



THE SPOONBILL

VOLUME XVIII, No. 3

July, 1969

A robin redbreast in a cage
Puts all heaven in a rage.

A skylark wounded in the wing,
A cherubim does cease to sing.

He who shall hurt the little wren
Shall never be below'd by men.*
from "Auguries of Innocence"
by William Blake

PUBLISHED BY THE ORNITHOLOGY GROUP, OUTDOOR NATURE CLUB, HOUSTON, TEXAS

MINUTES OF THE JUNE PICNIC MEETING OF THE ORNITHOLOGY GROUP JUNE 7, 1969

Forty-two people attended the June picnic meeting at Gladys Galbreath's farm on Cutten Road. The group began gathering at 2:00 P.M. and birded until picnic time - about 5 p.m. Bluejays, Cardinals, Grackles, and Mockingbirds were very much in evidence. Cattle Egrets flew down the creek, a pair of Carolina Wrens scolded in the brush near the bridge, and two Eastern Kingbirds sunned themselves on a nearby fence wire. And it was sunny, and it was hot! But the numerous Meadowlarks did not seem to mind, nor did the Bobwhites we flushed in the meadows. Yellow-billed Cuckoos were numerous and vocal around the farm house. Other sightings included the Carolina chickadee, Brown-headed Cowbird, Tufted Titmouse, and a Pileated Woodpecker tearing off great chunks of bark from a dead tree. The Common Nighthawk and the Chimney Swift flew high and low while, at dusk, two pairs of Purple Martins were joined by some thirty to forty others for some precision flying.

Those birders among us who were also botanists identified the plants, trees and flowers, including the Wild Orchid (Ladies Tresses), Little Hip Hawthorn, Baby Blue Eyes, Wild Iris, and Muscadine Grape.

At 6:15 P.M. Mr. Wallace C. Mebane, Jr. called the meeting to order. The half-dozen visitors were asked to introduce themselves and were welcomed by the Chairman. In the absence of the Secretary, Mr. Mebane waived the reading of the minutes of the last meeting. Miss Sarah Gordon read the Treasurer's Report for the fiscal year April 30, 1968 to April 30, 1969 and for the two-month period April 1, 1969 through May 31, 1969. Balance on hand May 31st was \$121.07.

Mr. Mebane announced that there are only a few of Steve Williams' books left, at \$1.25 each. Wally remarked that although the book is getting out of date, it is considered to be sort of a collector's item. Nest record cards, for free, are also available. The Houston International Exhibition of Photography will be held August 4-15. Of particular interest to us, according to Mr. Mebane, will be the nature slides to be shown at 8:00 P.M., August 14, at the Houston Lighting & Power Company, 610 West Loop. He also reminded us of the June 15 field trip scheduled to depart from the Angleton Courthouse at 7:45 A.M.

Those present then extended a vote of thanks and a round of applause to the Bradleys for editing the SPOONBILL for the past two years, to Marian Washburn for her two years as program chairman, to both Marian and Dan Washburn for the loving care with which they printed the OG roster, and to Gladys Galbreath for letting us come out to her farm for our picnic. Gladys extended an invitation to come again, particularly for the spring and fall migrations.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:30 P.M.
Respectfully submitted,
Louise Rogers,
Secretary Pro Tempore

EWELL AND JULIA BRADLEY VISITS KERRVILLE

* The above couplets are inscribed on tablets embedded in a stone wall in a tiny bird sanctuary on the grounds of the Butt-Holdsworth Memorial Library in Kerrville. A portion

of this sanctuary is at tree top level with steps leading down the steep bank to the Guadalupe river flowing by. As we approached we were greeted by the cascading song of the Canyon Wren.

Members of the Garden Clubs of Kerrville maintain the feeders in the sanctuary by their voluntary contributions. Through the graciousness of Mr. & Mrs. Thomas M. Daniel we were made aware of this lovely spot of developed beauty. The Daniels, formerly of Houston, now residents of Kerrville are still members of our Ornithology group.

NESTING BLACK RAILS ON BRAZORIA NAT'L WILDLIFE REFUGE by Raymond J. Fleetwood

The Black Rail, the smallest of the six rails in North America, is believed to be a very rare bird in Texas based on recent records.

So far as our present information goes, Kansas appears to be on the southern limit of its breeding range in the Central United States. Texas can now be included in the breeding range, since refuge personnel, Raymond J. Fleetwood and Stephen A. Nesbitt found 10 nests containing from 4 to 9 eggs in a marsh burn on the Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge, near Angleton, Texas on June 5, 1969. Other nests were undoubtedly missed on the census and it is believed there may have been between 15 and 20 pairs of rails nesting on the area.

Time will tell whether this is a temporary nesting Colony; or really a 500 mile or more extension of the breeding range southward.

Due to the secluded habits of the rail, it is seldom seen, but it may be more common in its range than generally believed.

This rail like all rails, has a noticeable compressed body, well adapted for running swiftly, like a mouse, through thickly growing grasses and reeds, hence the expression "as thin as a rail". It seldom flies when disturbed, and when it does, the flight is feeble and hesitating with dangling legs just over the top of the marsh grasses and sedges.

THE TYRANT FLYCATCHERS: by Dirk Hagemeyer

While photographing nesting Eastern Kingbirds and Scissor-tailed Flycatchers I was reminded by them why they belong to the Tyrant Flycatcher Family.

The Eastern Kingbirds were nesting over the water about 4 feet high in a dead Senna bush. Whenever Louisiana Herons or Snowy Egrets would come within 150-200 feet of the nest, they were immediately attacked, violently and consistently by both Kingbirds till the intruder would retreat and fly away. The Scissor-tailed Flycatchers were also nesting over the water, about 5 feet high in a live Senna and about 50 feet away from some Salt Cedars. There were 4 Boat-tailed Grackle nests in these Salt Cedars, 2 with eggs, 2 with young. And perched on the highest limb was one male Boat-tailed Grackle. Since there were no other males around he must have been polygamous and this was his harem.

As long as he stayed on his perch peace and quiet reigned. The females flew on and off, feeding the young, while he surveyed his territory for possible intruders.

I made a tape recording of his harsh calls and when I played these back to him all hell broke loose. He had to find the intruder and to do so he had to fly. But as soon as he got airborne both Scissortails would ferociously attack him from behind. Their attacks were sometimes so violent that he would lose flight control and drop several feet in the air. He could only save himself from their attacks by alighting on the grass or low bushes. And as soon as he would fly back to his high perch in the Salt Cedars he would be attacked again.

No wonder they were named the "Tyrannidae".

RED COCKADED WOODPECKER TO BE STUDIED BY DEPARTMENT

The following was taken from the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department News:

"The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is embarking on a study of the Red Cockaded Woodpecker which may help save the little bird from extinction. The three-year study has been approved with the aim of determining the distribution and habitat requirements

of this seven-inch, black-and-white ladderback bird. Disappearing habitat seems to be the problem because of the bird's stringent requirements. They seem to nest and roost only in over-mature pine trees with red-heart disease. The tree must be alive and vigorous enough for gum to flow freely when the woodpecker pecks through the cambium.

'Such trees are scarce, and this creates doubt as to the future of the species,' says Dan Lay, biologist for the Parks and Wildlife Department and project leader for the study. Lay says with adequate information as to the present distribution and requirements, it should be possible to develop plans for saving the bird from extinction. 'The bird is not a significant part of the ecosystem, yet its preservation may serve to focus public attention on habitat and environmental problems,' says Lay.

Some preliminary work has been done on an informal basis. Birds have been located in approximately 10 locations, and suitable study areas are available for the work planned. The formal study will start with the location of nest trees throughout the range and the recording of pertinent data for each.

Any nest trees which have died recently will be cut, and measurements of the hole, cavity, tree, and extent of red-heart disease will be recorded. Observation will be repeated in subsequent years to determine the rate of mortality.

The woodpecker will be followed on a systematic basis to determine the size of the territory, feeding habits, trees utilized, defense of territory, and hole construction. Suitable forest areas of known acreage will be selected and the total number of nest or roost trees and holes will be determined along with an estimate of the bird population.

FOGBOUND IN AFOGNAK by Dorothy Lefkovits

I left Houston at 8:30 on the morning of June 3rd and at 8:30 p.m. Alaska time, I was being welcomed in Skagway by the Wilson's Warbler's cheerful song. However, the first bird I saw was the robin! On my early morning walk the next day before the train left for the "Trail of '98", I saw crowds of Herring gulls, the robin and the Wilson's Warbler. The train ride was not too successful for birding since we didn't stop but the scenery was beautiful and I did see the Wilson's Warbler again.

The same night I flew back to Juneau where the sides of the airstrip were busy with barn swallows; in fact, Juneau seemed to have as many barn swallows as we have English sparrows. They were sitting on wires, walking down the sidewalks and driveways, and swooping fearlessly within two or three feet of pedestrians. Since I'm an early riser the streets were empty of people when I headed for the trail to Mt. Roberts where I searched for the source of a very happy and imperious song. Finally, on the very top of a conifer below me I spied a McGillivray's Warbler, head high in the air and singing like mad. The robins and hermit thrushes were everywhere but much more retiring. Two boreal chickadees were flitting from cone to cone looking for a tasty bit of breakfast.

The next opportunity I had to bird was in Mt. McKinley National Park where the Mew Gulls walked around the grounds of the lodge and the black billed Magpies visited regularly. A short walk from the lodge Horseshoe Lake lay in peaceful beauty; a moose and her calf fed in the shallows, a beaver swam lazily, a spotted sandpiper investigated the shore line, robins, hermit thrushes, myrtle warblers and swainson's thrushes were in the trees surrounding the lake. At 4 a.m. the next morning we were on the wildlife tour and I was lucky enough to see two mew gulls on their nests, the willow ptarmigan, the rock ptarmigan, lapland longspur and Mt. McKinley in its entirety. On the train ride down to Anchorage I saw the whistling swan in a lake by the side of the tracks.

Next stop, Kodiak, an island east of the Alaska Peninsula where I was met by Carolyn Cook, my niece, Lt. J.G. Roddy Cook, her husband and their two children, Shawn and Todd. On the lake in front of their home Herring Gulls bathed by the dozens and bank swallows dipped. In the bushes and trees Wilson's Warblers, song sparrows, yellow warblers, fox sparrows, and hermit thrushes abounded and I caught glimpses of the common redpoll and varied thrushes. Kodiak was literally swarming with gulls; they covered the waterfront buildings, the dumps, the fields and while I was there an airplane was disabled by a gull being sucked into the jet prop. Carolyn and Roddy told me about the time Roddy and a friend of his rowed out to one of the many small islands around Kodiak and in their explorations heard strange noises. On investigating they found a hole with five gulls struggling to get out. After they were taken out (one was so weak it could just barely flop away) it was found that the gulls had been standing on the thick mat of bodies of gulls to whom help had not come soon enough. Roddy covered the hole so this tragedy would not be repeated in this particular spot.

One day we drove north of Kodiak and saw the arctic loon and double crested cormorant; on the road up Mt. Pillar bank swallows were nesting and the bald eagle took advantage of the air currents. The same day we drove south on the road to Chiniak where the bald eagles sat in the road. We were never out of earshot of the warblers songs and saw two black oystercatchers, a flock of harlequin ducks, a mallard, and the black-legged kittiwake.

Afognak is an island north of Kodiak where a rather primitive recreation area is maintained for Navy personnel. We went by tug Friday morning, was taken to shore in a landing craft and went by jeep three miles to the camp on the shores of Lake Afognak. A slight correction; I walked the three miles dawdling along watching for birds, taking pictures and trying to believe that I was really there.

On the tug trip, foggy as it was, the tufted puffins were everywhere but we saw only two horned puffins; thick-billed murres were more shy, pigeon guillemots stayed near shore and was most shy. As the landing craft neared shore three black oystercatchers sat on a reef and a tree swallow lit on the top of a small tree and in the sunshine the glint of blue on its back was unbelievable

We shared the two bedroom cottage with Lt. Bob Thompson, his wife Illa and their two daughters Linda and Susan. Lt. Thompson told me many of his experiences in the area and in hunting season the lake is covered with the Common Goldeneye or "Whistlers" and they were well nicknamed for the whistling of their many wings could be heard for quite far distances.

Saturday morning was magnificent. The minute I walked out one young man showed me a beaver swimming down the lake and told us where the bald eagles were usually found. Just a few minutes later an adult and immature eagle sailed in and lit. Roddy took my camera and waded a creek (he was wearing hip boots) taking pictures as he went. Carolyn and I went around by the bridge and up to the base of the 20 foot high tree where the eagles still sat eyeing us with the clearest, yellowest eyes I've ever seen.

We went to the end of the lake in a small boat and on our way back we landed on a small island where we disturbed a duck (unidentified) from her nest and the gulls were just beginning to select their nesting sites. In the creek near the camp an ouzel sat on a log like a miniature hen, then down where the salmon were jumping the falls, two more ouzels walked among the rocks while two eagles sailed above. On a walk we took by the edge of the lake we must have come near a varied thrush nest for they fluttered three or four feet from us trying to lure us away. Savannah sparrows, hermit thrushes, fox sparrows and varied thrushes could be seen at any time and each morning a pair of red breasted mergansers swam leisurely by. The plaintive and sweet "Oh dear me" of the golden-crowned sparrow could always be heard in the background.

The clouds came Saturday evening and Sunday morning we received word the tug couldn't come for us so, since food had been brought for only two days we had to start conserving. Lt. Thompson caught salmon for all and C rations were available. All cabins in Alaska are kept stocked with emergency rations. The heavy fog continued through Monday and our only contact with the "outside" was by Navy radio and they were kind enough to see about cancelling my plane, tour and hotel reservations. Tuesday morning we were radioed the tug was on the way and be ready quick; my last view of Afognak was three eagles sailing in majestic stillness. On our way back we saw communities of puffins and gulls nesting on the faces of the cliffs we passed.

Planes from Kodiak were delayed two more days because of fog but I finally flew back to Houston, my life long dream of visiting Alaska already becoming just a memory.

IMPORTANT NOTICE FROM SARAH GORDON!

If you have not paid your dues, this will be the last issue of the SPOONBILL which you will receive. Don't let this oversight cause you to miss an issue of our fine publication. If you are an O.N.C. Member dues from May 1, 1969 to May 1, 1970 are \$2.00. For non-members a year's subscription to the SPOONBILL is \$3.00. Please make your check payable to Ornithology Group and mail to the Treasurer, Sarah Gordon, 1746 Wroxton Court, Houston, Texas 77005.

WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS!!!

Mrs. William Sapat 4981 Willow St. Bellaire, Texas 77401
Mrs. Dorothy J. Foster 615 No. Thompson Conroe, Texas 77301
Mr. Walt J. Wissel 9754 Woodwind Drive Houston, Texas 77025
Miss Coralie Eberspacher 1147 Allston Houston, Texas 77008

Miss Helen Eberspacher P.O. Box 1774 Houston, Texas 77001
Mrs. Mildred Elkins 4901 Locust Bellaire, Texas 77401
Mr. David S. Lefkovits 1601 Woodlawn Baytown, Texas 77520

Junior New Member:

James Barnes 5714 Chaffin Houston, Texas 77017

New Subscriber:

Mr. J. H. Stephens 5522 Bordley Houston, Texas 77027

CLEARING HOUSE, JUNE 1969

LOON, COMMON: (1)7 West Galveston Island, HP.
Frigatebird, Magnificent: (5)7 West Galveston Is. (perched on pilings), HP; (1female)15
Sea Isle (over Gulf), Galveston, NP.
Heron, Green: (2)4,7 Cove, AKM.
Nightheron, Blk.-crn: (1)5, (2)7, (1)21 Cove, AKM.
Bittern, Least: (10)7 West Galveston Island, HP.
Ibis, White-faced: (6)8 Cove, AKM.
Ibis, White: (100)3 Cove, AKM.
Duck, Mottled: (1-5)11 days, (6-13)2,3,26,28 Cove, AKM.
Teal, Green-winged: (3)2 Cove, AKM. (latest ever)
Teal, Blue-winged: (1)7 West Galveston Island, HP.
Vulture, Black: (2)20 Cove, AKM.
Hawk, Swainson's: (1) 8,12 (Light phase) Houston yard, CJ.
Rail, King: (1) 21 Cove, AKM.
Coot, American: (1)4 Cove, AKM.
Plover, Wilson's: (13)7 West Galveston Island, HP; (2-male & female)18, Sea Isle (West Bay)NP.
Plover, Black-bellied: (2)7 West Galveston Island, HP.
Willet: (1)7 Cove, AKM.
Dowitcher Sp.: (3)7 West Galveston Island, HP.
Avocet, American: (23)7 West Galveston Island, HP.
Gull, Ring-billed: (15)7 West Galveston Island, HP.
Tern, Caspian: (NC)7 Cove, AKM.
Black: (2)3,5 Cove, AKM; (36)7 West Galveston Island, HP; (8)18 Sea Isle (West Bay), NP.
Skimmer, Black: (2)11 Cove, AKM.
Owl, Barred: (1)19 Cove, AKM.
Hummingbird, Ruby-throated: (1)20 Cove, AKM.
Woodpecker, Red-bellied: (1)2, Cove, AKM.
Red-headed: (1)28, Cove, AKM.
Kingbird, Eastern: (1) 6 days, Cove AKM.
Swallow, Bank: (about 10)4, Cove, AKM.
ROUGH-WINGED: (1)2 (very late), Cove, AKM.
Barn: (about 15)2, Cove, AKM.
Crow, Fish: (1)24, near Wallisville, AKM.
Robins (1)8, (3)17, 20, Hermann Park, Houston, NP.
Oriole, Orchard: (1)18, Cove, AKM.
Dickcissel: (2)5, 28, (1)7, 17, 27, Cove, AKM.
Sparrow, Lark: (1)8, Houston Intercontinental Airport, NP.

CLEARING HOUSE NOTES-CORRECTION

On Page 5 of the June SPOONBILL the report of the 6 Brown-headed Nuthatches seen by Noel Pettingell and Joe Heiser should be changed to Joe Farrell and Joe Heiser. Sorry-Editors.

Noel Pettingell reports that the UTC Check-list status of the Black Tern was revised from rare to common during June and July in the Spoonbill, July 1968 and the Lark Sparrow is another species with revised seasonal status-uncommon Jan. through Dec.

SPECIES ADDED TO UPPER TEXAS COAST FIELD CHECK-LIST, 4TH ED., MARCH 1966

(Birds observed in Brazoria, Chambers, Fort Bend, Galveston and Harris Counties from Jan.1, 1956 through Dec. 31, 1965)----by Noel Pettingell

- 1 - Anna's Hummingbird (Jan. 12, 1966)
- 2 - Black-legged Kittiwake (Dec. 26, 1966)
- 3 - Crested Hummingbird (Feb. 1, 1967)*
- 4 - Black-headed Oriole (April 27, 1967)

- 5 - Masked Duck (about Sept. 1, 1967)
- 6 - Acorn Woodpecker (Jan. 7, 1968)
- 7 - Ruff (April 28, 1968)
- 8 - Allen's Hummingbird (Aug. 15, 1968)
- 9 - Purple Sandpiper (Dec. 28, 1968)
- 10- Jacana (Dec. 30, 1968)
- 11- European Widgeon (Jan. 1, 1969)
- 12- Western Gull (March 1, 1969) **
- 13- Zone-tailed Hawk (April 13, 1969) ***

A total of 431 valid species have been recorded in the UTC area, 356 of which have been substantiated by specimen or photograph.

* New North American and Texas species

** New Texas species

*** Reported in May 1969 SPOONBILL (P. 3) without the following details which were given to N. P. by Dr. David Marrack on May 29, 1969: The Zone-tailed Hawk was observed for two or three minutes with 20X telescope as it soared among migrating Broad-winged Hawks during afternoon of April 13 (see front page of May 1969 SPOONBILL); all field marks were noted, including dark wings and tail bands, and double-checked with Peterson's Texas and Pough's Water Birds field guides; D. M. felt certain that he was correct in the identification of this straggler normally seen only in far west or (rarely) central or extreme south Texas.

ADDITION TO MAY CLEARING HOUSE

Myrtle Warbler (male) 1, May 30th. While photographing nesting Kingbirds along Big Slough in Brazoria County I saw a male Myrtle Warbler in beautiful spring plumage for several minutes at distances of 20-30 feet.---Dirk Hagemeyer.

OOPS--CONTRIBUTORS TO THE CLEARING HOUSE SEEMS TO HAVE SLIPPED A PAGE

AKM Arlie McKay
HP Harvey Patten
CJ Charlotte Johnson
NP Noel Pettingell

NEW PROGRAM CHAIRMAN

Mrs. Harry L. (Avis) Brister, 2314 Saxon, Houston 77018, is the new OG Program Chairman. She may be called at 682-9430 if anyone has any ideas for programs. We wish to give a hearty "thanks" for a job well done to Mrs. Marian Washburn, who is retiring from the position.

NOTES FROM THE EDITORS

We again would like to remind you to continue and expand your contributions for publication in The Spoonbill. We would like to have accounts of birding vacations, along with any other items of interest. Publication of The Spoonbill is a joint effort of many people, and we want to give credit to those who help, in addition to those who contribute items for printing. We greatly appreciate the help of Dr. John Tveten, who delivers the raw material to the printers; Mr. and Mrs. Ewell Bradley, who deliver the printed copies to the mailers; and to Miss Nell Ray and Miss Melba Drake, who do the addressing and mailing. All these are just as important in getting The Spoonbill to you as are those listed as editors.

COMING EVENTS

August 7

Thursday Regular OG Meeting, Downtown Recreational Center, 7:30 p. m. Dorothy Lefkovits will talk about her trip to Alaska.

August 7

Thursday The O.N.C., Audubon Society, American Society of Oceanography, and the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club has combined to have Dr. Amos Eddy, chairman of the Department of Meteorology from the University of Oklahoma present a program in the Great Southern Life Insurance Building's auditorium. The meeting will be at 8:00 P.M.

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CHRISTMAS COUNT

Wallace Mebane reports the Christmas Count will be held on December 27, 1969 on a Saturday. Start planning to take part in it!

OFFICERS:

Chairman:	Mr. Wallace C. Mebane, Jr., 7106 Mobud, Houston, Texas 77036
Vice-chairman:	Dr. John Tveten, 512 Inwood Drive, Baytown, Texas 77520
Secretary:	Mrs. Bill (Katrina) Ladwig, 3303 Sunset Blvd., Houston, Texas 77005
Treasurer:	Miss Sarah Gordon, 1746 Wroxton Court, Houston, Texas 77005
Field Trip Chairman:	Dr. David Marrack, 420 Mulberry Lane, Bellaire, Texas 77401
Program Chairman:	Mrs. Harry L. Brister, 2314 Saxon, Houston, Texas 77018
Co-editors of The Spoonbill:	Mr. and Mrs. David Lefkovits, 1601 Woodlawn, Baytown, Texas 77520



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