



Volume 46, No. 12

December 1997

# The Spoonbill

## Budget Time

submitted by Lin Chen, OG Treasurer

The proposed 1998 budget will be presented in the January meeting and voted on in the February meeting:

### Income:

Surplus (1997)	\$ 2,814
Membership dues	3,960
Sales	<u>300</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 7,074</b>

### Expense:

Spoonbill (printing)	\$ 3,200
Spoonbill (postage)	300
Speakers	2,000
Facilities	20
Library	150
Supplies	100
Hawk Count	350
Christmas Count (boat)	225
P. O. Box	58
Check List Committee	<u>50</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 6,453</b>

### January 5 Meeting Speaker & Topic

#### *"All About Chimney Swifts"*

a presentation by

**Paul Kyle**

Paul and, his wife Georgan, have studied Chimney Swifts for 14 years. They have constructed 2 large nesting/roosting boxes at their home which allows them the unique opportunity to become intimately involved with the swifts. Paul will share with us the life history of the Chimney Swift and how to attract them to your home.

The January 5 meeting is to be held at the Baylands Community Center, 6400 Bissonett (just west of Hillcroft) and starts at 7 p.m.

### January Learning Corner

#### *"Gulls of North America"*

an OG Special Video presentation

HOT off the video presses (?) is a new treatment of gull identification. Please join other OG members at 6:30 p.m.

### February Meeting Speaker

**TBA**

Please watch for the next Spoonbill for our speaker and program.

### What's inside

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## Ornithology Group

### Chairman

Dan Coleman  
(713) 646-7028

### Vice-Chairman

Bob Ohmart  
(281) 579-7403

### Treasurer

Lin Chen  
(713) 778-1708

### Secretary

Janet Rathjean  
(713) 280-8620

### Program Coordinator

David Bradford  
(713) 855-2615

### Learning Corner Coordinator

Bob Ohmart  
(281) 579-7403

### Field Trip Coordinator

David Sarkozi  
(713) 520-5906

### Mid-Week Field Trip Coordinator

Sonny Fisher  
(281) 346-2354

### Clearing House

Phyllis & Tony Frank  
(281) 480-7878

### World Wide Web Site

<http://club.infocom.net/~hog/>

### Web Master

David Sarkozi  
dsarkozi@infocom.net

### *The Spoonbill*

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Ornithology Group  
Houston Outdoor Nature Club  
P.O. Box 270894  
Houston, TX 77277-0894

### Editor

Damien Carey  
Phone & Fax (281) 361-4120  
email: wildbird@vonl.com

Mail, fax or e-mail submissions *by the 15th of every month* for possible inclusion. *Include contact information!*

## Improvements at Aransas

Rockport - In a community where birdwatching is worth millions of dollars per year in tourism spending, the Aransas Woods Bird Sanctuary, a partnership project of TPWD and TxDOT, was dedicated with the unveiling of a new observation platform and boardwalk on Nov. 7.

Constructed with volunteer labor by the Rockport Bird and Nature Club with funds donated by the USFWS and the family of Robert M. Latimer, the observation platform and boardwalk overlooks a complex of grassland, oak motte and shallow-water wetlands offering a variety of wildlife-watching opportunities.

Neotropical migrant birds flock to the site for food and shelter and the freshwater ponds are congregating points for waterfowl.

The viewing station serves as a memorial to Latimer, an outdoorsman, who spent many hours watching and photographing birds on the Central Texas Coast before his death in May, 1994.

A bronze plaque commemorating Latimer will be unveiled during the ceremony. Latimer's family made this lasting tribute in their father's name through TPWD's Special Nongame Fund and the Wildlife Legacy Project.

For more information about the Wildlife Legacy Project, a tax-deductible fund used to further the conservation of nongame wildlife habitat, call (512) 389-4644.

## A Hunch About Henslow's

One of the highest priority birds for Partners In Flight (PIF) and a possible addition to the endangered species list is the Henslow's Sparrow.

A true skulker, it is a lot more common as a wintering species in the eastern third of Texas than most birders realize. The species once bred in tall grass prairies of the Upper Texas Coast (present day Houston) until 1982.

David and Mimi Wolf of Nacogdoches began to notice this species as being a lot more regular in Texas than birders once thought. They started really searching the bluestem fields of eastern Texas in the early 1990s and were rewarded.

The bird has since been removed from the TRBC Review List. Texas PIF, the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, the USFWS and others are partnering together and soliciting the help of area birders to help determine the abundance and habitat preference for this species in Texas. The OG is expected to provide much of the manpower that is expected to flush this secretive grassland species.

More details on how you can get involved in this "citizen science" project to assist with answering some basic questions as to why this species is so sensitive and declining. With your help, we can reverse that decline.

*by Cliff Shackelford,  
State Coordinator  
Texas PIF (Austin)*

## Neotropical Crossroads

Over 410 species of birds—from hawks to hummingbirds, shorebirds to waterfowl, and many colorful songbirds such as warblers, tanagers, thrushes, flycatchers, vireos, and many others—either live year around, or migrate through, the Lower Rio Grande Valley/Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge Complex (LRGVC). There are few places on the North American continent that see so many different species of birds.

Why the large number of bird species come to this area? Location, Location, Location. Similar to Cape May National Wildlife Refuge in New Jersey, and Kiktopeake Point in Virginia, the LRGVC is located at the bottom of the tip of a land-funnel in south Texas.

Locate the refuge on the map and you can see that birds from the eastern and mid-western regions of the continent funnel into this area.

The LRGVC is located at the convergence of two major flyways, the Mississippi and the Central flyways. The Atlantic, Mississippi, Central, and Pacific flyways are general routes which birds tend to migrate along. Because birds are funneling into the Lower Rio Grande Valley from both the Mississippi and the Central flyways, a great number of different species stop down at the refuge and surrounding areas.

In late August, birds start drifting southward across the continent. They move through

the area from mid-September. Fall migration takes place at a more leisurely pace than spring migration when birds race to get to their breeding grounds.

Many of birds that migrate through the LRGVC Neotropical migratory birds, birds which nest in the United States or Canada, and spend the winter months in Mexico, Central or South America, or the Caribbean. Some 346 species of birds in the Western Hemisphere are Neotropical migrants.

A whopping 196 of these stop down to rest and refuel at the LRGVC. Tens of thousands of bird watchers come to the refuge complex each year to spot Neotropical songbirds, hawks, shorebirds, and waterfowl as well as the resident birds.

From the LRGVC, the Neotropical migratory birds will move on to Mexico and points south. Depending on the weather in any given year, some species will migrate down the coast of the Gulf of Mexico while others will take off over the Gulf. Because the refuge complex is right on the Mexican border, it is a crossroads of migration and hundreds of thousands of birds continuously fly back and forth between the United States and Mexico.

Some biologists worry that populations of some Neotropical migratory birds are declining. The Neotropical migratory songbirds seem to be at greater risk than resident songbirds.

Why? Because Neotropical migratory songbirds travel

over such long distances, they are vulnerable to loss of forest, grassland, wetland, and coastal habitats in their breeding grounds, wintering grounds, and a huge number of stopover points along the way.

When breeding, and stopover habitats are lost to development in the United States and Canada, or the tropical and semitropical forests are cut for agriculture and cattle ranching in wintering grounds, populations of some Neotropical migratory songbird species have declined.

The LRGVC is located in the river delta at the extreme southern end of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, which stretches

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### Field Trips

#### Attwater NWR

**Sat., Jan. 10 @ 8:30 a.m.**

Go West!. Sparrows and Raptors will be the focus today. We could see 10 kinds of sparrows, plus Bald Eagle, White-tailed Hawk, Crested Caracara, and Sprague's Pipit. There will be lots of Waterfowl around and this has been a very good place for Least Grebes for the last several years.

**Contact:** David Sarkozi  
(713) 520-5906.

#### Anahuac NWR

**Wed., Jan. 21 @ 8 a.m.**

Meet Howard at the sign-in stand.

**Contact:** Howard Patton  
(713) 992-5640

for approximately 800 miles from El Paso, Texas to the Gulf of Mexico. The Rio Grande River (known as the Rio Bravo in Mexico) runs down the middle of the Valley and forms the border between Mexico and the United States. It connects the two countries and is a well-spring of life for people, animals, and plants of Mexico and the United States. Four major climactic zones occur in the area and average rainfall ranges from nine inches near El Paso, TX to 26 inches near the Gulf of Mexico.

This makes for a great diversity habitats, providing many different types of homes for the large number of bird and other wildlife species that live in the area.

In recent years, portions of the Valley have experienced rapid population growth and expansion of agriculture and maquiladora industries (factories which are built in Mexico to take advantage of cheap labor but whose products are exported to U.S. markets), in part associated with passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994.

Because the Valley is so important to migrating wildlife, biologists and other conservationists are developing a wildlife corridor

called the "Lower Rio Grande Valley Wildlife Corridor." A wildlife corridor is a series of land areas linked together in a kind of habitat land-bridge for birds and other wildlife.

The Lower Rio Grande Valley Wildlife Corridor is envisioned as a continuous ribbon of habitat stretching across four counties in south Texas. Look at a map of your county. How many green spaces can you find? Where are they located? Are there ways that any of these could be linked together by protecting areas that lie between them. How could an "Unpave the Way for Wildlife" project help provide a series of stepping stones or contribute to development of a wildlife corridor in your area?

*OG News Services*



From the Spoonbill Staff

**Happy Holidays!**

**Houston Outdoor Nature Club  
Ornithology Group  
P.O. Box 270894  
Houston, TX 77277-0894**

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