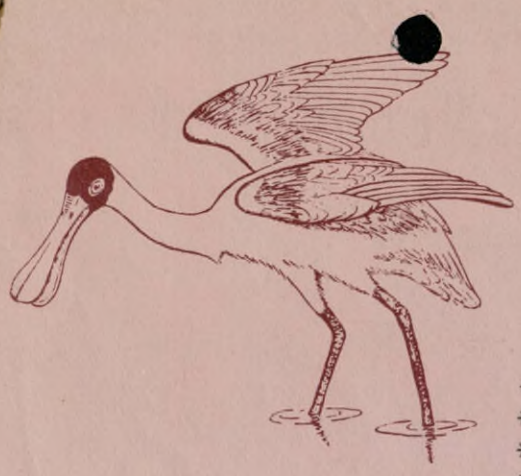

THE SPOONBILL

Volume IV No. 1

May 1955

"When the good Lord made the earth, He made it pretty with clouds and mountains and trees and flowers and the ocean and in a million other ways. Then He decided His creation shouldn't just look good but must have music; so He made the birds. And long before man ever got out of his cave, there was music on earth. And the music was made by birds. And never has man, since he learned to make music, ever made a note as sweet as a note that comes from a bird."
-- Raymond Carlson
--ARIZONA HIGHWAYS (March 1955)

Published by the Ornithology Group, Outdoor Nature Club, Houston, Texas

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Note from Mac Ramsey (Past Chairman of Ornithology Group)

" * * * I would like to personally thank each and every one of you for helping make the year 1954-55 a highly successful one for the O.G's. Your enthusiasm and spirits were greatly appreciated by me as well as our other officers. Let me urge you to give your full support and energies to this year's program and officers, so as to further the work of the Outdoor Nature Club."

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FORTHCOMING ACTIVITIES

May 21-22 Outdoor Nature Club overnight trip. Meeting time for this trip has been changed to 6:00 a.m., Saturday, May 21, at Katy, Texas. (For further details see current issue of "Nature Club Notes") This trip should be of particular interest to birders as much of the territory covered will be in the Edwards Plateau, home of the Golden-cheeked warbler and Black-capped vireo.

June 2 (Thursday) Meeting of Ornithology Group, 5815 Schuler . . . . 8 P.M.

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ORNITHOLOGY GROUP REPORTS

April 7 - Business Meeting (Jerry Baker)

During the business part of the meeting new officers for next year were elected: Jimmy Murray, Chairman; Mabel Cline, Secretary-Treasurer; and Leota Stilwell, Field Trip Chairman.

Leonard McWhirter, retiring Projects Chairman, said he had again put up the signs on Thursday Island which prohibits landing on the island during the nesting season of the Spoonbills and several other species of water birds.

Josiephine Wilkin, retiring Field Trip Chairman, gave a general resume of field trips held during the year. She stated that a field trip was held each month except July. In addition to regular field trips, the Ornithology Group participated in field trips scheduled by the Outdoor Nature Club and the Texas Ornithological Society.

Good news for all "birders"! We learned that the new check lists will be printed soon, as the supply of the check-lists now in use is almost exhausted.

The compilers tell us the check-lists will be "tried out" in the field before being printed, and the birds will be listed in alphabetical order.

There was discussion of a long-dreamed-of home for the Outdoor Nature Club and its various study groups, with a laboratory, workroom, darkroom and library. One member reminded us of the fact that the dream could very well become a reality in a few years as the Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary will soon be paid for and money could be made available for the home.

All members deplored the publicity which a local newspaper gave to a young collector of bird eggs, as such activities are in direct opposition to the ideals and purposes of all conservation groups.

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April 17 - Bird Finding by Boat (Norma Oates)

We had gone only a few miles down Highlands Bayou when a hawk perched on a post near an old dilapidated pier was found to be a White-tailed Kite. The kite was unafraid and remained perched on the same post while we landed on the pier and walked within a hundred feet of its perch. It then circled out over the marsh and came back to perch on another post nearby. (Note:- This was the second White-tailed Kite seen in the bay area within a seven day period -- it would be interesting to know how many others have seen Kites in this vicinity recently.)

As we cruised on down the bayou many Clapper Rails, Seaside Sparrows, gulls, terns and other marsh and shore birds were observed. However, we were looking for rarer species, so headed out across Jones Lake toward the Intracoastal Waterway. Here on a low shell reef we found our first pair of Ostercatchers, also a great number of black skimmers and Black-bellied plover. On another long chain of islands, covered with a low growth of shrubs, we saw hundreds of Spoonbills, as well as numerous herons, egrets and white ibis.

After a picnic lunch we headed toward Offatts Bayou in search of loons. Before reaching the bayou, however, we could hardly believe our eyes when we saw a Magnificent Frigate bird flying over! It circled high over-head, banking on the turns and spreading its long forked tail.

At this point we thought we had hit the "jack-pot", but in addition to the six Common Loons and eight or ten Eared Grebes found in Offatts Bayou, we also saw one immature Bonaparte's Gull swimming along with the loons. We watched the gull for some time both in the water and in flight and could distinguish the wing markings, the black band on the tip of the tail and the round black dot on the side of the face.

Those making this trip were Darris Massingill, Leota Stilwell, Josiephine Wilkin, Norma Oates and, of course, the skipper, Mac Ramsey.
NOTE: ROSEATE TERN IDENTIFIED BY STILWELL, WILKIN, & RAMSEY (HIGHLAND BAYOU)

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April 21 - O.G. Field Trip (Josiephine Wilkin)

The six "birdomaniacs" arrived in the Sheldon area at 3:45 A.M. and Carl Aiken tried in his best screech owl voice to get a real owl to answer but it was not his day. We did get one owl - Barred - after we had given up hope. We found birding in the early morning very enjoyable.

This group joined the main party at 7:30 A.M. at the San Jacinto Battlegrounds with 51 birds on their list. Here a Coral Snake was found and the boys wanted to bring it home, but when you try putting a live Coral Snake in the car with three women it's "no soap" so the snake was put in a paper bag, zipped in a small case, and placed in the trunk of the car.

Our birding route continued along Miller Cut-off Road to the Baytown Tunnel, thru La Porte to Kemah. Here all 25 observers were present and ate lunch together. Everyone enjoyed the fine birding (especially the warblers) Kemah has to offer, and swapped "bird tales" of the day. Our next meeting place was the railroad track which crosses the Freeway about 4 miles from the causeway - Houston side. This is a good area to explore and some time was spent here. We could see the two posts the White-tailed Kite used as perches on April 17 - he was not there. At the ball park on Galveston Island 6 Fulvous Tree Ducks were observed, 4 at close range. Here the group split again, some returning home, others to the west end of the

island, and one group to Kempner Park. The combined total for the day was 157 species of which the "bonus" species (for this time of year) were:- Avocet, Brewer's and Rusty Blackbirds, Wood Duck, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Marbled Godwit, Goldfinch, Mountain Plover, Clapper Rail, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, White-crowned and White-throated Sparrows, Warbling Vireo, Black-poll, Myrtle, Orange-crowned and Worm-eating Warblers, Ovenbird, Louisiana Waterthrush, Winter Wren and Hairy Woodpecker.

The observers were:- *Carl Aiken, *Tommy Alexander, Jerry Baker, Agatha Boettcher, Nance Cunningham, *Victor Emanuel, Rilla Hammat (Kansas City) Sue Harris, Marjorie Hopkins (Dallas), Mable Kaiser, Lloyd Lambert, Darris Massingill, Bill, C.R. and Rita Mattei, Edna Miner, Jimmy Murray, Norma Oates, Mac Ramsey, Charlotte Reindl, Marguerite Robinson, *Ruth Stamm, Leota Stilwell, *Josiephine Wilkin, and *Ella Wolfer.

* "Birdomaniacs"

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April 24 - Field Trip to Twin Oaks - Outdoor Nature Club (Nance Cunningham)

Before arriving at Sugarland, several groups of birders enjoyed the Dickcissels fluttering above the reeds and singing in a marsh filled with cattails and sedges. Here too, were found male and female Red-wing Blackbirds near nests. The party assembled at Sugarland and proceeded along winding country roads through fields covered with white prickly poppies. Several kinds of penstemon and Larkspur of delicate hue were encountered. The number of wildflowers totalled 84.

Our visitor from Kansas City, Miss Rilla Hammat, reported seeing a Caracara, a Roadrunner and three Yellow-headed blackbirds. The party was chagrinned to think that it took a visitor to spot our Texas birds.

Up the hill at the farmhouse under the venerable oaks, the welcoming committee consisted of Mr. and Mrs. R. L. Praytor, Mrs. Leona Richards, (Mrs. Praytor's mother), and Dr. and Mrs. S. R. Warner. Dr. Warner is the retired head of the Biology Department of Sam Houston State Teacher's College and some of his former students enjoyed renewing old acquaintances. Lunch was eaten accompanied by cold liquid refreshment provided by our gracious host. After lunch Dr. Warner spoke to the group and identified botanical specimens thrust upon him.

Then, Dr. James Lubkin, also from Kansas City, and an ardent birder was taken to see the bird rookery near Eagle Lake. The birds were discovered from the road and the comment most heard was, "Think of living right across the road from this". There is a well-populated settlement on the other side of the highway. It had not then been discovered how rich in birding the area really was.

Still definitely on the outside looking in, the group rejoiced when Mr. and Mrs. J. L. McCreary, the owners of the property appeared, said some magic words and opened the gates. They were kind enough to lead the cars around the lake where a very close view of the nests was obtained. Among the birds seen here were Double-crested and Olivaceous Cormorants, Anhingas, Common and Snowy Egrets, Great Blue, Little Blue, Green and Black-crowned NightHerons, Glossy Ibis, Blue-winged Teal, American Coots, Killdeer and Water Pipits.

Mr. and Mrs. McCreary are deeply interested in the welfare of these birds and a mutual understanding was quickly reached. An invitation was extended for any group sharing their concern for the birds, to visit the lake. The day, however, was to have still another climax. Leaving the first lake, another lake was seen where chasing each other across the duckweed were Florida and Purple Gallinules. Dr. Lubkin immediately claimed a new life-bird - the Purple Gallinule. There were numerous Sora Rails, and picking their way nonchalantly among the larger birds were three Yellow-headed Blackbirds.

Among other interesting birds of the day were Franklin Gulls, Western Kingbird and Sycamore Warbler. A Black-capped Vireo was heard at the Praytor's home by Mr. Joe M. Heiser, Jr. Vital statistics would reveal 250 miles travelled, 66 birds seen and 44 people attending.

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DID YOU KNOW

The whooping crane lays two and sometimes three eggs but only one is fertile.

CLEARING HOUSE

April 2 - Broadwinged Hawk - seen near Huntsville State Park (A.Y.)

April 10 - White-tailed Kite - seen near Seabrook (See April Spoonbill)

April 15 - Whip-poor-will - heard at 5:15 a.m. by Ellen Greer at 1111 Arbor, Houston, Texas

April 16 - Black Tern, Chuck-wills-widow (flushed twice), Crested Flycatchers (numerous) Yellow-breasted Chats (numerous) Black-throated Green Warbler, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, all observed in the San Jacinto Battleground and Baytown Tunnel area by George Palmer, Josiephine Wilkin and Ella Wolfer.

April 17 - See Bird Finding by Boat

SEE ATTACHED CHECK-LIST

April 19 - Baltimore Oriole (male) seen by Charlotte Reindl at her bird bath, 342 Parkview Ave., Houston, Texas.

April 21 - See O.G. Field Trip

April 23 - Sora Rail seen twice at same location in Herman Park by Mac Ramsey

April 23 - Sandwich Tern seen in Galveston, and Painted Bunting seen on Highway 6 near LaMarque by George Palmer, Robert Millette and Dr. Lubkin of Kansas City.

April 24 - Dickcissels - large flocks seen in the neighborhood of San Jacinto Battlegrounds, also in the fields around San Leon by Leota Stilwell, Norma Oates, Ruth Stamm and Carrie Holcomb.

April 24 - See Outdoor Nature Field Trip to Twin Oaks

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OFF THE PRESS

HOUSTON PRESS - "Whooping Cranes Start Trek North"

WASHINGTON, April 22 -- The world's last flock of whooping cranes, 21 of them, are heading north from Texas, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reported today.

The sole survivors of a once-flourishing species are making their annual spring migration from the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on Texas' Gulf Coast. The "whoopers" will travel to Canada's Northwest Territory by way of Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska and the Dakotas.

In making known the flight schedule, John L. Farley, director of the service, asked the public to give the birds every possible chance of survival.

"A safe passage through these states,"Farley said, "is essential as the cranes move northward in small groups to reproduce their kind. Only by increasing their numbers can these creatures win . . . . . the fight for survival . . ."

Wildlife experts are particularly concerned about the cranes because their numbers dropped from 24 to 21 last year. Federal law prohibits shooting or otherwise molesting the crane.

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MISCELLANEOUS CORRESPONDENCE

Mr. Larry Burgess (20 miles SE of Alberta's (Canada) NW corner
Thursday, March 17, 10:08 PM, clear-windy, drifting
snow, 15° below zero)

". . . Last month I became engaged to the nicest blond nurse I could ever hope to meet. We are to be married in Sudbury Ont. on Sept. 24. Her name by the way is Jean Campbell. I expect she'll be an expert bird watcher before many months.

". . . Up here (bird) life is hard to find . . . I'd sure like to see a Snowy Owl and would give a week's pay to see a Gyrfalcon."

ANNUAL NESTING CENSUS - LITTLE THICKET SANCTUARY - MAY 28-29

One of the yearly projects of the Ornithology Group is the census of nesting birds at the Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary. This year it will be held on Sunday morning, May 29, and, as it is necessary to get an early start, most members taking part in this count will want to camp overnight at the Sanctuary. You should arrive in ample time Saturday evening to arrange sleeping quarters. Instructions for making the count and area assignments will be made Saturday night or Sunday morning.

The time is limited and in order to cover the entire area we will need the cooperation of all O.G. members who are able to attend this outing. A good time was enjoyed by those who attended last year, and we are looking forward to another pleasant trip this year. Contact Leota Stilwell, MA-8671 (telephone after 6:30 P.M.) if you can assist in the 1955 nesting census.

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REPORT ON ANNUAL SPRING ROUND-UP

We hope to publish the final results of the Houston Spring Round-up in the June issue of The Spoonbill. In order to get all the data listed and compiled in the shortest possible time, we urge all who held party counts on May 1 within 75 miles of Houston to send a copy of their check-list to Noel Pettingell, 1814 Berry Street, Houston 4, Texas, as soon as possible. Be sure to include the names of those in your party, total mileage (by car and by foot), hours spent in the field, as well as the route and area covered.

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TOO HOT TO HOLD - (for the June Issue)

May 1 - - - Swainson's Warblers (2 males, 1 female), Bachman's (Pinewoods) Sparrow, Brown-headed Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Bell's Vireo and Roadrunner, all recorded by Joe M. Heiser, Jr. in the Little Thicket Sanctuary Spring Round-up. This is a first record for Bell's Vireo at the sanctuary and the second year Swainson's Warblers have been seen in the area.

* *

Since the resignation of our most capable former editor, Noel Pettingell, -- because of "matrimonial commitments" -- no permanent arrangements have been made for getting out future issues of The Spoonbill. Until such arrangements are made, the editorial duties will be assumed by Norma Oates with the assistance of Mrs. Josiephine Wilkin. We will do our best, with the cooperation and support of members of the Ornithology Group, to keep The Spoonbill up to its present high standard.

All readers are requested to send in news items - such as rare or unusual birds seen in your neighborhoods - on your vacation trips - or birding trips; let us have any announcements of "Forthcoming Activities" which are of interest to the Spoonbill readers. Also send articles about birds appearing in current Magazines or newspapers so that we may pass the information along. Any comments or suggestions will be welcome.

Mrs. Norma C. Oates 5908 Charlotte Houston 5, Texas	Mrs. Josiephine Wilkin 402 Sue Houston 22, Texas

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