
 Avocet, American 7-29 7/8422 U-1/3 BR-1/13 GA-5/8406  
 Yellowlegs, Great 1-24 11/82 U-1/1 BR-2/7 GA-6/36  
 HA-1/8 JE-1/30  
 Yellowlegs, Less 2-23 11/159 U-1/6 GA-4/83 HA-1/5 JE-5/65  
 Willet 2-24 9/408 U-1/20 BR-1/3 GA-6/376 HA-1/9  
 Sandprr, Spotted 7-24 5/8 FB-1/1 GA-2/3 HA-1/1 JE-1/3  
 Curlew, Long-bill 2-24 10/243 U-1/60 BR-2/3 GA-6/80  
 WA-1/100  
 Godwit, Marbled 7-24 6/71 U-1/2 GA-5/69  
 Turnstone, Ruddy 2-24 7/101 GA-6/98 HA-1/3  
 Knot, Red 9-9 1/1 GA-BF(1)9,JW  
 Sanderling 2-24 7/920 U-1/15 GA-6/905  
 Sandprr, Western 2-24 9/4165 U-1/20 BR-1/39 GA-6/4088  
 HA-1/18  
 Sandprr, Least 8-23 5/118 U-1/6 FB-1/2 GA-2/60 JE-1/50  
 Dunlin 7-24 7/3314 U-1/25 GA-5/3262 HA-1/27  
 Sandprr, Stilt 16-16 1/12 BR-(12)16,X  
 Dowitcher, S-bill 7-23 5/1830 U-1/250 CH-1/1000 GA-3/580  
 Dowitcher, L-bill 21-24 2/102 GA-(100)24,ALL; JE-(2)21,JW  
 dowitcher, sp. 8-23 4/137 BR-1/56 FB-1/20 GA-1/26  
 HA-1/35  
 Snipe, Common 9-24 3/18 BR-1/6 GA-1/6 JE-1/6  
 jaeger, sp. 22-22 1/1 GA-1/1  
 Gull, Laughing 1-29 15/7821 U-1/300 BR-2/11  
 GA-9/6435 HA-2/575 JE-1/500  
 Gull, Bonaparte's 2-29 9/2968 GA-8/2468 JE-1/500  
 Gull, Ring-billed 1-29 16/2493 U-1/100 BR-3/21  
 CH-2/2 GA-6/1605 HA-1/230 JE-3/535  
 Gull, Herring 1-29 11/354 U-1/12 BR-2/3 GA-7/309  
 JE-1/30  
 Tern, Gull-billed 2-13 2/1150 GA-(800)2,BBT; GA-(350)13,G  
 Tern, Caspian 2-29 11/77 U-1/8 BR-1/4 CH-1/1  
 GA-5/40 HA-2/20 JE-1/4  
 Tern, Royal 2-29 9/270 U-1/2 GA-6/252 HA-1/1 JE-1/15  
 Tern, Common 16-16 1/4 U-(4)16,X  
 Tern, Forster's 2-29 10/2518 U-1/120 BR-1/3 GA-6/2343  
 JE-2/52  
 Skimmer, Black 2-29 7/1822 GA-7/1822  
 Dove, Rock 2-29 15/305 U-1/12 BR-1/2 CH-1/8  
 GA-5/131 HA-3/103 JE-4/49  
 Turtle-Dove, Ring 27-27 1/1 HA-(1)27,NP  
 Dove, White-wingd 13-13 1/1 GA-(1)13,G  
 Dove, Mourning 1-29 29/556 U-2/55 BR-3/112 CH-3/25  
 FB-1/10 GA-7/74 HA-8/107 JE-5/173  
 Dove, Inca 1-29 6/20 BR-1/2 FB-1/2 GA-1/4 HA-2/9  
 JE-1/3  
 Parakeet, Monk 2-27 2/36 HA-(18)2,PM; HA-(18)27,PM  
 Cuckoo, Yel-billd 29-29 1/1 HA-(1)29,AG  
 Ani, Groove-billd 29-29 1/4 GA-(4)29,PTF  
 Owl, Barn 8-29 2/2 GA-(1)29,PTF; HA-(1)8,TD  
 Owl, Great Horned 15-15 1/1 HA-(1)15,DB  
 Owl, Burrowing 24-24 1/1 GA-(1)24,ALL  
 Owl, Short-eared 23-24 2/2 CH-(1)23,WC; GA-(1)24,ALL  
 Hummer, Ruby-thrt 1-29 1/1 HA-(1)1-29,PTF  
 Hummer, Anna's 13-27 1/1 HA-(1)13-27,MBM  
 Hummer, Rufous 1-28 1/1 HA-(1)1-28,MBM  
 Kingfisher, Beltd 1-29 23/87 U-1/7 BR-2/5 CH-4/17  
 GA-7/44 HA-3/5 JE-6/9  
 Wdpeckr, Red-head 2-2 1/1 FB-(1)2,PM  
 Wdpeckr, Red-bell 1-28 9/25 BR-2/8 CH-2/6 FB-1/1 HA-4/10  
 Sapsuck, Yel-bell 1-28 8/9 U-1/1 BR-1/1 CH-1/1  
 FB-1/1 HA-4/5  
 Wdpeckr, Downy 1-28 9/14 U-1/1 BR-1/2 CH-2/5  
 FB-1/2 HA-4/4  
 Flicker, Northern 1-23 9/16 U-1/1 BR-1/1 CH-1/1  
 GA-1/1 HA-5/12  
 Wdpeckr, Pileated 2-2 1/1 BR-BB(1)2,BH  
 empidonax, sp. 9-9 1/1 BR-BW(1)9,WP  
 Phoebe, Eastern 1-28 21/109 U-1/25 BR-3/15 CH-4/30  
 FB-1/1 GA-4/9 HA-5/20 JE-3/9  
 Flycatcher, Vermiln 1-16 3/5 BR-(1)1,DR; BR-BW(2)9,WP;  
 BR-SB(2)16,X  
 Kingbird, Couch's 7-7 1/1 CH-(1)7,G  
 Lark, Horned 7-24 4/62 U-1/1 GA-3/61  
 Martin, Purple 7-29 7/48 CH-1/3 GA-3/19 HA-1/6 JE-2/20  
 Swallow, Tree 7-7 1/24 CH-(24)7,G  
 Swallow, N R-wing 7-7 1/2 CH-(2)7,G  
 Swallow, Cave 29-29 1/5 JE-(5)29,PTF  
 Jay, Blue 1-29 16/59 U-1/4 BR-1/5 CH-2/7  
 FB-1/2 GA-1/2 HA-8/36 JE-2/3  
 Crow, American 1-28 18/212 U-2/60 BR-2/33 CH-3/17  
 FB-1/20 GA-1/1 HA-6/71 JE-3/10  
 Chickadee, Carol 1-28 12/103 U-1/20 BR-2/9 CH-2/26  
 FB-1/5 HA-6/43  
 Titmouse, Tufted 1-16 5/29 U-1/4 BR-1/8 FB-1/2 HA-2/15  
 Wren, Carolina 1-29 11/35 U-1/8 BR-2/7 CH-2/7  
 FB-1/1 GA-1/1 HA-4/11  
 Wren, Bewick's 8-8 1/1 HA-WHC(1)8,TD  
 Wren, House 2-28 5/24 U-1/5 CH-2/12 FB-1/1 HA-1/6  
 Wren, Winter 7-7 1/1 CH-(1)7,G  
 Wren, Sedge 9-28 5/11 U-1/1 BR-1/3 CH-1/3  
 FB-1/2 GA-1/2  
 Wren, Marsh 13-13 1/1 GA-(1)13,G  
 Kinglet, Ruby-crn 1-28 13/71 U-1/20 BR-2/14 CH-3/13  
 GA-2/2 HA-5/22  
 Gnatcatch, Blu-gra 1-28 6/20 U-1/6 BR-1/2 CH-2/7 HA-2/5  
 Bluebird, Eastern 1-28 13/60 U-1/3 BR-2/8 CH-2/6  
 FB-1/7 GA-1/3 HA-3/21 JE-3/12

Thrush, Hermit 1-28 6/15 U-1/3 BR-2/6 CH-2/4 HA-1/2  
Robin, American 1-23 13/1034 U-1/12 BR-2/16 CH-3/16  
FB-1/2 HA-5/984 JE-1/4  
Catbird, Gray 7-28 5/8 CH-3/5 GA-1/2 HA-1/1  
Mockingbird, N 1-29 27/251 U-2/25 BR-3/18 CH-3/15  
FB-1/2 GA-7/75 HA-7/44 JE-4/72  
Thrasher, Brown 1-28 8/11 U-1/2 BR-1/1 CH-2/4  
GA-2/2 HA-2/2  
Pipit, American 1-28 9/169 BR-3/47 CH-2/36 FB-2/25  
GA-1/40 JE-1/21  
Pipit, Sprague's 1-1 1/6 BR-(6)1,DR  
Waxwing, Cedar 1-27 7/341 BR-1/7 FB-1/2 GA-2/55 HA-3/277  
Shrike, Loggerhead 1-28 28/375 U-2/13 BR-3/19 CH-5/42  
FB-1/8 GA-7/87 HA-5/44 JE-5/162  
Starling, Euro 1-29 22/4676 U-2/55 BR-2/206 CH-1/200  
FB-1/12 GA-7/1554 HA-4/188 JE-5/2461  
Vireo, White-eyed 1-13 2/2 GA-(1)13,G; HA-CP(1)1,NP  
Vireo, Solitary 15-28 4/5 U-1/1 CH-1/1 GA-1/1 HA-1/2  
Warb, Orange-crn 1-28 9/32 U-1/10 BR-2/4 CH-2/7  
GA-2/3 HA-2/8  
Warb, Yellow-rump 1-29 30/836 U-2/85 BR-3/215 CH-4/206  
FB-1/10 GA-7/126 HA-7/135 JE-6/59  
Warb, Pine 1-13 3/10 GA-1/1 HA-2/9  
Warb, Palm 7-24 2/3 CH-(2)7,G; GA-(1)24,ALL  
Yellowthroat, Com 1-28 9/33 U-1/10 BR-3/7 CH-3/14  
FB-1/1 GA-1/1  
Warb, Wilson's 1-23 4/6 BR-2/4 HA-2/2  
Cardinal, Northrn 1-29 19/206 U-2/55 BR-3/51 CH-2/32  
FB-1/3 GA-2/3 HA-7/56 JE-2/6  
Sparrow, Chipping 1-16 6/131 U-1/30 FB-1/15 HA-3/76  
WA-1/10  
Sparrow, Field 1-29 5/30 U-1/1 GA-1/5 HA-3/24  
Sparrow, Vesper 1-28 9/76 BR-1/2 CH-1/1 GA-1/3  
HA-4/68 JE-2/2  
Sparrow, Savannah 1-29 24/834 U-1/100 BR-2/75 CH-4/176  
FB-1/20 GA-7/171 HA-5/213 JE-4/79  
Sparrow, Shp-tail 22-24 2/4 GA-(1)22,PTF; GA-SL(3)24,ALL  
Sparrow, Seaside 23-29 2/4 CH-AW(2)23,WC; GA-(2)29,PTF  
Sparrow, Fox 8-16 3/4 BR-PP(1)16,X; HA-(1)8,DB;  
HA-(2)15,DB  
Sparrow, Song 1-28 10/38 U-1/1 BR-1/2 CH-2/4  
GA-2/2 HA-2/9 JE-2/20  
Sparrow, Lincolns 2-28 10/32 U-1/3 BR-1/1 CH-2/7  
GA-2/3 HA-4/18  
Sparrow, Swamp 1-29 11/61 U-1/5 BR-2/4 CH-4/38  
GA-2/5 HA-2/9  
Sparrow, Wht-thrt 2-29 10/120 U-1/12 BR-1/10 CH-2/51  
GA-1/1 HA-5/46  
Sparrow, Wht-crnl 1-29 10/114 U-1/3 CH-1/1 GA-2/9  
HA-5/81 JE-1/20  
Sparrow, Harris' 1-15 4/52 HA-4/52  
Junco, Dark-eyed 7-15 2/43 HA-(18)7,G; HA-(25)15,DB  
Blackbird, Red-wg 1-29 28/14480 U-1/200 BR-3/1216  
CH-4/2272 FB-2/130 GA-7/5347 HA-5/515  
JE-6/4800  
Meadowlark, East 1-28 24/618 U-1/65 BR-3/188 CH-4/24  
FB-2/29 GA-6/130 HA-4/100 JE-4/82  
Blackbird, Brewer 1-16 5/120 U-1/40 BR-1/8 HA-2/47 WA-1/25  
Grackle, Gr-tail 1-28 21/2029 U-2/112 BR-2/48  
CH-3/750 GA-6/804 HA-3/24 JE-5/291  
Grackle, Bt-tail 1-29 8/259 U-1/50 BR-3/82 CH-1/50  
GA-1/50 JE-2/27  
Grackle, Common 1-24 12/430 U-1/100 FB-1/10 GA-4/59  
HA-5/241 JE-1/20  
Cowbird, Brn-head 1-24 13/531 U-1/35 BR-1/20 GA-3/138  
HA-5/238 JE-3/100  
Finch, Purple 7-15 2/2 HA-(1)7,G; HA-(1)15,DB  
Finch, House 1-22 1/6 HA-(6)1-22,G  
Goldfinch, Amer 1-8 7/80 BR-1/5 CH-1/2 FB-1/8  
GA-1/20 HA-3/45  
Sparrow, House 1-29 10/159 U-1/25 GA-3/50 HA-4/39  
JE-2/45

TOTAL INDIVIDUALS: 126203

LIST OF OBSERVER CODES: Al Clarke(AC); Lynne Aldrich, Peter Gottschling(AG); Arch Dillard, Giff Reaton, Bill Kossack(ALL); Arch Dillard, Richard Uzar, Dwight Peake, Sam House(AU); Bill & Bryan Tarbox(BBT); Bob Honig(BH); David Bradford(DB); Don & Lee Richardson(DR); Gail Luckner(G); Bob Honig, Geneva La Vern(HL); John Whittle(JW); Mary Ann & Bob Moore(MBM); ML & Ellen Owens(MO); Noel Pettingell(NP); Peggy Milstead(PM); Phyllis & Tony Frank(PTF); Rob Thacker, Jim Day(TD); John & Jana Whittle, Lanet Coleman(WC); John & Jana Whittle, Lanet Coleman, Ross Foreman(WCF); Warren Pruess(WP); P.D. Hulce, Steve Schultz, Don Francis(X)

LIST OF LOCATION CODES:

Anahuac NWR(AW)  
Brazos Bend St. Park(BB)  
Bolivar Flats(BF)  
Brazoria NWR(BW)  
Challenger 7 Park(CP)  
Davis Estates Rd.(DE)  
High Island(HI)  
Peach Point(PP)  
San Bernard NWR(SB)  
Spring Creek Park(SC)  
San Jacinto State Park(SJ)  
San Luis Pass(SL)  
Texas City Dike(TCD)  
West Harris County(WHC)

LIST OF COUNTY CODES:

Brazoria (BR)  
Chambers (CH)  
Fort Bend (FB)  
Galveston (GA)  
Harris (HA)  
Jefferson (JE)  
Upper Texas Coast (U)  
Waller (WA)

Western Grebe - J. and J. Whittle February 23, 1992

Observed on beach east of Bolivar Flats. Two birds in close proximity to each other, diving and remaining submerged for 20-30 secs at a time. Occasionally raised out of the water and flapped wings. Large grebes with long slender necks. Black cap (down to and including the eyes), back of neck, and back. White lower half of head, front of neck and underside. Tail almost nonexistent. Bill was yellowish, long and relatively thin.

Tundra Swan - Gail Diane Luckner February 7, 1992

This bird is the Chambers county bird previously documented in the November, December, and January CH.

American Black Duck - J. and J. Whittle February 23, 1992

Two ducks observed on the south corner of Shoveler Pond, Anahuac NWR. Large ducks (same size as Mottled Ducks) initially resting with heads in backs. After approximately 1 minute, they became more alert and heads could be clearly seen. One bird twice raised wings, but stayed on the ground. Birds eventually took flight directly into the air, but landed less than 100 yards away, but largely hidden from view. Body (back, wings and undersides) dark brown. Head and neck lighter brown with darker line from back of bill through eye and beyond. Sharp demarcation between body and neck color. Back, wing and side feathers were solid dark brown except for a very narrow lighter edge to each feather. Speculum was blue or blue-violet; no trace of white. Wing linings were vivid white. One bird had a very dull (but clear) yellow bill (female), while other had a brighter (but still somewhat subdued) yellow bill (male). Legs were bright orange. Elimination of Mottled Duck is based on the darkness of the bird, the typical solid dark brown centered feathers with lighter color only on the edges, and the brightness of the white wing linings.

Swainson's Hawk - Bob Honig February 2, 1992

Adult, light morph. Dark hood (head and breast) except for conspicuous white throat. Light belly with fine dark barring visible at close range. Back and upper surfaces of wings dark with no light mottling. Upper surface of tail dark, finely barred with blackish plus a wider blackish subterminal band. Initially seen at 50 to 75 feet perched in a short tree. Flew a few hundred feet to treeline - in glide with distinct dihedral - where it perched for a few minutes before being chased by an adult Red-tailed Hawk of approximately equal size (maybe slightly larger). In flight, distinct contrast between white wing linings and dark flight feathers. (Sketches included.)

Golden Eagle - Bob Honig February 2, 1992

Dark crown; tip of beak dark, lighter behind, cere and gape yellow. Nape and area behind eye golden buff. Upperparts dark with some tawny markings visible on upper surface of wing in flight at close range only. Underparts all dark except for white patches at base of the primaries. Tail broadly tipped with black, white at base. No other white areas were visible in flight. No white was present on belly, back, axillaries or wing linings. Much larger than nearby Red-tailed Hawk.

Stilt Sandpiper - P.D. Hulce February 16, 1992

Plump shorebird with distinct white eyestripe and longish slightly decurved bill. Long neck and legs. Smaller than dowitchers. Larger than peeps. About the same size as Dunlin.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo - P. Gottschling, L Aldrich February 29, 1992 Called along Clear Creek in Friendswood. It gave its typical "hoot, hoot, hoot" call. This will be the fourth year in a row this species nested behind our house.

Burrowing Owl - Arch Dillard February 24, 1992

Small owl perched at base of bacharis bush. Bobbed up and down. Spotted dark brown back. Long legs. Typical appearance and behavior. Flew short distances and returned. Seen by all observers from close range on a foggy, rainy day.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird - Phyllis and Tony Frank February 1-29, 1992

Hummingbird - had a green crown and back. White breast and belly with green flanks, with green joining together at top of breast. Wings appeared dark.

When first noticed, throat had small gorget spots scattered in throat. As month proceeded, spots joined and more appeared at sides of neck. The gorget color was a dark red. This hummingbird is an immature male ruby-throat based on gorget color and plumage.

Anna's Hummingbird - Mary Ann and Bob Moore February 13-27, 1992 Seen on intermittent days during the noted period. Probably the same individual reported in the December CH.

Rufous Hummingbird - Mary Ann and Bob Moore February 7-28, 1992

One immature male seen daily. Stop action photos show outer four pair of retrices to be cinnamon-rufous on basal half(approx.). A second Rufous was present Jan 9 through 16. Id based on photos.

Couch's/Tropical Kingbird - Gail Diane Luckner February 7, 1992. This bird was documented in the December and January CH.

Cave Swallow - Phyllis and Tony Frank February 22, 1992

Observed at Sea Rim State Park boat house were they have been presert previously. Smaller in size than Purple Martins which were present. These swallows has bluish head, back, tail and wings. The chin forehead and rump were all the same buffy brown color. The tail was squared off, not forked. No other swallows were present. Only other similar swallow is the Cliff Swallow. Cliff Swallows were eliminated based on the chin color.

House Finch - Gail Diane Luckner February 1-22, 1992

Between one and six birds observed at feeder in east Harris county. These birds have been previously documented in the CH.

FROM THE JANUARY CH

Ovenbird - P. and T. Frank January 4, 1992

Small bird with warbler shaped/sized bill. Crown was stripped tan with black on either side. Upperparts were brown. Breast was whitish with large black spots.

## CONTACTS

SEND CLEARING HOUSE bird sightings to: Clearing House, (OG), P.O. Box 271374, Houston 77277.

TEXAS RARE BIRD ALERT TAPE, sponsored by Houston Audubon Society, 992-2757.

SEND SPOONBILL MATERIAL to Editor, Judy Boyce, 5546 Aspen, Houston 77081, Home: 668-5359, Work: 771-2432 Fax: 713/771-2432 Monday-Friday, business hours.

OG MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION, dues, subscriptions and address changes. Edward J. Lebeau, Jr., 5459 Beechnut, Houston, Texas 77096 (713) 664-4900. Annual dues \$15. Non-member Spoonbill subscriptions \$13.



#### CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Spring is here, birds are nesting, and that means once again it is time to think about the Texas Breeding Bird Atlas Project (TBBAP). This year's efforts focus on filling in gaps in data (see "Chairman's Message" in *The Spoonbill*, May 1991, for a brief overview of the project's first 5 years). Because it depends on volunteers to gather data, the Atlas needs your help. Keith Arnold, TBBAP Director, wrote the OG after his presentation at our March meeting, "I want to reiterate my appreciation for the opportunity to bring the Atlas project before your group once again. It is always good to visit my birding friends. ... We would like (OG) members to know how much (the OG contribution of \$450) means to us and to the project. OG has been in the forefront of support, both financial and in the field, and we are most appreciative ...."

To continue its support, the OG will facilitate your participation by scheduling a blockbusting (i.e., a group of birders quickly census an area) outing every weekend (except those on which there is an OG field trip locally) from 11 April through late July. Jerry Caraviotis and Bob Schwartz, in contact with TBBAP regional coordinators, are identifying areas that still need attention. Lynne Aldrich and Peter Gottschling, David Bradford, Winnie Burkett, Jim Day and Rob Thacker, Phyllis and Tony Frank, P.D. Hulce, Gail Luckner and Aaron Stoley are among those who will be leading outings (SEE PAGE 1 FOR DETAILS ABOUT THE FIRST FEW TRIPS). Also you can pledge to the Birdathon team of Fred Collins, Peter Vennema and myself--we will be counting birds on 25 or 26 April to raise funds for the TBBAP.

The Atlas field card makes data collection simple --observe a bird, and merely record the code that corresponds to how you observed it: O = observed but not believed to be breeding; POSSIBLE BREEDING: X = observed in suitable nesting habitat, S = singing male; PROBABLE BREEDING: M = multiple singing males, P = pair observed, T = territory being maintained (by defense or over time), C = courtship or copulation, N = visiting probable nest site, B = nest building by wrens or excavation of holes by woodpeckers; CONFIRMED BREEDING: NB = nest building (except wrens and woodpeckers), DD = distraction display, UN = used nest, FY = adult carrying food for young or feeding recently fledged young, FL = recently fledged young (of altricial species) incapable of sustained flight or downy young (of

precocial species) restricted to natal area, ON = evidence of occupied nest or adults incubating or brooding, FS = adult carrying fetal sac, NE = nest with eggs, NY = nest with young (for FY, FL, NE, NY: cowbird eggs or young confirms both cowbird and host species).

Pete Dunne, inspired by the memory of watching a Wood Thrush nest during his youth, eloquently provides insight into breeding bird atlasing ("Atlasing and the Art of Bird Watching," in *American Birds*, summer 1991). That was in what he called, "the Summer of Looking Close--one of the greatest summers of my life." Here are some excerpts from Pete's article: "As Gerry (an atlaser in Washington state) puts it, 'atlasing is the ultimate thing to do with your birding skills.' ... A bird atlas project is an important mechanism for gathering information that can be used to accommodate the needs of both people and birds.

"... Atlasing is different from most other types of birding. With atlasing, locating and identifying a bird is only the initial step in a process. Atlasing takes birding from tic-listing to birding with a purpose. Atlasing directs birders to look closely at the birds they find, makes birders study and interpret behavior; searches for the evidence and clues that may lead to the ultimate objective: to confirm breeding. Atlasing brings birders back to a time when people were bird watchers; back to roots. " . . . Gerry's elation (at confirming nesting of Swainson's Thrush, common in his atlasing area) had nothing to do with relative abundance. It had to do with meeting a challenge and mastering it with acquired investigative skills. It had to do with birding with a purpose and of coming to an understanding with the world by using the ancient art of bird watching.

"But for those whose interest in birds must be whet by paucity, there is hope. If atlases fail in their ultimate objective, if human ambitions eclipse the needs of other living things, there is a real possibility that the Summers of Looking Close will assume greater significance in the future. They will serve those who follow us as a yardstick to measure loss. "It has been many years, you see, since Wood Thrushes nested within earshot of my parents' house. They exist now only in memory. A memory planted during the Summer of Looking Close."

I hope you will join us this year for a Texas "Summer of Looking Close." Bob Honig 665-6963

ORNITHOLOGY GROUP (Outdoor Nature Club)  
c/o Peggy Milstead  
10810 Burdine  
Houston, Texas 77096  
(RETURN POSTAGE GUARANTEED)

SOLICITED MAIL

TIME SENSITIVE MATERIAL

DO NOT DELAY

Nonprofit Org  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Houston, Texas  
Permit No. 1063