



# THE SPOONBILL

Volume 5      No. 11  
March 1957

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\* BURROWING OWL \*  
\* One of nature's drollest creatures, the Burrowing \*  
\* Owl spends each day in pantomining "How do you do?" \*  
\* to family, friends, and passers-by, and in eating \*  
\* his weight in things you wouldn't eat your weight \*  
\* in, not even his. More at home under the range than \*  
\* on it, he knows it's cheaper to board than to build \*  
\* - so he redecorates an old gopher hole. He will \*  
\* probably twist his head off if you walk around him \*  
\* enough times. \*  
\* Charles Harper - Nov. 1956 Ford Times \*  
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## FORTHCOMING ACTIVITIES

March 30 - Saturday field trip to Galveston Island - Meet at Busch Stadium at 6:30 a.m.  
We expect to see early spring migrants along the Coast - Leader Carl Aiken.

April 6-7 Texas Ornithological Society Annual Meeting in Austin, Texas (Terrace Motel)

April 28 - O.G.Spring Roundup - Details will be announced in April SPOONBILL

## Special Notices

### Next Meeting

Our next meeting will be held at the River Oaks Garden Center, 2503 Westheimer on Thursday, April 11th at 8:00 p.m.

This is the fifth anniversary of the Ornithology Group which was organized in 1952 as a bird study group of the Outdoor Nature Club. After a short business meeting at which time an election of officers for the coming year will be held, our guests, the Botany and Photography Groups, will be entertained with a program of colored slides, after which birthday cake will be served! This is "get-acquainted" time and we would like our new members to attend as well as all "old regulars". J. F. Murray, Chairman.

### Spring Migration Count

Carl Aiken, 3767 Georgetown, Houston 5, Texas, will serve as recorder for spring migrants going through this portion of the Gulf Coast area. He needs check-lists from all birders - beginning immediately and continuing through April and May.

The check-lists should separate migrants by areas and dates - for instance, birds observed in the Houston vicinity should be on a separate list from those seen on the same day in the Battlegrounds area; or the Kemah and the Bay-shore area; and a separate list should cover Galveston Island, etc. etc. It is also important to show an estimate of the number of each species recorded -- it is helpful to know whether just one individual was seen or whether 10, or 100, or 1000, or more were observed.

Let's all take the extra time to send these lists to Carl so we can have an accurate picture of the numbers and kinds of migrants passing through this area.

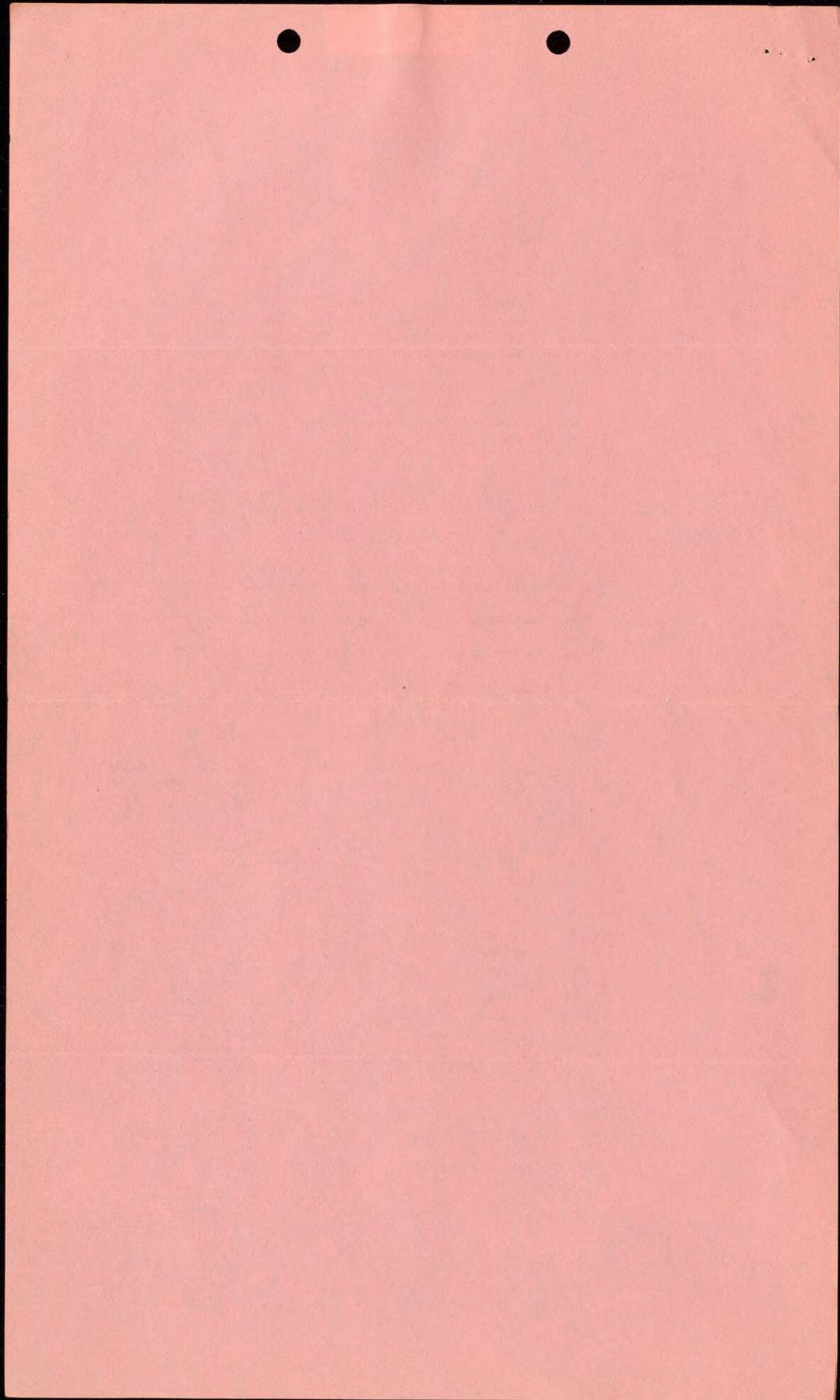
### Nominating Committee

This committee requests that all members who have suggestions as to the selection of Ornithology Group officers for the 1957-1958 season, contact one of the following:

John Frels -	UN 2-2524
Darris Massingill -	WA 1-4441
James Murray -	UN 1-8837
Norma Oates -	MA 3-6140
Mrs.B.H.Wilkin -	ME 5-6679

### Indigo Buntings

Mr. Aaron M. Bagg who, for several years, has made an extensive study of the spring migration of Indigo Buntings and Rose-breasted grosbeaks, would be grateful for records of first spring migrants of these two species as well as dates this spring when they are



present in peak numbers. This information can be sent to Mr. Aaron M. Bagg, Farm Street, Dover, Mass., or to the SPOONBILL Editor who will send the data on to Mr. Bagg.

#### ORNITHOLOGY GROUP REPORTS

##### Feb. 24, 1957 - Field Trip to see Sandhill Cranes - (C. B. Gilman)

It would appear that our group is gaining more confidence in the predictions of the weatherman, for with complete disregard for the heavy fog and lowering skies, thirty-one consecrated birders met at Westheimer and Post Oak Roads for a visit to the haunts of the sandhill cranes.

A very short side trip was made just inside the vast area enclosed by the Addick's Dam where we found the Western Meadowlark (singing) Great Blue Heron, Greater yellowlegs and Snipe. We then proceeded to the ranch-house of the Cinco Ranch, in the vicinity of which we spent about an hour and found an unusually large flock of Harris' sparrows - about sixteen were counted. Here also were seen Pied-billed grebes, Vermilion flycatcher, Sapsucker and large numbers of blackbirds, cowbirds and grackles.

After obtaining permission, we penetrated further into the wilds(?) of the ranch, and there fulfilled the primary purpose of the trip by finding a considerable number of sandhill cranes. The twenty power spotting scope brought by Mr. and Mrs. Geo. Bateman was used to advantage in observing the cranes.

Weather conditions continued to improve, and a suitable spot was found in a wooded area for the picnic lunch for which everyone was well prepared.

After returning to Westheimer Road some further birding was done, the most notable additions to our list being Caracara, Peregrine falcon, and Blue, Snow, White-fronted and Canada Geese, plus more large flocks of sandhill cranes. The list for the day included fifty-four species.

We were particularly happy to welcome to our group Mesdames J. L. Hooks, H.B.Lindsay and S.T.Wier all from Beaumont; Mr. and Mrs. Bruce Reid of Silsbee (who brought along their pet Bluebird named Bee Bee - See life story of Bee Bee, this issue page 5 ); also Mr. J. H. Matthews of Sherman, and John Williford of Houston who joined both the Outdoor Nature Club and the O.G. Group.

In addition to the above, those attending this field trip were Mr. and Mrs. George Bateman, Jimmy Murray, Josiephine Wilkin, Klela Klaische, Ronald Fowler, Vic Emanuel, Carl Aiken, Jerry Baker, Darris Massingill, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Aldrich, Helen Wolfer, Mary Clark, Carrie Holcomb, Norma Oates, Lecta Stilwell, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Hoffman, Nance Cunningham, Raymond McDavid and Mr. and Mrs. C. B. Gilman.

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#### CLEARING HOUSE

- December 26, - Bewick's wrens and 1 Sprague's pipit - Barker Dam; 7 Bewick's wrens seen  
1956 at same location on Jan. 5, 1957 - John O'Neill
- February 9 - Rough-legged hawk soaring high over Addicks-Satsuma Road; Western meadow-  
lark and Lark Sparrow heard singing on Katy-Hockley Road NCO & L.Stilwell.
- February 10 - Inca Doves at Kempner Park, Galveston - NCO LS
- Feb.11,12,13 - Brown-headed nuthatches at Hunter's Creek School - John O'Neill
- Feb. 17 - Mrs. Jerry Baker reported a male Rufous hummingbird perched for about 15  
minutes just outside her window in a Fringe Tree.
- Feb. 20 - About 80 sandhill cranes, 5 Lapland longspurs, 7 Short-eared owls (all  
marks noted at about 55 feet) 1 Sprague's pipit - just north of Clodine  
John O'Neill.
- Feb. 24 - An albino cowbird - all white except a brownish head was observed near  
Dewalt by Mr. and Mrs. Charles W. Hamilton.

#### Purple Martins

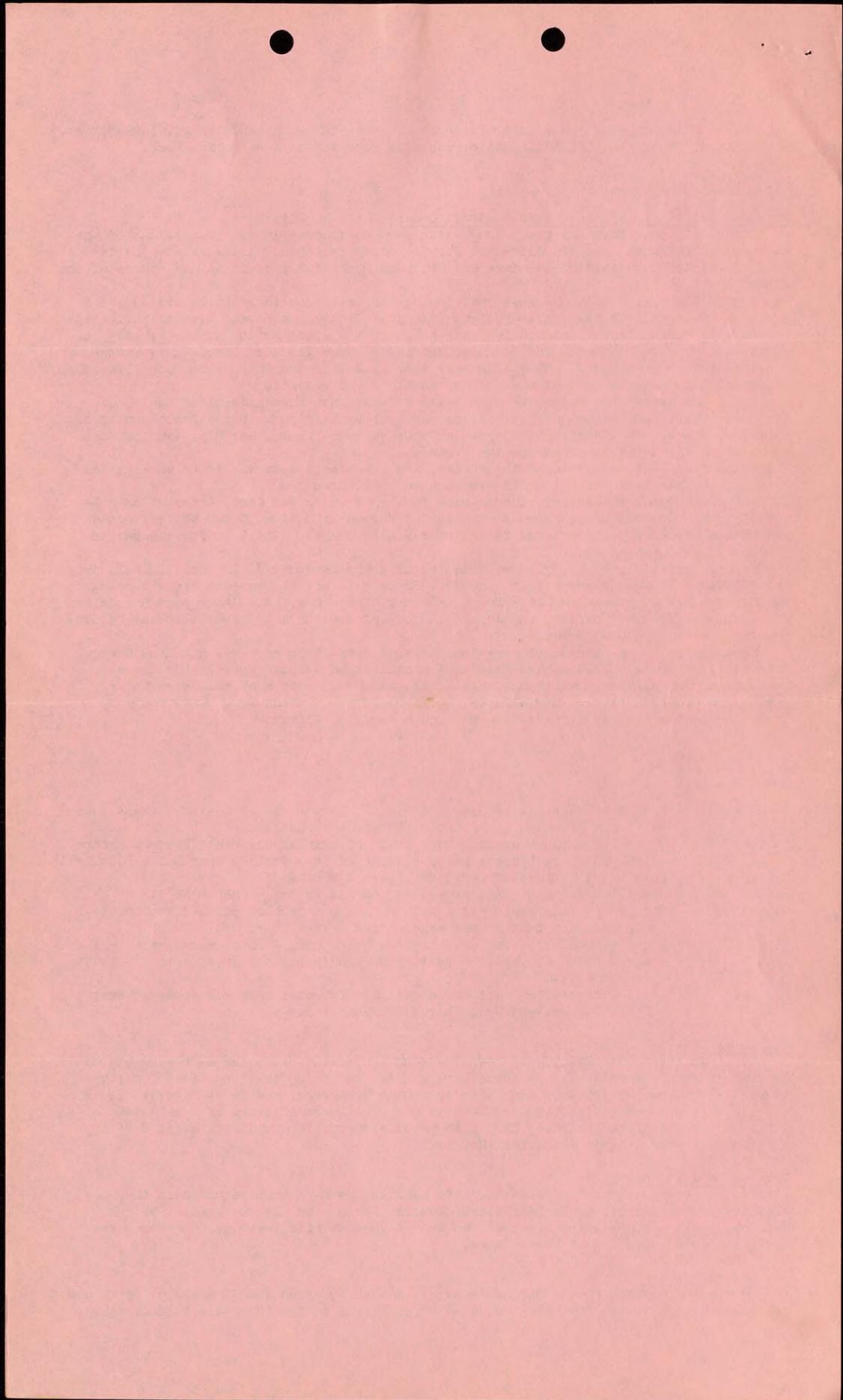
R. L. Mills of 1913 Huldy, who keeps tabs on the advent of spring each year by the arrival of purple Martins at his Pecan Park roosts, said the first one of 1957 reported in Monday, Feb. 4 (Reported on same date by Armand Yramategui and Jerry Baker). Eight martins were seen on February 20 on the west end of Galveston Island by Carl Aiken, David Safley and Klela Klaische; Carl also reported 5 purple martins on March 2 at a martin house near Wesleyan (southwest Houston).

#### Nesting Bald Eagles

For several years one and sometimes two bald eagles have been recorded in the vicinity of a reservoir on Highway 6 near Dewalt, Texas. On February 24, 1957, Mr. and Mrs. Charles W. Hamilton observed two bald eagles at this location - one on a nest while its mate perched in a nearby tree.

#### Bullock's Orioles

On March 2, 1957 a female Bullock's oriole was observed on the Rice Campus by Hardin Craig and Billy Reiser. On March 9, 1957 a female and an immature male Bullock's oriole



were seen feeding in oak trees at the home of your Editor (about ten blocks from the Rice Campus). These two birds were observed for fifteen minutes or more at close range. Both had whitish bellies. The head of the male was a yellowish-orange and he had a small black patch on the throat.

#### Geese Flying North

On March 2nd, Luta Buchanan, Edna Miner and Carolyn Simmons who were gathering plants for the Houston flower show, spent Saturday night at the hotel in Jasper, Texas. Around 5:00 p.m. they heard a flock of geese flying northward over the town. From that time until the early morning hours, whenever they were awake, they heard the honking of great flocks of geese which seemed to be flying past at intervals of from five to fifteen minutes.

#### Sparrow Hawk calls at 1008 Missouri - (Carrie Holcomb)

On Friday, February 8, about midday, Margaret Sims, who helps keep our house in order, was attracted by a fluttering noise, and found perched on the fire screen, a bird which she was able to take hold of and carry to the screened porch. When I reached home I found a beautiful male Sparrow Hawk perched on a coke bottle on a ledge in the porch. He was not alarmed at my approach, and I attempted to give him some chopped liver. He took only one bite, and did not evidence any further interest in the offered food or drink. Fearing he would be hurt if he attempted to fly and struck the screen, I picked him up to place him in a box, letting him perch on my finger, where he clung so tightly his talon pierced the skin, but he offered no objection to the transfer to another perch. I could find no evidence of injury, though he had entered a chimney we considered blocked, and inasmuch as I felt reluctant to procure for him the food he likes, the following morning we took the bird in his box to the vicinity of Tomball and released him.

#### A Frustrated Woodpecker - (Josephine Wilkin)

While I was hanging clothes on February 25, I heard a Red-bellied woodpecker fussing. I found him at the very top of a pecan tree trying to remove a stubborn pecan. As I watched, the woodpecker succeeded in dislodging the pecan, which fell to the earth with the woodpecker in a spectacular dive only inches behind. The pecan landed in a small fish pond, and as the woodpecker pulled out of his dive he flew into a small China-berry tree beside the pond and from his perch he looked down at the water and "told" that pecan off in no uncertain terms! Meanwhile, I was thoroughly enjoying his frustration.

#### Birds seen in Shreveport, Louisiana - (John O'Neill)

From December 29 through January 1, 1957 I visited and birded with Mr. Horace Jeter of Shreveport, Louisiana. I added six birds to my life list including: Rough-legged hawk (sixth record for this bird in Louisiana in December and first good record for Shreveport area), Red Cockaded woodpecker, Chestnut Collared and Smith's Longspurs, Leconte's sparrow and Fox sparrow. The record of the Chestnut Collared longspur was the first January record in Louisiana.

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#### OFF THE PRESS

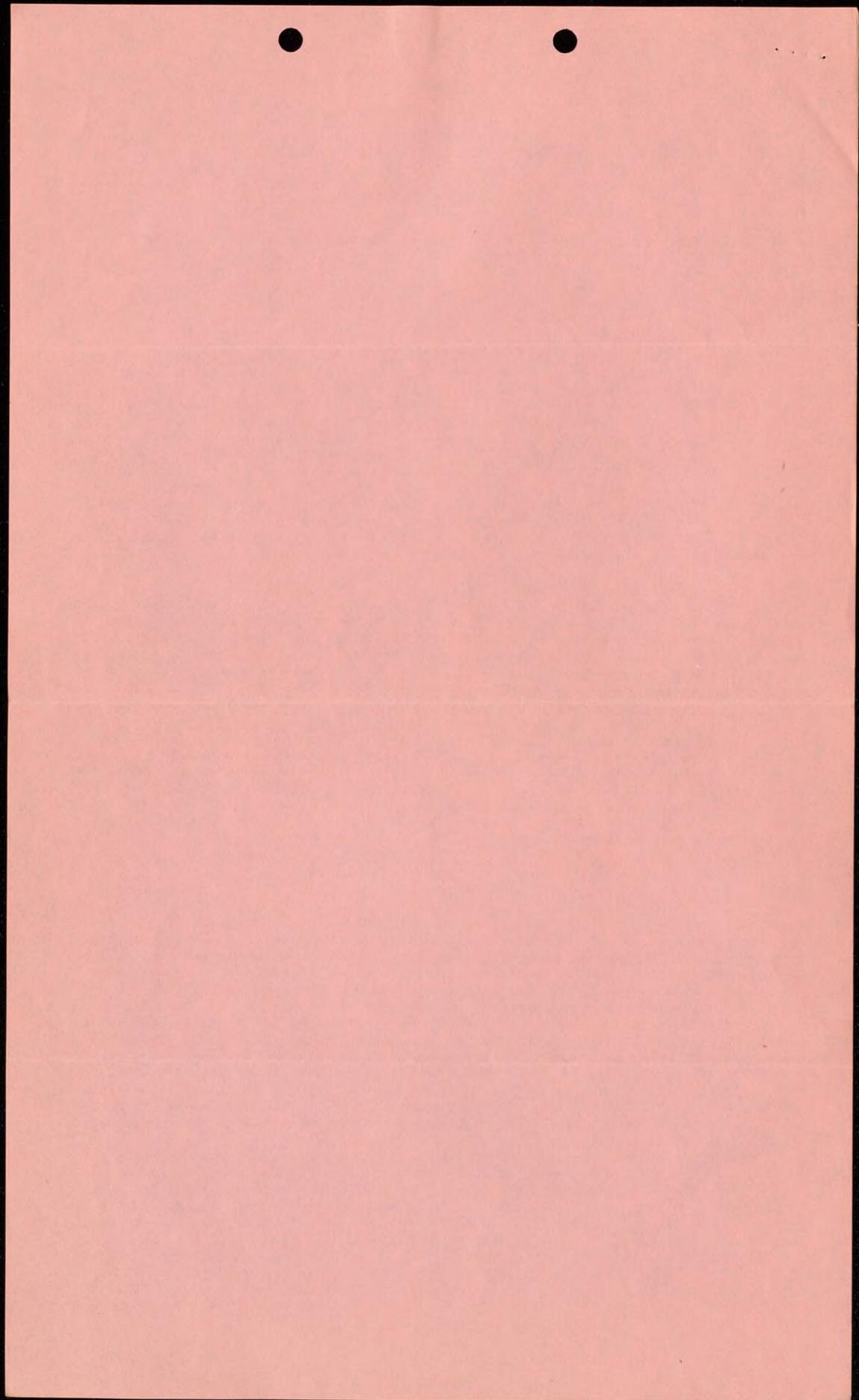
#### Black-bellied Tree Duck's Life Story - (The Harlingen Star)

Putting in hundreds of hours with movie camera outfitted with a telephoto lens, R. J. Montgomery, mayor of Rio Hondo, captured exciting movies of a strange breed of ducks, the Black bellied tree ducks, which nest and roost in trees. The strange species, which is decreasing year after year, probably will not be seen in the United States within a few years. They nest mainly on Montgomery's ranch east of Rio Hondo.

The film, in color, was made by Mayor Montgomery on several fresh water ponds on his ranch. The sequence opens with a large group of ducks sitting on the limbs of a dead tree, devoid of vegetation, near one of the ponds. Taken with a long-range telephoto lens, the ducks are brought so close viewers can see the sharp claws on their webbed feet with which they cling tenaciously to any perch. Against the blue of the brilliant Texas sky the ducks' red bills and glossy black plumage are clearly discernible, and when the flock of about 25 take off, the broad white stripe across the middle of their black wings flashes brilliantly in the sun.

Preceding the ducks' arrival one of Montgomery's ranch hands was shown cleaning out the holes in the trunks of a grove of ebony trees in which the ducks nested last spring. Unless the egg shells are removed the hens show a disinclination to use again the same nesting places. From one of the holes the ranch hand pulled a large opossum, and the narrator whose voice is on the film, told of the care with which predators must be watched to protect the eggs and the ducklings after they are hatched.

The film shows state deputy game warden W. R. Stewart and manager Luther Goldman of the Atascosa Wildlife Refuge watching through a powerful telescope as the first flock of tree ducks came into Mayor Montgomery's ranch last spring. The ducks are shown inspecting the various trees looking for nesting places to their liking and there are a number



of beautiful sequences showing closeups of the big birds in the customary V of flight.

Spectacular scenes show the ducklings peeping out of the tree holes in which they were hatched for their first look at the outside world. Then the ducklings clutch small twigs in their clawed, webbed feet. After studying the ground below for a while and urged by the peculiar whistling call of the mother (tree ducks do not quack), they make their first leap to earth and scamper away with their waddling mother for their first swim.

Scenes in the film clearly show the ducks landing not on the water, as other ducks do, but on the land, on which they come down as gently as a ballet dancer ending a pirouette. The film ends as the ducklings, grown to adulthood and after long practice flights, take off with the oldsters for the long flight South, fading into the horizon in several long V patterns.

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The Scene Outdoors - Houston Press - Feb. 14, 1957

A recent survey shows that 19 million mourning doves were bagged by hunters in 29 states and a Canadian province during the 1955 shooting season, the Wildlife Management Institute reports.

More doves are killed than any other single species of migratory game bird, and exceed by four million or more the combined take of all species of ducks and geese. Gunning pressure has increased during the past five years and is expected to mount. The importance of mourning doves to sportsmen means that game administrators and technicians will have to pay closer attention to dove breeding populations, production figures, and hunter kill records.

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Conservation Corner (Reprinted from "The Phalarope" of Midland Naturalists)

The Texas Game and Fish Commission is composed of nine men (farmers, ranchers, businessmen) appointed by the governor. They serve, without pay, for six years. Supposedly appointed on their qualifications, these men are in most cases wealthy friends of the governor (or friends of friends) who like to hunt. They serve on the Commission, in many cases, because of the evident advantages accruing to a member of the Commission when big-game hunting permits are issued. A few of the members are actually dedicated to the cause of conservation and wildlife restoration.

The Game and Fish Commission does not make the hunting laws for Texas. The laws are made by the State Legislature -- the Commission can only make recommendations. The Commission makes these recommendations on the basis of facts obtained by its staff of well-qualified fishery and wildlife biologists. This staff conducts research in all phases of wildlife management, hoping to find the best methods of increasing the game fish and mammals of Texas.

Any wildlife, not considered game, receives no attention from the Commission. Thus, a body of supposed conservationists stand idly by while the Golden Eagle and the American Alligator are slaughtered in Texas. At the January 18th meeting of the Game and Fish Commission, Mr. Hal Peterson, one of the commissioners, is reported to have said that if a law were passed protecting the Golden Eagle he would not abide by it! This is indeed a strange statement to be made by a state official serving the governor, the state legislature and the people of Texas, who ultimately make the laws.

Mr. Peterson was appointed by Governor Shivers just before the end of his term. This appointment has not been confirmed by the Texas Senate. We believe that any person serving the people of the state of Texas should abide by its laws, without their personal preference entering into their obedience and enforcement. Those who do not approve of Mr. Peterson's appointment are asked to write Governor Daniel asking him to replace Peterson with a better qualified man.

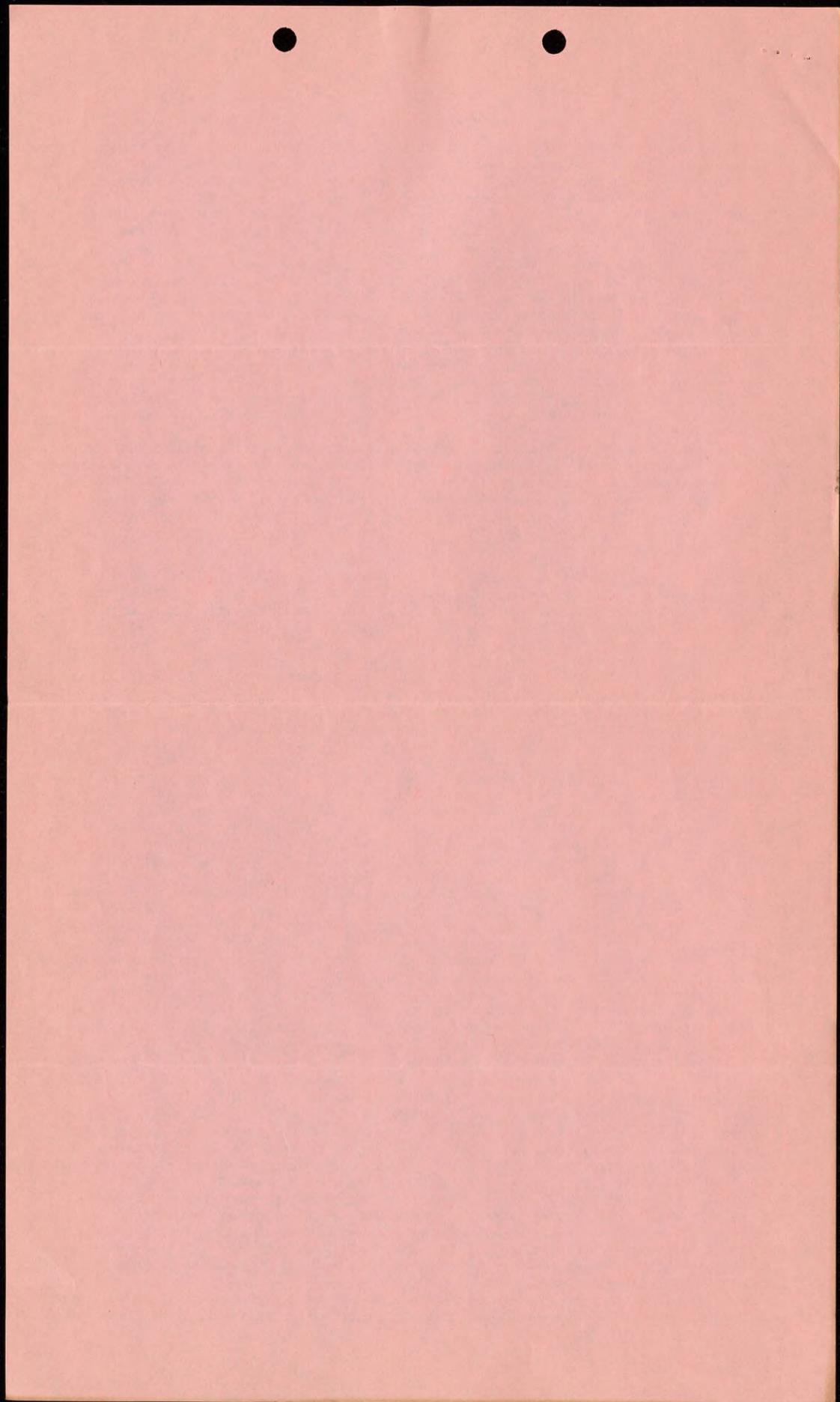
(Houston O.G. members should write Senator Searcy Bracewell, Capitol Building, Austin, Texas, in addition to Governor Price Daniel, Capitol Building, Austin. Make it a short letter or send a 2¢ postal card - BUT DO IT NOW.)

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Dr. Cottam's Appointment to State Game and Fish Commission  
Would be for Better (Hart Stilwell, Houston Post Feb. 27, 1957)

There is a move on in the state to urge the appointment of Dr. Clarence Cottam to the Texas Game and Fish Commission. Dr. Cottam is director of the Welder Wildlife Refuge, a privately-endowed project, near Sinton. He is generally recognized as one of the foremost wildlife authorities in the nation. For many years he was assistant to the director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Dr. Cottam would bring to the Commission expert knowledge on many aspects of wildlife. Of course much of such information already is available to the commissioners, from their own biologists, for in spite of the shamefully small salaries paid, the Department has a group of competent men. But all too often the Commissioners ride rough-shod over the opinions of those men. They would be much more inclined to listen to Dr. Cottam.

So if people could manage to induce Gov. Daniel to depart from the time-honored custom of awarding posts on the commission to political supporters and name Dr. Cottam, maybe



it wouldn't be so hard to pass bills to increase the hunting and fishing license fees.

(Dr. Cottam was recently elected president of the Texas Ornithological Society)

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 Legislative Roundup - by Margaret Louise Hill  
 Reprinted from "Signal Smoke" pub. by Travis Audubon Society

Most of us complain about the lack of conservation-mindedness on the part of our Texas Legislature and our National Congress. We really have no right to do so unless each one of us has written to our representatives expressing our feelings on the various measures introduced. This is not only our privilege as a citizen but our duty to our elected officials. So please let me urge each one of you to write four or five lines on each one of the following measures

These bills are worthy of careful attention:

HB 87, introduced by Rep. O. H. Schramm of Taylor, calls for an increase of the fishing license fee; proceeds to go to the Texas Game and Fish Commission. One strong advocate is Rep. Charles Haas of Corpus Christi.

HB 73, introduced by Rep. Parish, would allocate revenues from the sale of shell, gravel and sand to the Game and Fish Commission. They are already receiving one million dollars annually from this source (except when it is diverted to other uses by executive decree).

Our protests of HB 343, introduced by Rep. Atwell seem indicated. This bill would repeal the act validating state parks improvement bonds. The Budget Board has always whittled the Parks Board's appropriations down. They get less money to run the State Parks and Recreation than Austin uses for City Parks and Recreation. This fact should certainly be called to our legislators' attention.

The Governor's inaugural address indicated that he desires added recreational opportunities in the State Parks and additional Game and Fish Commission activities. Probably he should be reminded of the huge sum of money Texas lost because the Commission was prevented by executive decree of his predecessor from buying land and becoming eligible for Robertson-Pittman Federal funds.

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 The following eight

Harris County Representatives should be addressed: House of Representatives, Capitol Building, Austin, Texas - -

- |                            |                       |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Rep. Frank E. Mann      | 5. Rep. J. E. Winfree |
| 2. Rep. Wm. M. Elliott     | 6. Rep. Paul Pressler |
| 3. Rep. Carlton Moore, Sr. | 7. Rep. Criss Cole    |
| 4. Rep. Robert W. Baker    | 8. Rep. J. M. Heflin  |
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Note- Your Editor urges members to carefully consider the legislative measures listed above and to briefly express your opinion in writing to our State officials in Austin.

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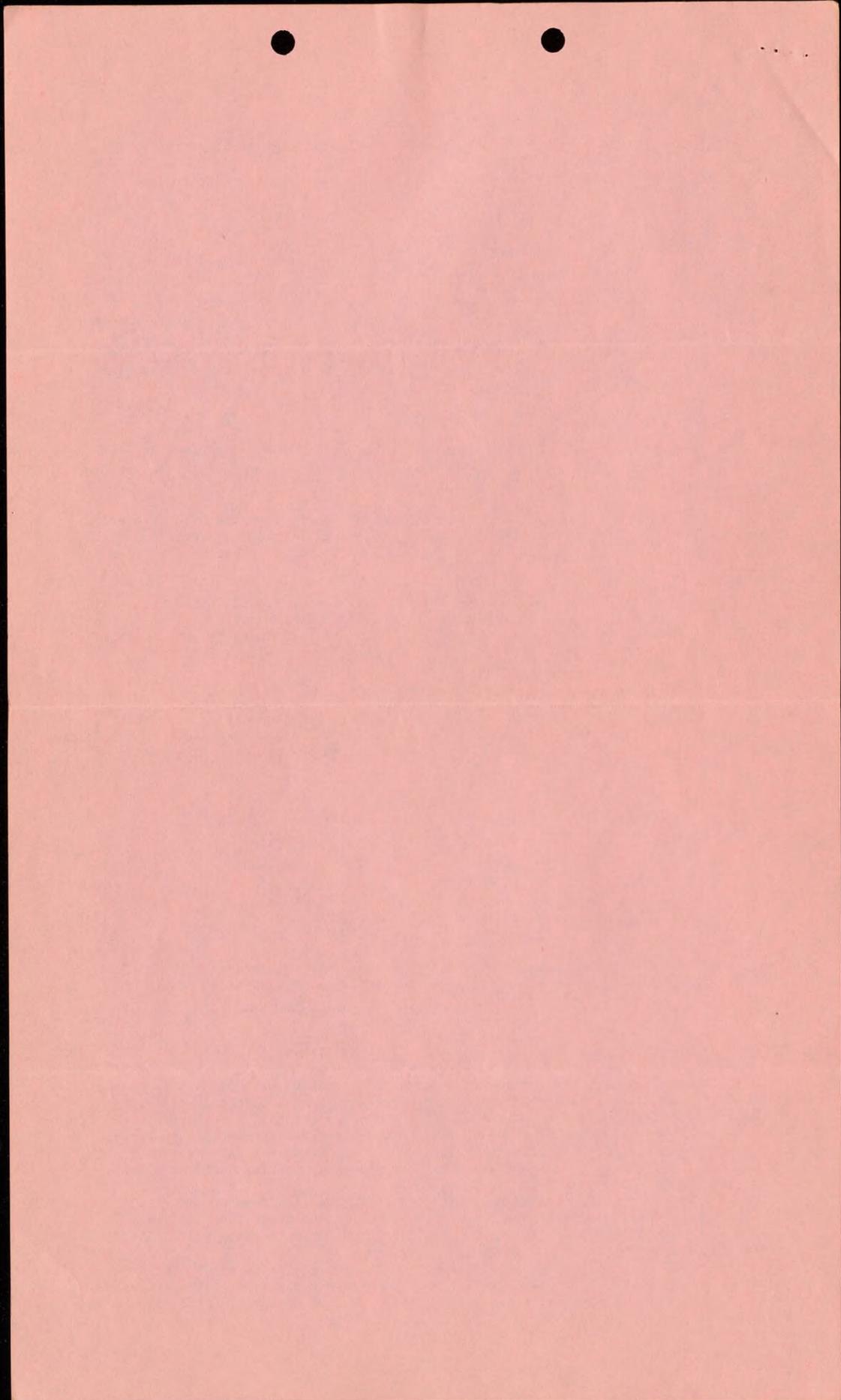
The True Story of "Bee Bee" by Bessie M. Reid, Silsbee, Texas

All of our birds have been named by children and it was natural for little Camp Fire girls to call the bluebird, symbol of their organization by his clan's initials.

Many birds like gourds for homes and a friend of ours has half a dozen of these, nicely cleaned and properly hung from fence posts across the front of her kitchen garden. Each gourd has the right size provisions for small birds - two-way entries, and cross ventilation. All except one (which was taken over by early nesting Carolina wrens) shelters pairs of bluebirds.

By late March or early April first nestlings begin tumbling from the gourds. By the last of May, second families are ready to face the world and about the first week in July some of the pairs are ready to present their third try at keeping the bluebird population at least static.

Nearness to human residences saved the bluebirds from most wild predators; even snakes were discouraged by vigilant farm dogs. But there was no protection against such twenty-four hour hunters as house cats, with their power of seeing at night, and their



uncanny ability to slink past dogs that either do not see them or have been trained to tolerate them. Heavy feline toll was taken of the baby bluebirds, particularly on their first bumbling attempts to fly.

In July Bee Bee's parents tried to bring off a third family as their first two had fallen victims of cats allowed to stay round the farm under the impression that they kept down rats.

What happened to those late fledglings was a thing of which we had heard but never before seen! Ticks crawled up the fence post, as they do on fallen logs, and buried their heads deep in the tender skin of the little bluebirds. The infestation may have been newly hatched "seed ticks", practically impossible to remove, and have stayed attached until of good size. Or sizable "speckle backs", soon detected and picked off by the old birds or the babies themselves. However it was, the heads of the ticks were still sunk in such places as underwings, causing abscesses to develop. Hoping to save the little weakest looking baby "blue", we took him home and were surprised to find he had crusted inflamed spots at the roots of several of his primaries, and a roughening of his feet scales that should not have been present on any but perhaps a very old bird.

Treatment did away with the angry looking abscesses, but it may be a long time yet before damaged roots can again grow useful feathers, instead of the roughened, crooked ones that both Bee Bee and we are trying to coax into smoothness. Otherwise Bee Bee's plumage is close to perfect.

No one was ever unkind to him; nothing has ever happened to frighten him. He has never, so far, as much as seen a cat or a snake. Bogs are a commonplace to him, to be scolded at through screened doors or windows. People, irrespective of age, color or dress, are welcome as sources of fruit, insect life and other delectable tidbits. He makes a great show of reproving fingers that bear no gifts, pecking at them with ruffled feathers or turning his back on them.

It is doubtful whether any bird outside a big zoo has such a multitude of friends as Bee Bee. Grownups and children alike, though children are in the majority, scouts and Campfire Girls, Brownies, Cubs, Bluebirds -- they all love Bee Bee and he loves them. He has been all over Texas, and hasn't the slightest objection to being placed on exhibition or photographed. At Camp Niwana of the Beaumont, Texas Camp Fire Girls, he graciously took turns perched on different small hands, to be pictured in color - one of the camp personnel got fine poses of him.

So did members of the Houston Outdoor Nature Club at their San Jacinto County Wildlife Sanctuary. One inspired photographer sat him on a bush of "French" or "Spanish" mulberry (*CalliCARPA americana*). He at once hopped to the end twig of a branch heavy with clustered fruit, and began to regale himself on the ripe berries. Before another picture of him was taken he insisted on a bath, and that last one shows him very, very wet.

When we are not leaving home for longer than a day we leave Bee Bee in his spacious home-made cage. But if we are going to be gone over-night or longer, we put him in an old canary cage and take him along. The only other bird we ever had fonder of riding in a car was an owl -- I think Dr. Oberholser will remember her. She came to see him once, sitting up as usual on the front seat of our car between Mr. Reid and me - a strikingly handsome and most dignified barn owl.

That little scamp Bee Bee also comes mighty close to knowing what it means when we put on our hats. His doleful protest at being left, sounds funny to many of our friends, but not to us. So we take no chances of having him grieve too long; instead he now sits up in the car between us on the front seat, and is carefully hung -- his cage that is -- wherever we stop.

\* \* \* \* \*

DID YOU KNOW

Vultures head the list of long-lived birds. In the Zoological Gardens at Giza, Egypt, a vulture lived for ninety-five years.

The turkey vulture, or buzzard, is found in most of the southern states and as far north as British Columbia and northern Minnesota. The California condor and the black vulture of Asia are among the largest birds in the world, having a wing-spread of more than ten feet. (From "Nature's Ways")

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OFFICERS OF ORNITHOLOGY GROUP

- |                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| Chairman            | - Mr. James F. Murray, 6032 Glen Cove, Houston 7, Texas |
| Secretary-Treasurer | - Miss Thelma H. Smith, 2148 Harold, Apt. 11, Houston   |
| Field Trip Chairman | - Mr. C. B. Gilman, Rt. 1, Box 175, Houston, Texas      |
| Editor of Spoonbill | - Mrs. Norma C. Oates, 5908 Charlotte, Houston 5, Texas |



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