



The Spoonbill

A Publication of the Ornithology Group (OG)
of the Houston Outdoor Nature Club

September 2006
Vol. 55 No. 7

September Meeting

Monday, September 11, 2006 -- 7:00 p.m.

Bayland Community Center
6400 Bissonnet, Houston

6:30 -- Learning Corner -- with Adam Wood:
iPod for Birders--where to get it, how to set it up,
accessories needed in the field.

**Program: The Nature Conservancy:
Fort Hood, Texas, and Beyond**
Speaker: **Rich Kostecke**

Rich Kostecke received his B.S. in Biology from the University of Kansas, his M.S. from North Dakota State University, and his Ph.D. from Texas Tech University. For the past 4 years, Rich has served as Project Scientist for The Nature Conservancy's Fort Hood Project, where he has conducted research on the conservation and management of the endangered Black-capped Vireo and Golden-cheeked Warbler, as well as cowbirds.

Since the mid-1990s, The Nature Conservancy has worked cooperatively with the Department of Defense to conduct research on federally endangered Black-capped Vireos and Golden-cheeked Warblers on Fort Hood Military Reservation. Intensive habitat management and cowbird removal efforts have paid off, as the largest populations of these two species now occur on Fort Hood. These results prove that it is possible to conserve endangered species while meeting Fort Hood's primary goal of military mission-readiness. Rich will talk about the ecology, management, and conservation of the Black-capped Vireo and Golden-cheeked Warbler, on Fort Hood and in general. He will also address the controversy over cowbird removal and its role in songbird conservation, and the range-wide status and future of the Black-capped Vireo and Golden-cheeked Warbler. Rich will discuss the relationship between The Nature Conservancy and Fort Hood, and will comment of the larger role of The Nature Conservancy, briefly highlighting its work on the Texas Gulf Coast and its objectives for global conservation.

Other Events

Sept. 9: Xtreme Hummingbird Xtravaganza,
Lake Jackson (GCBO)

Sept. 16: Smith Point Hawk Watch
with Bill Saulmon

Sept. 16-17: Hawk Identification Workshop
presented by Gulf Coast Bird Observatory
with Jeff Smith at Smith Point -- \$100
<http://www.gcbo.org/hawkwatch.html>

Sept. 23: Brazos Bend State Park
beginning birder / new member trip
with Adam Wood

Oct. 14: Little Thicket Nature Preserve
beginning birder / new member trip
with Adam Wood

Oct. 21: Quintana/Brazoria NWR
with Adam Wood

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Minutes of the August 7, 2006 Meeting

Bayland Community Center

Attendance: 78

About the Ornithology Group

The Ornithology Group (OG) is a division of the Outdoor Nature Club (ONC), a non-profit organization dedicated to greater knowledge about the environment and wildlife of the Upper Texas Coast. The OG is a club of individuals interested in all aspects of birding, including bird identification, listing bird sightings, competing in birding events, and preserving bird habitat. Some members study bird behavior, biology, distribution and migration, while others just enjoy watching birds. The organization is designed to accommodate these diverse birding interests. Monthly meetings and field trips provide an opportunity to interact with and learn from experts in local and international birding.

Chair:	Michael Williams	713-228-9064
Vice-Chair:	Bernice Hotman	713-782-7889
Secretary:	Shirley & Raymond Mondshine	713-774-1413
Treasurer:	Jim Winn	713-464-8057
Clearing House:	David Sarkozi	713-412-4409
Library:	Andy Scott	281-537-9690
Membership:	Margret Simmons	713-776-2511

Spoonbill: Al Shultz 281-829-0970
Email: og_spoonbill@earthlink.net

OG website: <http://www.ornithologygroup.org/>

ONC website: <http://www.outdoornatureclub.org/>

1. **Learning Corner:** Mark Klym discussed the importance of being consistent when working with unknown Hummingbirds. He stressed the use of tools; one being use of our field guides; getting check lists of birds in the specific area we are birding; take photos and get recordings when you can; studying the bill, color patterns, tails, and movements all the while making notes of these observations. These tools should help in IDing birds.

2. **Welcome:** Chairman Williams opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m. with a greeting to all and a welcome to 10 visitors. Bird sightings reported were: Nutmeg Mannikins (many at Arthur Storey Park), Swallow-tailed Kites, Red-whiskered Bulbul, thousands of Purple Martins (staging in the Galleria area each evening), Black-chinned Hummingbird, Northern Jacana in the Rio Grande Valley, Black Swan on Corpus Christi Bay, Rufous Hummingbird at a home in Pecan Grove, Kirtland's Warbler and migrating flocks of Blue Jays in Michigan, Connecticut Warbler in Florida, White-tailed Kites gathering on the ground in La Grange area, Atlantic Puffin in Maine, Pied Kingfisher and Little Bustard in Istanbul.

3. **Minutes** of May meeting by John Schneider approved.

4. **Environmental Issues:** Chairman Williams again brought to our attention the need to recognize the plight of our state parks, especially when voting in November. Mary Dodson stated the oil spill in Alaska will affect us all. Bills now in Congress need to pay attention to Alaskan wildlife. Sale of federal lands in Texas (25,000 acres) needs monitoring. David Marrack informed us that 16 new Nuclear plants may be built in Texas.

5. **The Spoonbill:** Margret Simmons reminded all to have any news or articles in by Aug. 10. Any summer story or adventure is welcome. Those not getting their SB via email should let Margret know. There were printed copies at the meeting.

6. **Membership:** Margret asked all to sign in for accurate count of attendees. She also reminded us the ONC Yearbook has been sent to members.

7. **Library:** Andy Scott stated there were several books from the library over due for more than a year. Please note if you have one of these books and return ASAP.

8. **Field Trips:** Jim Winn gave details for trips by the Houston Audubon Society to be held Sept. 10, 11, and 13 to Big Reef, East Beach, and Bolivar; the cost is \$25 for the day, \$50 for taking the bus. For more information, contact Skip Almony at skipalm@aol.com or the Houston Audubon Society. These trips will be filled on a first-come, first-served basis. Adam Wood announced OG birding trips coming up this year and 2007. The Aug. 19 field trip will be to Matagorda County. The quarterly trip for fall will be to Granger, Texas, Oct. 27-29. In June 2007, Victor Emanuel Nature Tours will take a group (14) of OG members to Southeast Arizona.

9. **Budget News:** Jim Winn gave the good news of our club having \$8,682 in the bank, which is \$830 more than last year. At the next Board meeting donations to the Smith Point Hawk Watch will be voted on.

10. **Program:** Bernice Hotman introduced Mark Klym, the coordinator of the Texas Wildscapes and Texas Hummingbird Roundup programs at Texas Parks and Wildlife. Texas has a wonderful diversity of hummingbird species, and Mark's talk was about where, when, who and what to look for when chasing hummers in Texas. His recommendations of three excellent books are: A Field Guide to Hummingbirds of North America, by Sheri Williamson; Hummingbirds of North America, the photographic guide, by Steve Howell; and Hummingbirds of Texas, by C. Shackelford, M Lindsay, M Klym and S. Rucker. Mark also informed us about several hummingbird festivals: Ft. Davis Festival is always the 3rd weekend of August; Lake Jackson's festival is always the first weekend after Labor Day; and Rockport's festival is always the second weekend after Labor Day. Questions and answers followed with a book signing by Mark.

11. **Meeting adjourned** at 8:30 p.m.

--Shirley Mondshine

September 16, 2006: Hawk Watch Trip

Our first monthly field trip is our annual Hawk Watch trip to Smith Point. The trip leader will be OG's very own Bill Saulmon, a Hawk Watch counter volunteer. There will also be additional hawk watch counter volunteers at the tower to assist people in raptor identification. If you are looking to really learn how to identify raptors on the wing from close up and afar, this is the trip for you. It doesn't matter if you are a beginner or a seasoned birder--the Hawk Watch counters are very knowledgeable and are willing to answer whatever questions you may have about raptor identification. This is when raptor migration peaks, so throughout the day there should be lots of raptors soaring by. So come and join us for a day of looking up at not the stars but "kettles" of hawks soaring overhead. It should be a memorable experience that you don't want to miss. Hopefully this year no hurricane will interrupt the trip.

Meet at the hawk watch tower at Smith Point at 8:30 a.m. on Saturday, September 16, 2005. From Houston, take I-10 east to exit 812. (Coming from the east on I-10, take exit 813.) Turn south on Highway 61, go to the 4-way stop. Proceed through the 4-way where the road becomes FM 562. Follow FM 562 until a fork (Y) in the road, and go right at the Y. After approximately 14 miles you will arrive in the small village of Smith Point. Continue straight towards the bay and follow the black and white Hawk Watch signs, turning left to reach the tower. It will take approximately 1½ hour to 2 hours to get there from Houston, so I suggest leaving around 6:30 a.m. Make sure to bring binoculars, a hat, sunscreen, raingear (in case it rains, but we will bird rain or shine), water, and snacks if you would like (there is a gas station nearby with a food mart).

September 23, 2006: New Member / Beginner Birder Trip to Brazos Bend

Are you a beginning birder? Are you interested in finding out more about OG and birding before joining our regular monthly trips? If so, then this trip is for you. Join me for a leisurely day of birding in Brazos Bend State Park, where you will have the opportunity to improve your birding skills in a low-pressure environment. I have been birding for 14 years, and have been birding the Upper Texas Coast and surrounding counties intensively since 2004. I have been a member of the Houston Ornithology Group for the past two years and am currently serving my second year as Field Trip Coordinator. I am largely a self-taught birder. This trip will be a chance for inexperienced birders to get more experience in a low pressure environment where we will not be worried about finding target birds or trying to see as many species of birds as possible. So come on out to Brazos Bend ready to meet new people and to ask questions and learn more about birding and the birding community.

We will meet in the parking lot for 40-Acre Lake at 8:00 a.m. The park is approximately a one-hour drive from downtown Houston. Take Highway 59 South to the Crabb River Road exit. You may also take State Highway 288 south to FM 1462 West, then follow FM 1462 to FM 762 North. From the south, follow State Highway 288 North to the FM 1462 exit, or take State Highway 36 to FM 1462 East. All routes are marked with brown State Park signs to guide you. We will bird for as long as the group wishes, and I will be willing to stay as late as the last person to make sure that everybody sees most of what they want to see and gets all their questions asked. Be sure to bring binoculars, hat, sunscreen, water, snacks, a camp chair (we may be staying in one spot for quite some time at points during the trip), camera, and a lunch (if you plan on birding in the afternoon).

--Adam Wood, OG Field Trip Coordinator birdman_570@yahoo.com 713-515-1692

OG Mid-Week Birding Trips

The OG will sponsor a midweek birding trip the second Wednesday of each month from September through May. These will be informal birding trips with Skip Almoney as the leader. Skip will be at the site at 8:00 a.m. and the trip will not last beyond 12 noon. Depending on the birds and the number of participants, the trip may not be a full 4 hours. Each location listed below is in or near the city of Houston with only a few outside Beltway 8. Anyone is welcome and we will meet unless the weather is seriously inclement. The following are the locations for each month of the upcoming season.

September 2006	Timbergrove Park
October 2006	Houston Arboretum
November 2006	Hermann Park
December 2007	Edith L. Moore Sanctuary
January 2007	Cullinan Park
February 2007	Russ Pittman Park
March 2007	Jesse H. Jones Park
April 2007	Herman Brown Park
May 2007	Hermann Park

Directions to the meeting places at these sites will be listed in the Spoonbill for the month of the trip.

September Mid-Week Field Trip

The September midweek birding trip will be on September 13 at the Timbergrove (11th Street) Park, a small urban park that has 5 woodpecker species on its checklist. This trip will help to collect baseline data on the bird life in this green space, which is in danger of being developed. We may also walk to the White Oak Bayou and bird the green space surrounding it. The meeting place will be southeast corner of Timbergrove Park. The park is located at the corner of 11th Street and Shelterwood Street in the Heights area. To reach this location, get on West T.C. Jester from either I-10 (going north on T.C. Jester) or from I-610 North Loop (going south on T.C. Jester). Go to the intersection of West T.C. Jester and 11th Street, and go west from that intersection. After crossing White Oak Bayou, the second street is Shelterwood Drive. Turn north on Shelterwood and park along the street, or on one of the side streets, Woodbrook or Pineshade Lanes.

--Skip Almoney

October 27-29 Trip to Granger

Tim Fennell will lead us on a birding expedition to Granger and the surrounding areas, in search of Mountain Plover, Sprague's Pipit and late fall migrants. Tim has been a science teacher in Austin for the past 20 years, and has been birding the Granger area intensively since 1997 when he adopted it as his local "patch." He has led field trips to the Granger area for various birding organizations, including the Texas Ornithological Society, the Travis Audubon Society and the Northeast Texas Field Ornithologists; and since 1998 he has taught a class on shorebird identification for the Travis Audubon Society. We should see some good birds over the course of the weekend, and birding in the Hill Country is always a treat. So come out and join us for a nice weekend of birding in the Granger area of Central Texas.

The Best Western Taylor Inn has said that they will give a discount, charging \$67 for a double and \$63 for a single. The number is 512-352-3536 and all you need to do is just say that you are with the Houston Ornithology Group (Nalini quoted the rates). There are 40 rooms and she said that they can fill up as they are basically the only game in town. The motel is located on Highway 79 on the west edge of town. (However, as is often the case, you can get a better deal online, at least currently. Currently at <http://www.bestwestern.com> folks can reserve a single or a double for as low as \$61 with a AAA or AARP discount. I suggest they try online before they call the hotel.) We will plan to meet in the hotel lobby at 9 p.m on Friday night so that I can make sure that everybody is there and can give out details about how the weekend is going to go.

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This trip will be limited to 14 people. There will be a \$25 registration fee plus a \$10 donation to the OG. Please make registration fee checks payable to me, and send them to Adam Wood, 2525 Old Farm Road, Houston, Tx. 77063. The \$10 donation should be made out to the Ornithology Group and given to me Friday night at the hotel.

Be sure to bring your binoculars, hat, sunscreen, water, lunches, spotting scope, camera, and snacks.

--Adam Wood, OG Field Trip Coordinator -- birdman_570@yahoo.com, 713-515-1692

How Birdwatching Changed My Life

Until 14 years ago, my husband and I were your typical suburban homeowners. As for birds, I thought the world consisted of house sparrows and grackles. Certainly I had heard of exotic creatures like cardinals and blue jays, but I had little first-hand acquaintance with them. Then the boarding stable where I kept my horse closed down, causing us to move to a home in a rural area where we could keep the horse right on the property. As a bonus, this property bordered a lovely quiet lake that reflected the gorgeous sunsets and sunrises, and contained over six acres of trees and plants.

As we settled into life in our new home, I began to notice various brightly colored birds in the yard. I soon had to buy binoculars and a field guide to try to identify the birds. It was then that I discovered the diverse world of my yard. I learned to recognize painted and indigo buntings, grosbeaks, tanagers, warblers, vireos, hawks, hummingbirds, herons, ducks, owls and so many more types of birds. When I reported seeing a bald eagle in a tree in our yard, many friends did not believe me. This is when I bought a camera and started documenting the birds that visited my yard.

Within 5 years, I have taken photos in the yard of over 144 different kinds of birds. I have even been able to photograph some of the many babies that are raised here, such as the yellow-billed cuckoos, vireos, red-headed woodpeckers, Mississippi kites, and whistling ducks. And I am still trying to get photos of the cerulean warblers who remain at tree-top and hard to photograph, as

well as the elusive woodcocks, owls, bobwhite and others that I have seen but not yet captured on film.

My husband and I have learned a lot about birds since our move. We have learned that we are living on a migration path. We have learned about "fallouts" when the migrants cover the yard in such numbers and diversity that we spend the day in awe. We have been fascinated as we look out of the windows to see hawks migrating by the hundreds. We have learned how important it is to preserve the wild habitat on the property for the wildlife--for the birds, butterflies, dragonflies and other creatures of our yard. We have also learned to enjoy our lives more. Since we moved here to Anahuac, we return home from our office in downtown Houston and feel like we are coming home to a tropical paradise vacation, every day of our lives.

How else has birdwatching changed our lives? Well, as much as we love this property and hate to leave it, we are in the process of retiring to Panama in Central America, where we hope to continue our enjoyment of nature on a whole new level. Of course we hope whoever buys our property in Anahuac will enjoy it as much as we have, and will preserve the special habitat that is so crucial for the birds. Retiring to Panama? Talk about birdwatching changing your life! We will be looking forward to having members of the ONC stay in our guest house in Panama and join us in our newest birdwatching adventure!!

--Linda Scott

Greatness of Grackles

Most lifelong residents of Texas may not agree, but I think that Great-tailed Grackles are amazing. From my New Mexico childhood in the 1960s I remember meeting them only in the southern half that state, and southward into Mexico. Even to a non-birder they were memorable, with long angled tails like something out of a cartoon. They were Boat-tailed Grackles then, before their split by the AOU into a separate species. (My father, a transplanted Southerner, recognized them by this older name. He would have met them years before, along the Gulf Coast, and therefore might well have been able to keep both names on his life list, if he had been the listing type.) Years later, when I began birding seriously, I already knew them by sight—not because they were common or familiar, but because the very descriptive name (either name, in fact) was unforgettable. They evoked Mexico and farmlands near the border, and were a little exotic.

Nowadays I see Great-tailed Grackles on a daily basis in the Houston suburbs. They are a trash bird in every way. Noisy to be sure; messy at times, too, such as when roosting in huge flocks in ornamental trees in parking lots, and leaving their own ornamentation on my car. They seem to be practically everywhere. I can't honestly say that I find them alluring. Still, they are interesting. They inspire my sense of wonder. You there—yes, you, the shiny adult—what *is* that noise you make that sounds like a clarinet in a bathroom? Or you, the plain brown juvenile, loitering with your gang under the live-oaks outside my office, gorging on

acorns like there's no tomorrow, where did you get that swaggering attitude?

It's partly the name that I like: gracke, a blackbird-but-not-a-blackbird. Its genus is *Quiscalus*, but my limited Latin vocabulary leaves this as an unanswered riddle. (*Quis?* Who?). But "grackle" I can at least make a decent guess about. Spanish explorers and settlers centuries ago might have called it *grajo*, or jackdaw. There are no jackdaws in Texas, but in Spain and the rest of Europe they are common mid-sized corvids, like small crows with light-colored eyes. They tend to be gregarious and vocal, and are familiar in towns as well as farmland. To me this etymology makes sense, and also seems like an uncanny foretelling. Unlike other American birds with unrelated European namesakes (robin, blackbird, buzzard), grackles are like *grajos* not just in being black and shiny but in being highly adaptable to human urbanization.

Over the forty years since I first saw them, Great-tailed Grackles have increased both their range and their abundance. Review of CBC records shows that they are now found regularly as far north as Idaho and Nebraska. Is this because of the removal of some former limiting factor? Or are grackles simply among those birds whose versatility allows them to prosper, following people into new subdivisions and shopping-mall parking lots like a second wave of settlers? I cannot say, but I'm happy for their presence. Just not on my car.

--Al Shultz

The Chase, or Confessions of a Lister Part 2

For me, the years 2002 and 2003 (October to October) became the Year of the Chase. I have no idea exactly how many birds I saw in this twelve-month period, but it was an enjoyable time. I do know that in 2002 I had 436 species, and 480 in 2003. --Bob Ohmart

In November I made several trips in Texas. I went to Edinburg for the Golden-crowned Warbler (lifer), Flour Bluff near Corpus Christi for Surf Scoter (TX lifer), Lake Balmorhea for White-winged Scoter and an unexpected Black-legged

Kittiwake (both new TX birds) and the Davis Mountains for other west Texas birds. Late in the month Martin Reid found a Mew Gull, which may have been a first record for Texas, at a landfill west of Fort Worth. I made arrangements to meet him there and after an early morning drive in the rain had the bird by 10:00. ...continued, p. 7

--Continued from p. 6:

I began 2003 with a TOS trip in January to the Duluth, MN area. My primary target was a Great Gray Owl, which I had previously missed at Yosemite National Park and Manitoba. This trip ended like a typical story in a hunting magazine, as we finally spotted an owl during the last hour of the last day. We also had great looks at a Black-backed Woodpecker. Other birds seen were Bohemian Waxwing, Northern Shrike, Boreal Chickadee, Pine Grosbeak and numerous gulls including Glaucous, Thayer's, and Iceland. The Minnesota climate was rather severe for a bunch of Texans: temperatures ranged from a high of 17 to a low of 15 below zero.

Ruddy-ground Doves were reported throughout the winter at the Patons in Patagonia, AZ, and at least two locations in New Mexico. In early February I headed west. Following an early morning start and a 13-14 hour drive I arrived at a location near Pancho Villa State Park south of Deming, NM, in time to find several Lawrence's Goldfinches which had also been reported. The next morning I spent several hours in Cotton City in the southwest corner of the state, but found no sign of the nine doves that had been reported there.

Moving on, I checked the activity at the Patons but again no RG Dove. I then went on to Patagonia Lake State Park for the night and to look for the Black-capped Gnatcatchers being seen there.

After arriving at the park I was changing footwear when two birders returned to their car. Inquiring whether they had seen the gnatcatchers they pointed to a photographer on the hillside about 50 feet away and said the birds were right there. Forgetting my boots, I grabbed my binoculars and circled up behind the photographer. I was concentrating on the birds, so I was rather surprised when he turned and said "Hello, Bob." It was former OG member John Ericksson. After watching the gnatcatchers, we birded around the lake for a while, and John invited me to his camper for a spaghetti dinner, which was certainly better than my usual can of beef stew.

-- Bob Ohmart

(More of Bob Ohmart's account of his "year of the chase" will appear in future issues of *The Spoonbill*. --Editor)

From The Spoonbill's Past

Compiled by Skip Almoney

Fifty Years Ago

Upcoming Events

Oct. 14 - Special field trip to the Cypress-Katy-Hockley area. Meet 11:00 AM at Cypress Texas (Hwy. 290). This is a trip to observe the **CATTLE**

EGRET which was located in this area by Leota Stilwell and Carrie Holcomb. Since the SPOONBILL may not be delivered before the 14th members are being contacted by the telephone committee additional details of the trip may be secured by calling Mrs. Jerry Baker (WA 1-2644)

Oct. 28 - Regular monthly field trip to San Jacinto Battlegrounds, Baytown Tunnel and Cove. Meet at 8:00 AM in the parking lot at Thornhill's Cafeteria - just off the Gulf Freeway at Woodridge and Winkler.

Oct. 21 - Scheduled trip to Galveston - Leota Stilwell, leader

Oct. 27 - Scheduled trip to Galveston - Mrs. Jerry Baker, leader

Nov. 4 - Scheduled trip to Galveston - Vic Emanuel, leader

Anyone wishing to go on one of the above trips to Galveston should contact the leader for information on time and meeting place.



THE
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Ornithology Group
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ONC Annual Dues:	\$ 8.00	\$ 15.00
OG Annual Dues:	\$ 14.00	\$ 19.00
Total:	\$ 22.00	\$ 34.00

Additional contributions are welcome in any amount.

Send to:

Outdoor Nature Club
PO Box 270894
Houston TX 77277-0894

Membership questions? Contact Margret Simmons
phone 713-776-2511
msimmons@compassnet.com

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Discount for Electronic *Spoonbill*

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