



THE SPOONBILL

Volume 6 No. 11

March 1958

Rec'd 3-15-58

 * HEART STOPPER *
 *
 * How does a diving duck stay *
 * under water so long? Electrocardio- *
 * graph readings, taken by Dr. Perry *
 * Gilbert Cornell zoology professor, *
 * on ducks under simulated diving *
 * conditions, revealed their heart beat *
 * decreased as much as 90% within 20 *
 * seconds of submersion, thus reducing *
 * oxygen demand. *
 * *****

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

FORTHCOMING ACTIVITIES

- March 16 - Sunday - Field trip to the Brazoria and Sweeny areas. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the Weingarten's store on Almeda. The leader will be Jimmy Murray.
- April 3 - Thursday - Bi-monthly meeting of the Ornithology Group to be held at the River Oaks Garden Center, 2503 Westheimer. 8:00 p.m.
- April 20 - Sunday - Upper Gulf Coast Spring Roundup.

ORNITHOLOGY GROUP REPORTS

February 6 - O. G. Meeting - (Mrs. C. R. Mattei, Secretary)

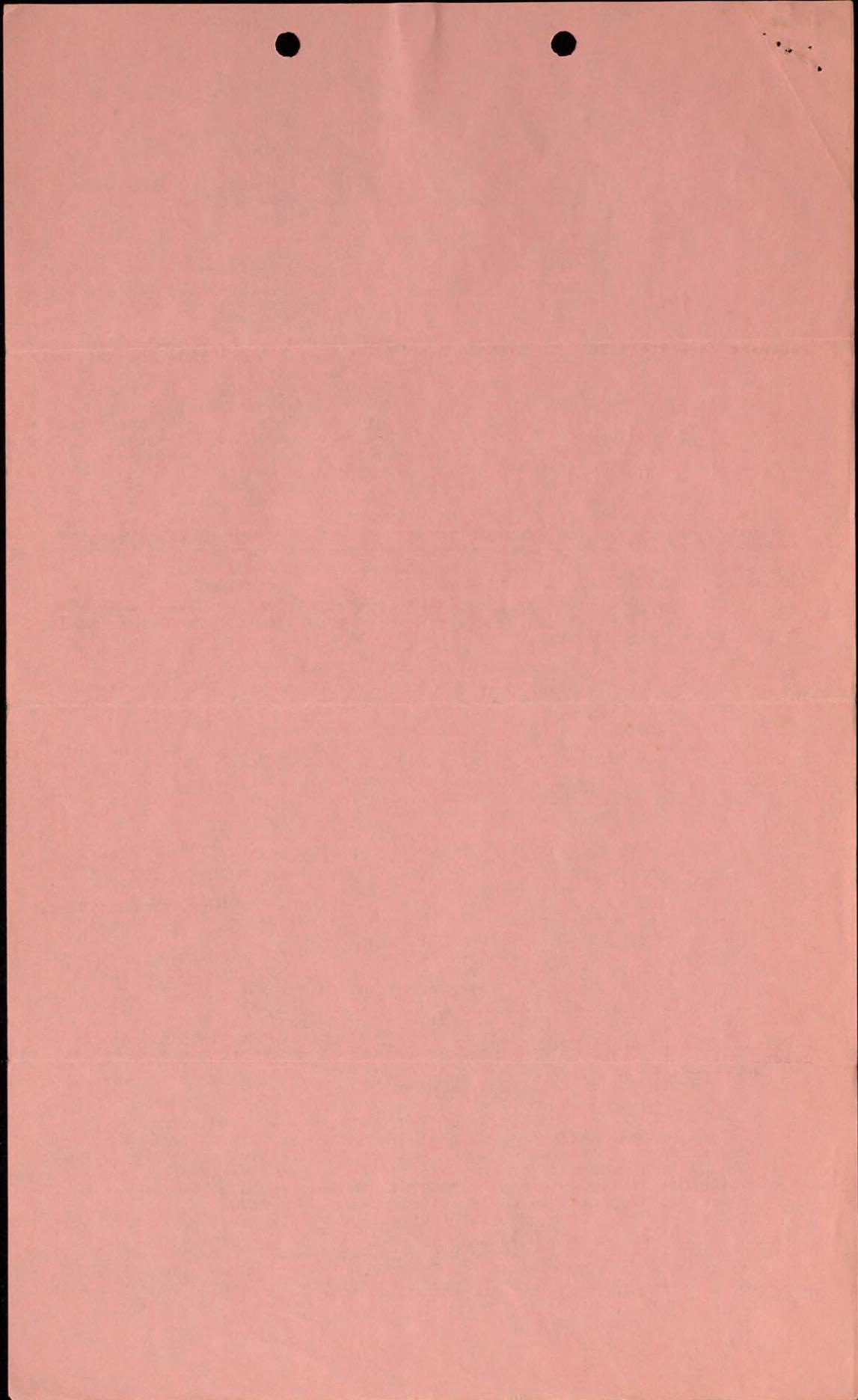
Approximately twenty-five members and several visitors were in attendance at the regular meeting of the Ornithology Group on February 6, which was held at the River Oaks Garden Center, 2503 Westheimer. Visitors included Mr. and Mrs. J. A. Snyder and sons, Clinton and Drew, from Baytown, and Mr. and Mrs. Martin Kroesche of the Photography Group. Mrs. Snyder and Clinton became members of the Ornithology Group.

Chairman C. B. Gilman presided and the minutes and treasurer's report were disposed of in the usual manner. We learned that Program Chairman, Mrs. Marine Jarrell, had been transferred to New Orleans, that the new check lists would probably soon be ready for the printer, and that the sanctuary near Memorial Drive is still in the proposal stage.

In view of the availability of funds, Miss Leota Stilwell made a motion that the Balscope Committee be authorized to purchase a tripod, another lens and a turret at an approximate total cost of \$54.00. The motion, seconded by Mr. Hoffman, carried.

Miss Thelma Smith moved that, since membership in the group had increased appreciably, the office of secretary-treasurer be separated into two offices. Miss Carrie Holcomb seconded the motion and it carried. However, a "post-discussion" brought out the recollection of several members that the by-laws provided for only one office. Mr. Gilman stated that the Nominating Committee, which he subsequently named, would be guided by the motion only if it proved to be in accord with the by-laws.

Mr. Gilman told of a proposal that our group plan another trip to the Valley for the April 21st holiday week-end. In the discussion of this proposal it was indicated that such a trip might cut down on the number of persons going to the TOS meeting in Corpus Christi. It was also noted that such a trip might also affect the participation in the spring count in this area.



All motions having been disposed of, Mr. Armand Yramategui introduced Mr. Martin Kroesche of the Photography Group who presented some movies that he had made. There were highlights from some of the Naturs Club's field trips, including trips to the state park at Gonzales, to Box Canyon near Austin, and to the Aransas Wildlife Refuge. He also showed films made in Florida. The scenes made in the swamps were of especial interest and those of the water skiers at Cypress Gardens were thrilling indeed. Our sincere thanks go to Mr. Kroesche.

February 23 - Field Trip to Western Harris County - (Miss Thelma Smith)

As has become customary, gray skies and threatening rain greeted the O. G.'s as they gathered at 8:30 a.m. Sunday, February 23, at Westheimer and Post Oak for the Cinco Ranch - Sandhill Crane trip. The drive to the ranch produced only the usual roadside birds but the last two cars of the five car procession stopped along the entrance road to Cinco, and the occupants saw one of the high-lights of the day, a Ferruginous Hawk (dark phase).

Birding at the ranch was good despite the mud under foot and the following species were seen: Anhinga, Redwing Blackbird, Common Bluebird, Cardinal, Carolina Chickadee, American Coot, Mourning Dove, Mallard, Yellow-shafted Flicker, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, American Goldfinch, Pied-billed Grebe, Belted Kingfisher, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Meadowlark, Mockingbird, Barred Owl, Eastern Phoebe, Robin, Spotted Sandpiper, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Field, Harris', Vesper, White-crowned and White-throated Sparrows, Brown Thrasher, Hermit Thrush, Tufted Titmouse, Myrtle and Orange-crowned Warblers, Downy and Red-bellied Woodpeckers, and Carolina Wren.

After lunch the three men drivers fortunately deferred to the wishes of the two women drivers who wanted to stay off muddy roads, and all proceeded west on Route 1093. There, scattered through several fields and in the air, approximately 300 Sandhill Cranes were sighted. Those on the ground were very close to the road, enabling all to see them clearly. In several of the groups, a few were performing their courtship dance.

Turning north on Farm Road 1463 to the Katy Road, many Snow, Blue, and White-fronted Geese were observed, some at very close range. In the ponds along this route, Baldpate, Mallard, Pintail, and Lesser Scaup were seen. At Katy, the group drove north on the Katy-Hockley Road, then west on House-Hall, adding Shoveler, Green-winged Teal, and Dowitchers to the list.

The group then broke up with three cars returning to the city while the diehards turned back to Katy-Hockley Road and birded north. They were rewarded with three Caracaras and two CATTLE EGRETS just north of the Cypress bridge. One of the Cattle Egrets was first seen following a black steer in typical Cattle Egret style while off in another part of the field some Common Egrets were clustered. All flew as we approached and the black feet and thicker neck of the Cattle Egret were clearly observed. From across the road a second Cattle Egret flew up and joined the first in flight.

Members making the trip were: Carrie Holcomb, Norma Oates, Leota Stilwell, Ruth Moorman, Jimmy Murray, Edna Miner, Carolyn Simmons, Myrtle Phillips, Nance Cunningham, Katrina Thompson, Thelma Smith, Josiephine Wilkin, Henry and Louise Hoffman, Clayton and Eva Gilman, Ella Wolfer, and Robert Simpson. Baron Louis de Geer, new Swedish Consul to Houston, was a guest.

Statistics: 66 species; the temperature ranged from 58 to 51 degrees; wind was under ten miles per hour; 105 miles were covered by car and about 2 were covered on foot.

* * * * *

CLEARING HOUSE

- January 22 - Mrs. Massingill observed Purple Finch in her yard at 1532 Munger. The birds stayed two days.
 February 2 - Clinton Snyder and Mrs. J. A. Snyder of Baytown, observed a Grasshopper Sparrow near Clodine.
 February 8 - Mr. and Mrs. Henry Aldrich found one male Purple Finch in their yard at 431 Knipp Road (SW Houston)



- February 9 - Vic Emanuel and Steve Williams found 1 CATTLE EGRET and 2 Rough-winged Swallows on Galveston Island.
- February 12 - Norma Oates reports that from 8 to 20 Purple Finch, including at least three colorful males, fed in the sycamore trees across the street from her house at 5908 Charlotte. The birds stayed until February 23.
- February 16 - Mr. and Mrs. Henry Hoffman observed a Roadrunner at the extreme western end of Memorial Drive (where Memorial Drive meets Addicks-Howell Road).
John O'Neill reports that Purple Finch are fairly abundant in the Memorial Drive area and extremely large flocks of Cedar Waxwings are often seen - one flock covering 14 trees.
Clinton and Mrs. J. A. Snyder found 2 CATTLE EGRETS on Galveston Island, near the intersection of 8 Road and 9-Mile Road. They were about 200 yards from cattle.
- February 22 - Ronald Fowler noted one Wood Duck near Lake Houston.
- February 23 - Joe Heiser recorded a White-eyed Vireo and a Catbird at the Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary. The two birds were seen as well as heard.
Austin Evans noted 2 CATTLE EGRETS on highway 73 near Port Arthur.
- February 25 - A Ruby-throated Hummingbird was observed by David Safley in his yard at 6410 Auden.
Austin Evans recorded 2 Purple Martins at Freeport.
- February 27 - Vic Emanuel observed one male Purple Martin at Bellaire High School (SW Houston)
- February 28 - 4 Purple Martins were seen by John O'Neill at his home (10723 Beinhorn Road)
- March 1 - Barn Owl seen at 10723 Beinhorn Road by John O'Neill.
- March 2 - Ronald Fowler reports that for the past several weeks there has been an over-abundance of Pine Warblers in his yard. (11921 Knippwood Lane)
Norma Oates, Leota Stilwell, and Ruth Moorman noted a Black-necked Stilt at Highland Bayou.
- March 3 - One Purple Martin near Bellaire High School (Carl Aiken)

IN MEMORIAM: Heber McAlister (Mac) Ramsey

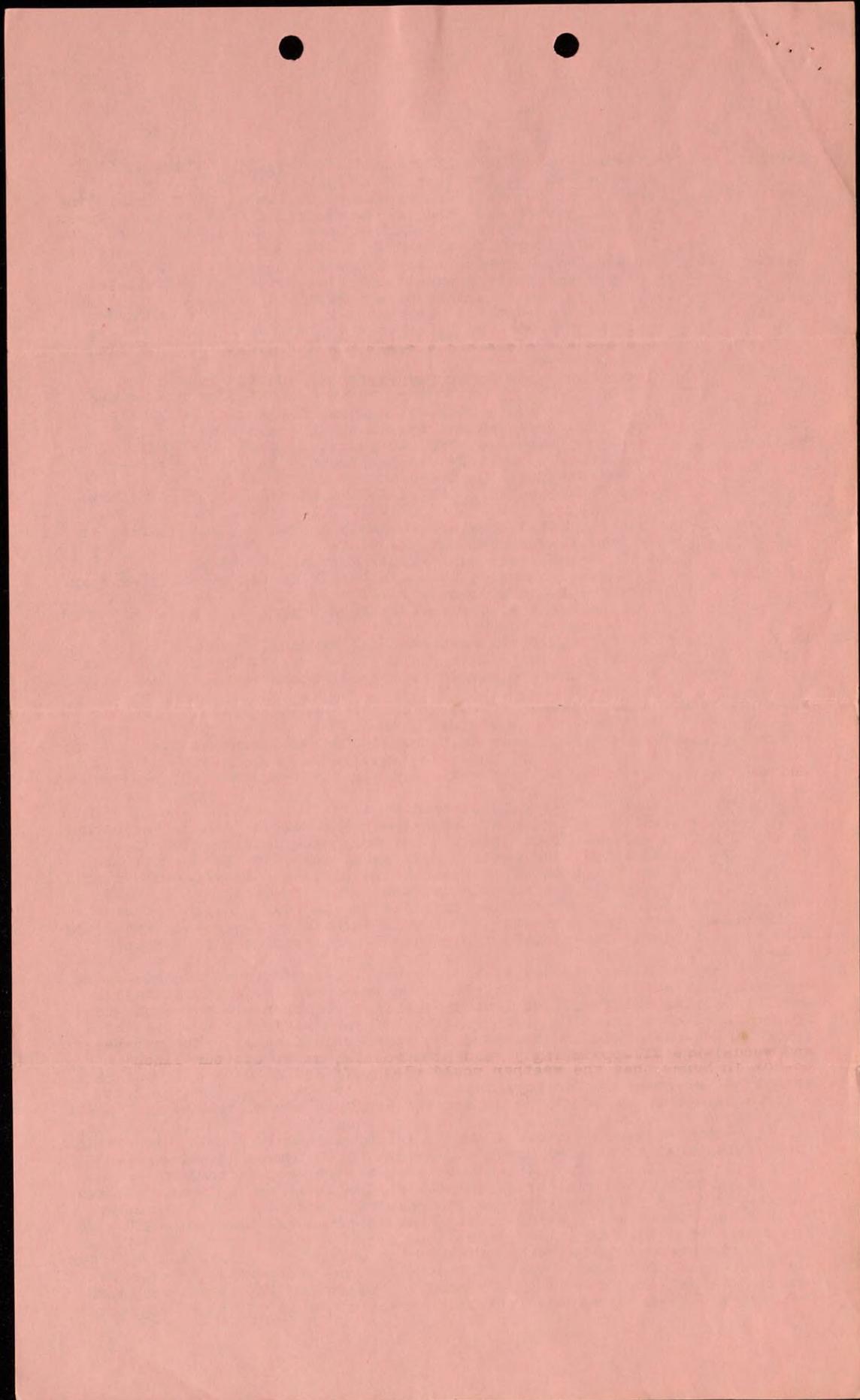
Heber McAlister Ramsey, known to his many friends as "Mac", was born 33 years ago in Atlanta, Texas, the son of Mr. and Mrs. H. H. Ramsey of that city. He finished high school in Atlanta, and attended North Texas State College, earning a bachelor's degree in physical education. During the summer he worked in Big Brother camps and when he graduated in 1948 he was hired by the Big Brother organization in Dallas. In 1952 he came to Houston as executive secretary of the Big Brothers of Houston, retaining that position until February 8, 1958, when he died suddenly of a heart attack.

During World War II, Mac learned he had a heart murmur but this knowledge did not dampen his zest for life or curtail his activities. He enjoyed camping trips and was instrumental in getting a camp-site for the Big Brothers organization, giving the boys under his supervision an opportunity to study and enjoy nature. Fishing was one of Mac's hobbies, and in 1955 with a motor boat of his own he spent week-ends cruising in the open waters around Galveston. He was often accompanied on these outings by some of Houston's fatherless boys.

On September 13, 1953, he made his first O. G. field trip with a small group who went to Thursday Island to count Spoonbill nests. It was a hot, humid day, there were mosquitoes and briars to contend with, but Mac never lost his enthusiasm or good humor. A short time later he joined the Outdoor Nature Club and became an active member of the Ornithology Group.

In May, 1954, he was voted chairman of the Ornithology Group. He was interested in every project of the group and for two years he personally printed the "Spoonbill", using an old hand-operated duplicating machine to turn out around 1000 pages for each issue.

He was married to Bette Wood in Houston on April 5, 1956, and with her young son, Mike, they made their home at 4332 Lafayette in Bellaire. He remained active in the Outdoor Nature Club, accepting the chairmanship of the Ways and Means Committee in 1956. He was a member of the Photography



Group and served as field trip chairman there. Mac was a charter member of the Texas Ornithological Society attending many of the organization's field trips and meetings.

He was a person of highest integrity; his keen sense of humor, pleasant manner and enthusiasm assured his popularity in all business and social activities. His warm friendship enriched the lives of those who knew him, and in the hearts of his family and friends there will always be pleasant, happy memories of Mac.

UNOFFICIAL CHRISTMAS COUNT RESULTS - January 22, 1958

1 - Cocoa, Fla.-----	193
2 - Laguna Atascosa, Texas-----	165
3 - San Diego, Calif.-----	164
4 - Tomales Bay, Calif.-----	155
5 - Houston, Texas-----	154 *
6 - Coot Bay, Fla.-----	152
7 - Los Angeles, Calif.-----	148
8 - St. Marks, Fla.-----	144
(tie) Wilmington, N. C.-----	144
10 - Panacea, Fla.-----	142
11 - Oakland, Calif.-----	135
12 - Charleston, S. C.-----	133
13 - Jacksonville, Fla.-----	131

* Both Dowitchers to be counted as of 1958 count

March 2, 1958 - (Carl Aiken)

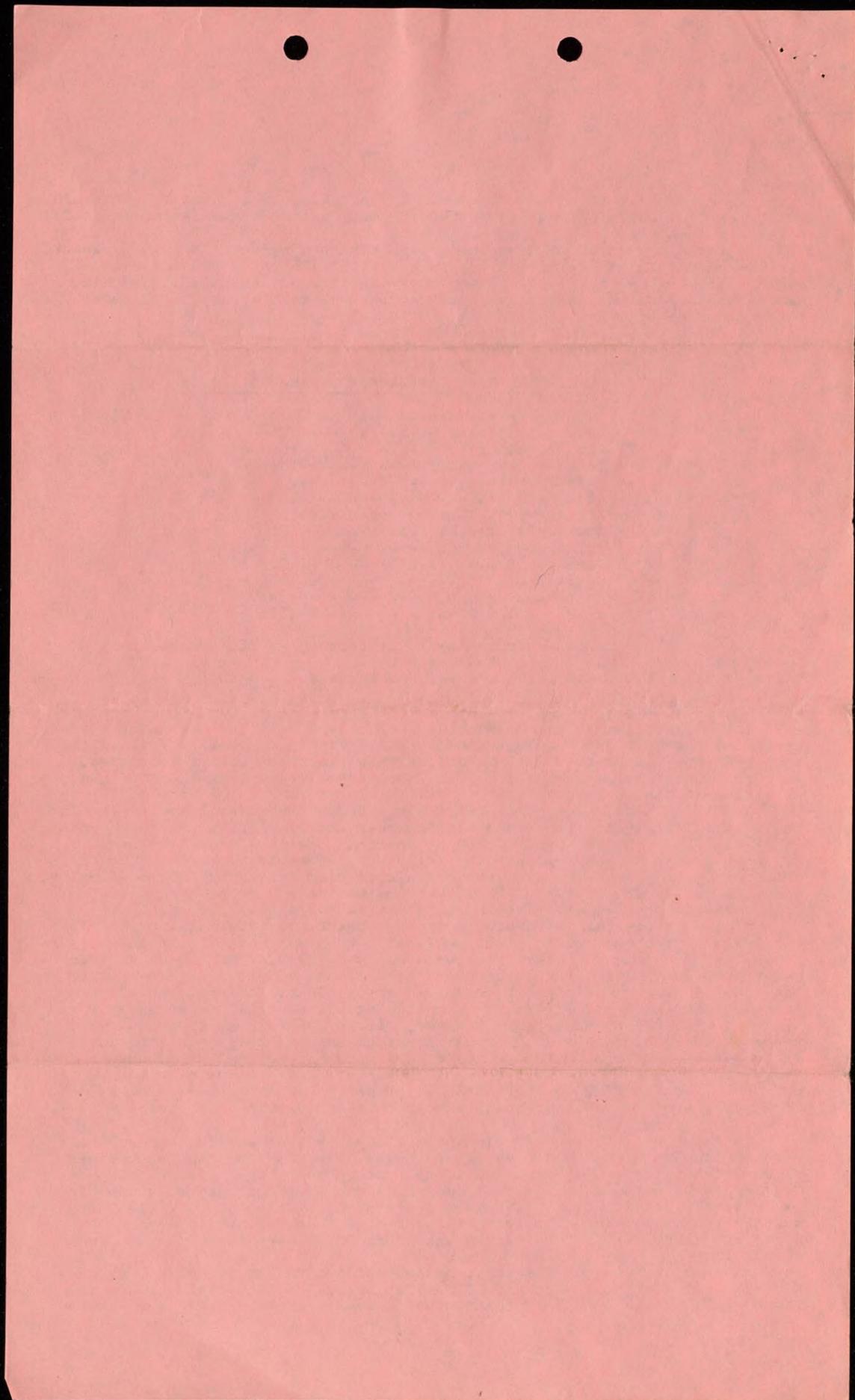
The month of March brings without a doubt the official beginning of spring migration along the Texas Gulf Coast. With a fortunate break in the winter weather many birds make their long awaited appearance in our area, and the enthusiasm of local birders is once again freed from the confinement of cold and rain.

With high hopes of a gala christening to this wonderful event, Ronald Fowler and I arrived in a wooded section near the San Jacinto Battlegrounds about 7:15 a.m. House Wrens, Phoebes, and Song Sparrows added the usual touch of winter to the overcast day while Myrtle Warblers paraded through the trees. It was the note of another winter bird, the Ruby-crowned Kinglet, that led us to our first spring migrant and summer resident, a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. The two were feeding in a low Yaupon bush.

A pond on the Battlegrounds produced a beautiful male Mallard and his mate, while from the nearby reeds we flushed the resident Little Blue Herons and Snowy Egrets. Many Lesser Scaup were feeding in the marsh near Peggy Lake but, with the exception of large flocks of Brewer's Blackbirds, the land birds were completely absent. Baytown Tunnel offered Pintails, Canvasbacks, and Water Pipits, but in the face of bad weather we quickly headed for Seabrook and Kemah. However, before arriving at these coastal towns it began to rain and the wind increased considerably. The marshes and woods were disappointingly void of birdlife, so we ate our lunch nearby in hopes that the weather would clear off and give us a better opportunity to search for migrants. Although it had stopped raining at 11:15, the woods were still quiet and we proceeded south on highway 146 toward Galveston.

Laughing Gulls in summer plumage sailed over the causeway and several Lesser Scaup swam in the cloudy waters below. Two Common Loons were added to our list at Offatt's Bayou and another near the bridge in town. Common Gallinules were feeding in a small marsh on Stewart Road but we decided to explore that later and try to cover the west end of the island while the weather remained calm. The pond behind the golf course was covered with Coots and Scaup, and in the tall grass we found a Green Heron, our second spring migrant.

As we continued out S Road it became evident that many ducks had already arrived from the south. Pintails, Baldpates, Shovelers, Blue and Green-winged Teal, and Ruddy Ducks were in great abundance over the entire



western half of the island and could often be found in flooded ditches beside the road.

At the corner of 8-Mi. Road and S Road we found three Long-billed Marsh Wrens and four Swamp Sparrows. About a dozen Purple Martins flew over a nearby farm house and we first noticed the small flocks of Tree Swallows flying low over the fields. At 8-Mi. Road we also ended our long and diligent search for the CATTLE EGRET when two individuals were found - one feeding near dairy cattle and the other in a ditch not five feet from the road. We particularly noted the bright orange bills, dark greenish legs, yellow iris, and the peculiar waving motion of their stubby necks.

After adding a flock of 40 White Ibis to our list, we returned to the east end. At the marsh on S Road (near the corner of S and 61st Street) we again found the Common Gallinules as well as two Sora Rails. An added attraction this time was a small Muskrat feeding on cattails beside his conical home. At Kempner Park we met Norma Oates, Leota Stilwell, and Ruth Moorman. They saved us much time and trouble by pointing out the hard to find Inca Doves - which had already started their courtship. Before Ronald and I left Kempner, we recorded an Olive-backed Thrush (evidently a young bird because of extremely short tail and ruffled appearance). Ruddy Turnstones and two Brown Pelicans were found at the east jetties but the wind had come up again; making observation difficult. We rode around the beaches a short while and then decided to call it a day.

We left Galveston with 76 species and added one on the way home - a Black Duck at Highland Bayou. This gave us a grand total of 77 species and a much brighter outlook on the coming spring migration.

Audubon's Shearwater - (Mrs. Bessie Reid, Silsbee)

Fishermen along the western side of the Intracoastal Canal and on Taylor's Bayou used to pick up and bring me all kinds of birds that had been washed there after battering themselves to death against the Sabine lighthouse tower. One specimen was of the general size, shape and coloring of the lighter hued terns. But no tern has a bill like that of the dainty seabird, new to me. Being still alive, he went to the bath tub where he surprised us all by recovering from what had appeared necessarily fatal injuries.

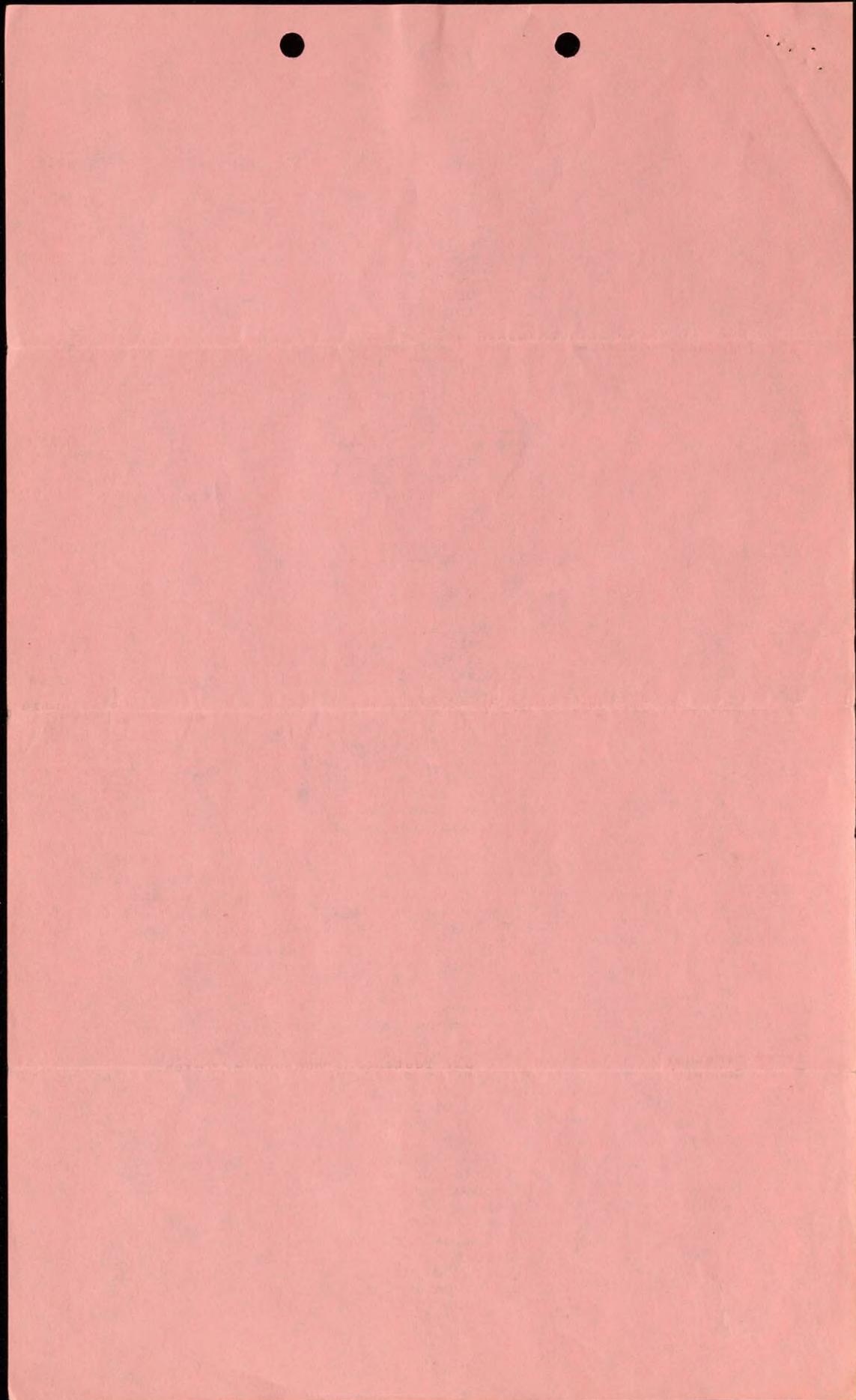
When he could again use his long, lovely wings, we took him down to Keith's Lake, within a few miles of the Gulf, and released him. He played on the lake for a few minutes then headed for the Gulf. I sent a detailed description of him to the B.B.S. at Washington, and was told in reply that our visitor might have been a pelagic species frequenting the vicinity of Bermuda and neighboring shores.

Accidental on the Florida east coast, it had not been reported further west. Were another to turn up, I was to be sure to send it along. Many years passed before a second bird rode into the pass on a storm, and was blown against the lighthouse. We could not regret No. 2's dying in spite of our trying to save it. Washington got it promptly and B.B.S. identified it as an Audubon's Shearwater.

Report from Arlie K. McKay - Cove Area

The following are, for the commoner species, the peak estimates from January 16 to February 28.

Common Loon, 1 on Jan. 19; Pied-billed Grebe, 8 on Feb. 9; Anhinga, 4 on Jan. 19; Green Heron, 1 on Nov. 30, Jan. 1, and Feb. 2; American Bittern, one found dead on Feb. 23; White-fronted Goose, 40 on Feb. 23; Mallard, 500 on Jan. 21; Mottled Duck, 7 on Feb. 9; Gadwall, 3 on Feb. 15; Baldpate, 50 on Jan. 18; Pintail, 1500 on Feb. 14; Green-winged Teal, 1000 on Feb. 22; Blue-winged Teal, 7 on Feb. 23; Shoveler, 90 on Jan. 26; Common Goldeneye, 50 on Jan. 25; Ruddy Duck, 3 on Jan. 19; Red-breasted Merganser, 75 on Jan. 25; Sharp-shinned Hawk, 2 on Feb. 23; Cooper's Hawk, 1 on Jan. 19; Red-tailed Hawk, 13 on Feb. 15; Red-shouldered Hawk, 7 on Feb. 15; Caracara, 2 on Jan. 25; Sparrow Hawk, 22 on Jan. 19; Least Bittern, 1 on Dec. 29 and Feb. 23; King Rail, one found dead on Feb. 24; Common Gallinule, 3 on Dec. 28 and 29; Coot, 16 on Jan. 26; Semipalmated Plover, 2 on Jan. 25; Black-bellied Plover, 100 on Jan. 26; Turnstone, 11 on Feb. 15; Common Snipe, 19 on Jan. 19; Short-billed Dowitcher, 500 on Jan. 26; Long-billed Dowitcher, 10 on Jan. 26; Spotted Sandpiper, 1 on Jan. 18, 2 on the 25th, 1 on Feb. 1, and 2 on the 15th; Willet, 28 on Feb. 15; Greater Yellowlegs, 26 on Jan. 19;



Lesser Yellowlegs, 26 on Jan 26; Sanderling, 7 on Feb. 18; Herring Gull, 4 on Feb. 15; Bonaparte's Gull, 1 on Jan. 26; Black Skimmer, 1 found dead on Jan. 18; Screech Owl, 1 on Jan. 24, Feb. 3, Feb. 16, and Feb. 20; Great Horned Owl, 2 frequently; Yellow-shafted Flicker, 17 on Feb. 16; Belted Kingfisher, 5 on Feb. 9; Downy Woodpecker, 3 on Feb. 15; Red-bellied Woodpecker, 2 frequently; Pileated Woodpecker, 3 on Feb. 15, and 2 on the 23rd; Red-headed Woodpecker, 1 on Jan. 26; Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, 2 frequently; Eastern Phoebe, 8 on Jan. 26; Vermilion Flycatcher, 2 on Jan. 19, 1 on the 26th, and 2 on Feb. 9; Tree Swallow, 5 on Jan. 18, 3 on Feb. 9, and 20 on the 23rd; Barn Swallow, 2 on Feb. 1 (two of the four that were seen on Nov. 30 and Dec. 29 might have died); Brown Creeper, 1 on Feb. 23; House Wren, 1 on Feb. 16; Short-billed Marsh Wren, 1 on Jan. 18; Robin, 150 on Jan. 19, still common; Hermit Thrush, 9 on Jan. 19; Bluebird, 20 on Feb. 9; Golden-crowned Kinglet, 1 on Feb. 23; Sprague's Pipit, 5 on Feb. 15; Cedar Waxwing, 10 at Baytown on Feb. 26; Solitary Vireo, 1 on Jan. 15 and 2 on Feb. 19; Orange-crowned Warbler, 7 on Jan. 19; Myrtle Warbler, 100 on Feb. 23; Yellowthroat, 3 on Jan. 18; Bronzed Grackle, 10 on Feb. 21; Purple Finch, 1 on Jan. 26; American Goldfinch, 125 on Feb. 16, and 50 on the 23rd; Rufous-sided Towhee, 3 on Jan. 26, 2 on Feb. 15, and 2 on the 16th; Seaside Sparrow, 4 on Jan. 25; Vesper Sparrow, 20 on Jan. 18; White-crowned Sparrow, 15 on Jan. 25; Song Sparrow, 3 on Jan. 18.

New Discovery - from Chemical & Engineering News Week

When a bird lands on oil-topped water, it can, and usually does, mean disaster. The oil mats its feathers and prevents flight. Often the bird starves. Sometimes it gets washed ashore where somebody picks it up and tries to rehabilitate it. But in 90% of the cases the bird dies.

Washing the feathers with soaps or detergents takes the oil away, and with it the natural oils. So if the bird tries to swim, it sinks; if it is exposed to air, it often gets pneumonia and dies.

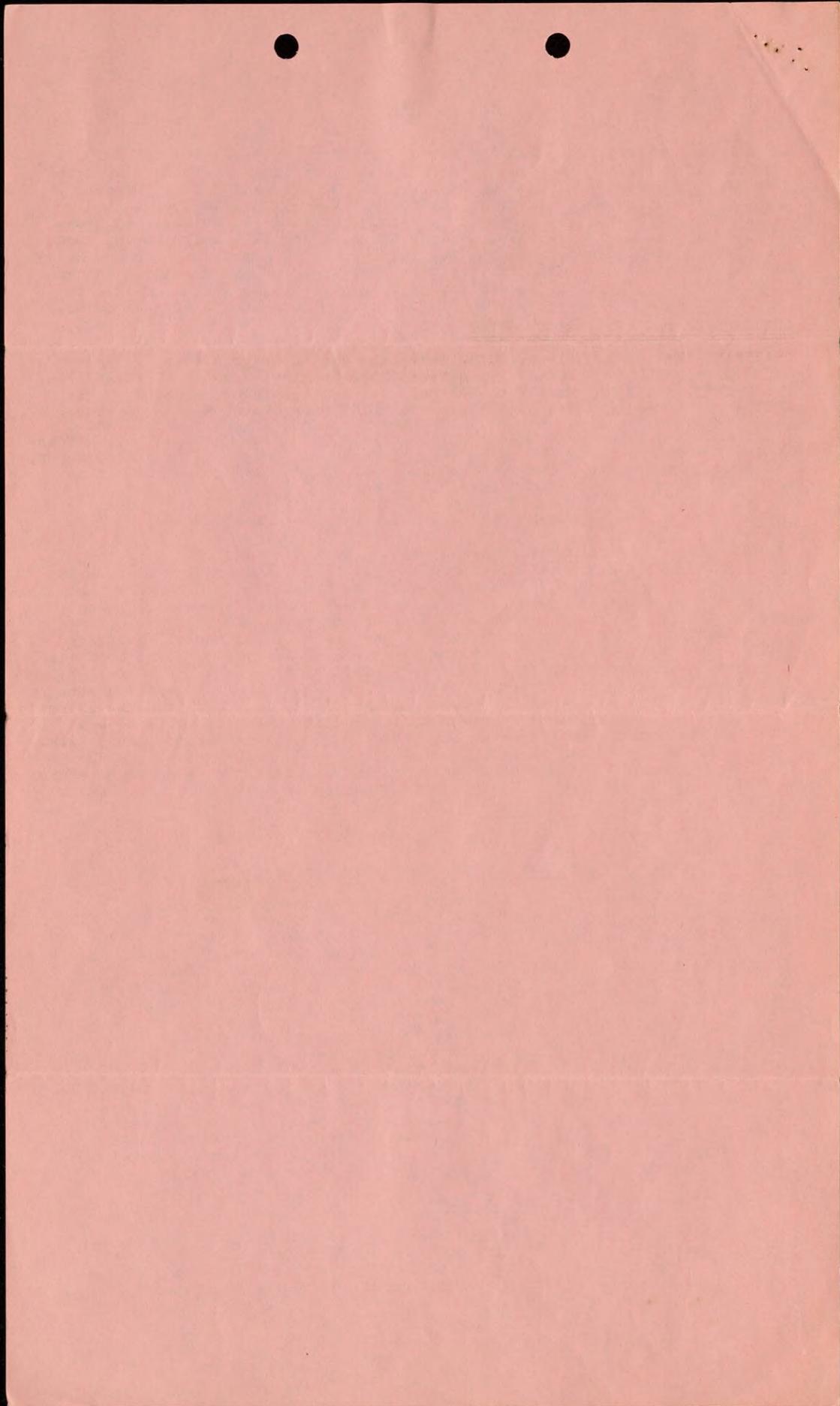
New hope for such derelicts, however, comes from England where a woman had the oil problem dumped into her lap. She lives in a house on the Atlantic Ocean and well-oiled birds float up to her doorstep many times. She and others have come up with a treatment using fuller's earth or prepared chalk. This absorbs the excess oils but doesn't steal the natural oils from the feathers. Other things, such as proper feeding and keeping room temperature right, are important, but the key step is absorbing the oil rather than washing it away.

Members Who Have Joined the Ornithology Group Since October 1, 1957

Mrs. Wm. H. Ainsworth	3024 Rice Blvd., Houston 5, Texas
Charles A. Aves	R.F.D. 372 A, Spring, Texas
Miss Cathy Aves	R.F.D. 372 A, Spring, Texas
Mrs. Louis Brand	5523 H.M.C. St., Houston 21, Texas
Charles Bruhl, Jr.	6039 Glencove, Houston 7, Texas
Mrs. E. P. Edwards	5230 Grape Road, Houston, Texas
Miss Mary P. Etzel	1900 Pech Road, Houston 24, Texas
Mrs. J. A. Snyder	Box 3095, Baytown, Texas
Clinton Snyder	Box 3095, Baytown, Texas
Mrs. R. L. Inglis	3333 Palm, Houston 4, Texas
Larry Semander	517 Teetshorn, Houston 9, Texas
E. J. Goodwin	No. 3 Leisure Lane, Houston 24, Texas
Mrs. E. J. Goodwin	No. 3 Leisure Lane, Houston 24, Texas
Carl Goodwin	No. 3 Leisure Lane, Houston 24, Texas
Jerry Strickling	5118 West Belfort, Houston 35, Texas
Mrs. Jerry Strickling	5118 West Belfort, Houston 35, Texas
Dr. Louis Turner	2614 Werlein, Houston 5, Texas

New Subscribers Since October 1, 1957

Jimmy Lord	124 E. 12th Avenue, Belton, Texas
Dr. Charles H. Hall	3807 Avenue R, Galveston, Texas
Steve Williams	2732 University Blvd., Houston 5, Texas
Mrs. Wm. M. Donohue	2722 Pemberton, Houston 5, Texas



OFF THE PRESS

The March, 1958 edition of the National Geographic Magazine offers two wonderful stories of wildlife, both complete with color photographs. The first is about the Bristlecone Pine, the oldest known living thing, and the second concerns rare birds of Spain's Marismas. The latter is by Roger Tory Peterson and contains many photographs by him.

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