



THE SPOONBILL

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

CONDOLENCES

The Ornithology Group joins the many other friends of Avis and Harry Bristor in their grief over the recent death of their son, Richard. Many OG'ers were privileged to know this fine young man, who will be sorely missed by his family and friends.

COMING EVENTS

- Saturday
Jan. 24 HAS field trip to Freeport area, looking for waterfowl and shorebirds. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the parking lot of Brazosport Museum of Arts and Sciences in Clute. From Houston take Hwy 288 to Clute, turn right on College Drive, which is marked with a sign to the Brazosport College. It is an all day trip, so bring lunch. For more information, call Larry Ballard at 1-297-2190.
- Sunday
Jan. 25 Deadline for SPOONBILL announcements, articles, etc. NOTE: Guest Editor for the February issue is Ellen Red, 1802 Sunset Blvd., Houston 77005, or call at 523-4287. She will need your input, so please contribute. Dr. B. C. Robison, veterinarian, will have the first of his series of fascinating articles on diseases birds get and carry, and their effects in this February issue. Please send or call in your contributions to Ellen.
- Monday
Jan. 26 Armand Bayou Nature Center is having another Bird Seed Savings Day. You who feed the birds will be glad of that, what with the skyrocketing cost of seed in the stores! All Sunflowers, mixes of 15% and 30%, peanut hearts, thistle seed.....get your order in now by this date. They will accept phone orders, so if you haven't time for a written order, call 474-2551 between 9 and 5 to order your seed. Approximately 120 persons took advantage of the November BSSD to stock up on more than 7500 lbs. of seed. Pickup will be Feb 7 and 8.
- Wednesday
Jan 28 HAS regular meeting, 7:30 p.m., downstairs in the Houston Museum of Natural Science. Mike Noel will give the program on exotic birds of East Africa.
- Tuesday
Feb 3 Deadline for Clearing House observations for January. Please send in your bird trip observations as early as possible...if you bird the middle of the month and the last of the month, send in two lists! See "Assembling a SPOONBILL Staff....Progress Report" on the next page.
- Wednesday
Feb. 4 Photography Group regular meeting, 7:30 at Bayou Manor auditorium, 4141 So. Braeswood Blvd. Frank Hse, OG member, inveterate world traveler, and excellent photographer, will delight us with a program on "Recreation areas of Taiwan and Mainland China.
- Thursday
Feb. 5 OG regular meeting, 7:30 p.m. at Bayou Manor auditorium, 4141 So. Braeswood Blvd. David Matson will give us some highlights of his tour of Russia last year, and the birds he saw there.
- Saturday
Feb. 7 OG field trip to W. Harris Co. Meet at Bear Creek Park playground at 7:30 a.m. Bring lunch and plan to car pool. We will be looking for sparrows, ducks, geese and hawks.
- Tuesday
Feb. 10 ONC regular meeting, 7:30 p.m. at Garden Center in Hermann Park. The program will be on "Solar Energy", presented by Dr. Carolyn Summers.

PAST EVENTS

On December 6, 1980, sixty birders descended upon Cinco Ranch and sighted seventy-eight species of birds, the most interesting being Wood Ducks, White-tailed Kite, 500 Sandhill Cranes, 6 Ground Doves, Winter Wren, 250 Cedar Waxwings, 6 Harris Sparrows and 10 Fox Sparrows. --Paul Nimmons

ASSEMBLING A SPOONBILL STAFF.....PROGRESS REPORT

It has become increasingly evident to Ted Eubanks, the current CH compiler, that putting together this important part of THE SPOONBILL, takes far more time than he realized. The demands of his many other interests and his work make it imperative to get an assistant. This assistance would be in the form of receiving the monthly observations from the CH contributors, entering them in the species notebook as soon as the lists are received. With this necessary "pick and shovel" work done, Ted can then organize the sightings for each species by location and date, add his comments and notes, and ready the CH for the typist. All members of THE SPOONBILL Staff have the specter of Time facing them, trying to get their part done so the newsletter gets mailed as soon in the month as possible. You who contribute your monthly birding observations to the CH can assist greatly by sending in your lists as early as possible. If you make a birding trip early in the month, send in your observations then, don't wait until the end of the month. If you make a second trip later in the month, send in a second list! Please call Ted or Margaret Jones and say you would like to be the CH assistant compiler!!!

AN UNEXPECTED BIRD....by Paul Jones

One day recently the Editor's brother called to say that a bird he had never seen before was in his yard. His description: about robin sized, rusty pink breast, long curved beak and black stripes across the head! His query: What is it? My reply: Sounds like a woodcock, I'll be right over!!

Sure enough, in the bright sunlight in the middle of his manicured River Oaks lawn, a real, live American woodcock was "pumping" for worms, grubs....at least a meal. On three sides of the yard are thick hedges with plantings of ligustrum, azaleas, fern, etc. The woodcock flies to this cover when flushed, but comes out into the open lawn to feed. At this writing, he hasn't been seen for several days, but he spent at least three or four days in this unusual spot.

Not only are there Urban Cowboys....now we have an Urban Woodcock!

LEARNING CORNER.....IDENTIFICATION OF GREATER SCAUP by Tony Gallucci

The Lesser Scaup, *Aythya affinis*, is one of the most common birds on the Upper Texas Coast in the winter. It is most frequently found on bay waters and large lakes. Often mixed in with these diving ducks are a few of its slightly larger cousin, the Greater Scaup, *Aythya marila*.

In recent years, with an upsurge in interest in finding scoters in coastal surf, there has been an increase in reports of the Greater Scaup. True, the Greater Scaup is frequently found in surf waters, but it should also be looked for in bay waters and large lakes, and in small quiet ponds, a place where Lesser Scaup are seldom found. I have discovered in the past few years that scaup found on very small ponds (city block size or smaller) are almost always Greater's.

It is not necessary to see the white wing stripe in order to properly identify a Greater Scaup -- careful attention to detail will allow identification of males on the water -- although a good look at the wing stripe is a clincher. Here are a few hints for finding and identifying these birds (which, by the way, I think are considerably more common in this area than past data show):

- 1) Any scaup (or a few together) in the surf zone or on a very small pond should immediately be suspect -- check them all very carefully.
- 2) Scan all large flocks of scaup in bays and larger ponds and lakes -- Greater Scaup will not "stick out like a sore thumb" but will be noticeably different --

carefully check each individual bird that catches your eye. Also check small groups of scaup that may tend to stay away from large flocks -- Greater Scaup tend to stick together when there are several.

3) Don't completely bypass females -- the general field marks listed below (except head color) apply to females as well. Greater Scaup females should only be positively identified when the birds are at quite close range or if you see the wing stripe. In general use "different" females to help in locating other birds -- hopefully the more easily identifiable males. Females that strictly associate with known male Greater's can be safely labeled as Greater Scaup.

4) Field Marks: GREATER SCAUP

LESSER SCAUP

The head color is perhaps one of the most underrated field marks for identifying this bird.

The head color of Male Greater's is distinctly green, about the same shade as that of the Common Goldeneye. The literature says that in some lights the head appears purple. This is a function of feather structure. If the sun is out, continued observation will reveal the green color.

Likewise, the head color of male Lesser Scaup is distinctly purple. It will also flash a greenish hue in some lights but constant observation will show the head color to be purple.

Usually when one sees the true color of the head, the head appears to shine and is the same uniform color throughout. The "flash" of the wrong color is a shimmering glow of color that lasts only very briefly. The flash will cover only a small portion of the head -- that portion which is at the proper angle to reflect the color. Usually when the "wrong" color is flashed there is also a mingling of other colors (since this is a prismatic effect) such as red with the purple or blue with the green. Also do not avoid looking for head color just because it is overcast. In fact, on overcast days one is more likely to see the true head color without the flash of other colors.

The wing stripe, along with the head color, is a sure identification mark. The other marks listed below are marks that vary between the two species and should be used in conjunction with other marks.

The wing stripe of Greater Scaup begins inside the tertial feathers and extends along the trailing edge of the secondaries and primaries, to very near the tip of the wing. The stripe is a distinct, bright white of virtually the same shade its entire length; except, occasionally it turns gray on the last two or more primaries.

The wing stripe of the Lesser Scaup is very similar to that of the Greater Scaup except that it darkens to gray quite abruptly where the primaries begin. This makes the stripe appear shorter. By looking carefully at many Lesser Scaup in flight it becomes very easy to pick out the occasional Greater.

When comparing birds swimming together check the following characters:

Head shape: rounded, never peaked

usually peaked but may appear rounded at times

Bill tip: nail at end of bill is very large, obvious at a distance

nail fairly small, usually not noticeable at a distance.

Bill size: comparatively wider and taller at base

slimmer at base

Head posture: has a tendency to carry head very high, "majestic" looking

tendency to carry head low and back, sometimes appears to rest head on back

Swimming: body carried low in water tail trails behind

body carried higher in water, more buoyant, tail often slightly raised

Flank color: whiter color, back grayer and more distinctly streaked on males

flanks grayer, back of males appears to be more brownish (by comparison)

[With this article, Tony sent a sketch denoting clearly the differences mentioned above. Regretably, it could not be reproduced at this time. Ed.]

1980 HOUSTON CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

By Paul W. Nimmons, Jr., Compiler

The Houston Christmas Bird Count had another successful year. Although the weather on Saturday, December 20, was windy (15-20 mph), cloudy and cold (35° to 45°), an all-time high number of birders (143) saw the third highest number of species (185 plus 3 races and 1 form) ever seen on a Houston Christmas Bird Count.

The most unusual discovery was Marbled Godwit, which has never before been seen on the Houston Count. Three other birds had not been seen on any of the ten preceding Counts: Burrowing Owl, Ovenbird and Green-Tailed Towhee. Eight other birds had been seen only once in the preceding ten years: White-Winged Scoter (1978), Surf Scoter (1979), Black Scoter (1979), Ferruginous Hawk (1979), Sandhill Crane (1975), Piping Plover (1972), Red-Breasted Nuthatch (1977) and Western Meadowlark (1979).

We saw every species that can be hoped for except Red-Throated Loon, Reddish Egret, Long-Billed Curlew, Black Skimmer, Ground Dove, Vermilion Flycatcher, Wood Thrush, Black-Throated Green Warbler, Black-Headed Grosbeak and Henslow's Sparrow. None of these birds are seen every year, and, when they are seen, they are usually in small numbers.

Numbers of ducks were up substantially on the Houston Lighting & Power Co. cooling ponds. Conversely, numbers of ducks were low in other areas. Although the ducks seek refuge on the cooling ponds during hunting season, hunting pressure elsewhere is not the only explanation for the large congregation on the cooling ponds. If it were, there would have been ducks in other areas closed to hunting, such as the Exxon lagoon south of Highway 146 at the Baytown Tunnel. The apparent explanation is an abundance of food sources on the cooling ponds.

Passerines were not overly active and were sometimes difficult to find because of the strong north wind. However, wooded areas on the bay in the extreme southern part of the Count Circle experienced a substantial increase in numbers of passerines. Apparently, the birds had meandered south with the wind but refused to venture out over open water, just as birds will stack at staging areas during fall migration.

The Count checklist and the list of participants is reproduced below. In the checklist, Roman numerals indicate area numbers and underlining indicates unusual species or unusually high numbers.

Count Checklist

Com. Loon 11, Red-throated Loon 0(low), Horned Grebe 6(VI), Eared Grebe 378, Pied-billed Grebe 26, White Pelican 515, Double-crested Cormorant 4650, Olivaceous Cormorant 52, Anhinga 2(low) (I,VI), Great Blue Heron 210, Green Heron 3(V,VI), Little Blue Heron 25, Cattle Egret 42, Reddish Egret 0, Great Egret 263, Snowy Egret 163, Louisiana Heron 25, Black-crowned Night Heron 138, Yellow-crowned Night Heron 2(low) (III,IX), Am. Bittern 1(IX), White-faced Ibis 64, White Ibis 15(VI), Roseate Spoonbill 1(low) (VI), Canada Goose 145, White-fronted Goose 89, Snow Goose 3000, Snow Goose (blue form) 730, Mallard 211, Mottled Duck 148, Gadwall 1318, Pintail 3130, Green-winged Teal 350, Blue-winged Teal 2(low) (VI), Am. Wigeon 1045, N. Shoveler 188, Wood Duck 25, Redhead 5, Ring-necked Duck 54(I,VI), Canvasback 815, Greater Scaup 184(VI), Lesser Scaup 35,634, Com. Goldeneye 58, Bufflehead 271(VI,IX), White-winged Scoter 3(DDa,DM), Surf Scoter 1(DDa), Black Scoter 1(DDa), scoter, sp. 1(VI), Ruddy Duck 1108(VI,X), Hooded Merganser 17(VI,IX), Red-breasted Merganser 127, duck, sp. 200, Turkey Vulture 60, Black Vulture 6, White-tailed Kite 6, Sharp-shinned Hawk 7, Cooper's Hawk 6, Accipiter, sp. 1, Red-tailed Hawk 200, Red-tailed (Harlan's) Hawk 1(I,VIII), Red-shouldered Hawk 67, Ferruginous Hawk 1(DM,KM), Marsh Hawk 155, Osprey 3, Merlin 1(VI), Am. Kestrel 279, Bobwhite 74, Sandhill Crane 36 (R&B), King Rail 7, Clapper Rail 10, Virginia Rail 1(X), Sora 1(I), Com. Gallinule 5(I,V), Am. Coot 2667, Semipalmated Plover 6, Piping Plover 1(WC), Killdeer 1163, Black-bellied Plover 63, Ruddy Turnstone 12, Am. Woodcock 24, Com. Snipe 16, Long-billed Curlew 0(low), Spotted Sandpiper 54, Willet 195, Greater Yellowlegs 22, Lesser Yellowlegs 55, Least Sandpiper 283, Dunlin 8(VIII,IX), Short-billed Dowitcher 108, Long-billed Dowitcher 14(VII), dowitcher, sp. 1529, W. Sandpiper 669, Marbled Godwit 2(WC,BG), Sanderling 53, peep, sp. 400, Am. Avocet 204, Herring Gull 131, Ring-billed Gull 3100, Laughing Gull 8300, Bonaparte's Gull 13, Gull-billed Tern 1(X), Forster's Tern 720, Com. Tern 30, Royal Tern 44(low), Caspian Tern 90, Black Skimmer 0, Rock Dove 415, Mourning Dove 847, Ground Dove 0, Inca Dove 4(IV,VI), Groove-billed Ani 1(low) (IV), Barn Owl 5, Screech Owl 25, Great Horned Owl 9, Burrowing Owl 1(DDa), Barred Owl 5, Short-eared Owl 2(DDa), Selasphorus, sp. 1(VI), hummingbird, sp. 1(V), Belted Kingfisher 88, Com. (Red-sh.) Flicker 1(WM), Com. (Yel-sh.) Flicker 432, Pileated Woodpecker 29, Red-bellied Woodpecker 75, Red-headed Woodpecker 2(VI), Yellow-bellied Sapsucker 53, Downy Woodpecker 42, Ash-throated Flycatcher 1(I), E. Phoebe 145, Vermilion Flycatcher 0, Tree Swallow 41, swallow, sp. 2, Blue Jay 204, Com.

Crow 370, Carolina Chickadee 226, Tufted Titmouse 46, Red-breasted Nuthatch 2(2 parties), Brown Creeper 28, House Wren 81, Winter Wren 11, Carolina Wren 68, Long-billed Marsh Wren 6, Short-billed Marsh Wren 35, Mockingbird 538, Gray Catbird 20, Brown Thrasher 302, Am. Robin 18,500, Wood Thrush 0, Hermit Thrush 156, E. Bluebird 190, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher 306, Golden-crowned Kinglet 152, Ruby-crowned Kinglet 1956, Water Pipit 520, Sprague's Pipit 3(III,X), Cedar Waxwing 342, Loggerhead Shrike 391, Starling 3451, White-eyed Vireo 3, Solitary Vireo 42, Orange-crowned Warbler 270, Nashville Warbler 4(III), Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler 5968, Black-throated Green Warbler 0, Pine Warbler 102, Palm Warbler 3, Ovenbird 2(RB,WP), Com. Yellowthroat 21, Yellow-breasted Chat 1(GCL,WR), Wilson's Warbler 13, Am. Redstart 1(GH,SEs), House Sparrow 647, E. Meadowlark 410, W. Meadowlark 1(WM), meadowlark, sp. 407, Red-winged Blackbird 16,900, Rusty Blackbird 88, Brewer's Blackbird 1536, Boat-tailed Grackle 13(V,VI), Great-tailed Grackle 82, Com. Grackle 395(low), Brown-headed Cowbird 445(low), blackbird, sp. 16,945, Cardinal 705, Black-headed Grosbeak 0(low), Purple Finch 19, Pine Siskin 15, Am. Goldfinch 825, Green-tailed Towhee 1(LBa), Rufous-sided Towhee 27, Savannah Sparrow 309, Grasshopper Sparrow 1(VII), Le Conte's Sparrow 9, Henslow's Sparrow 0, Sharp-tailed Sparrow 11(VI,X), Seaside Sparrow 2(low) (VI), Vesper Sparrow 72, Lark Sparrow 3(III,X), Dark-eyed (Slate-col.) Junco 383, Dark-eyed (Oregon) Junco 1(WC), Chipping Sparrow 201, Field Sparrow 100, Harris' Sparrow 16, White-crowned Sparrow 240, White-throated Sparrow 5182, Fox Sparrow 16, Lincoln's Sparrow 46, Swamp Sparrow 107, Song Sparrow 49.

Comparison With Prior Years

Year	Species	Indi-viduals	Observers	Area I	Area II	Area III	Area IV	Area V	Area VI	Area VII	Area VIII	Area IX	Area X	Area XI
1970	160	200,619	55	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1971	156	54,320	57	68	60	62	51	73	95	58	74	77	106	-
1972	158	61,802	59	87	58	68	54	77	106	62	70	73	89	-
1973	144+3	94,944	63	60	52	53	36	62	103	61	62	64	86	58
1974	163+1	176,900	77	53	68	51	43	91	109	79	66	70	86	54
1975	170+1	209,200	99	72	69	56	74	100	120	83	82	70	116	47
1976	173+2	120,288	123	74	69	79	70	106	122	101	100	99	112	43
1977	183+2	73,449	130	84	63	61	72	109	97	100	62	132	122	47
1978	177+2	77,719	127	89	61	84	74	96	108	102	77	134	119	41
1979	191+1	158,923	139	81	85	78	81	116	134	103	78	113	109	44
1980	185+4	159,126	143	93	68	83	77	116	149	107	72	101	114	43

List of Participants

Margaret Anderson, Margaret E. Anderson, Jerry Baker, Larry and Martha Ballard, John Bargman, Albert Barr, Mike, Pat and Tom Barry, Charles and Priscilla Bauer, Allen and Joan Benjamin, Cynthia and Shirley Boden, Earl Bogar, Ann Booth, Ewell and Julia Bradley, Ron and Marcia Braun, Larry Brown, Brian Buchner, Diane Cabiness, Cabiness, Chuck and Suzi Campbell (Area VIII), Dennis Caputo, Dennis Casserly, Ben Chrisman, George and Jane Clayton, Fred Collins, Marilyn Crane, Glenn and Sue Cureton, Penny and Wesley Cureton (Area VII), David, Jan and Stephanie Dauphin, Hubert Davis, Mary Dodson, Cecilia Donaldson, Bertha and Jay Dooling, Donald Draper, John and Stephen Earthman, Sterling Essenmacher, Ted Eubanks (Area V), Wally Gardner, Jim Gillespie, Jack and Mary Gillette (Area III), Bill and Diane Goloby, Delton Goodin (Area XI), Johanna Grabbe, Susie Graham, Doris and John Harmonson, Gene Heitzman, David Henderson, Annabelle Hicks, Barbara Hoover, Sam House, George Howe, Charles Jensen, Paul Jones (Area IX), Helena Kimball, Cindy and Trudy King, Peter and Roseland Klein, Jan and Sean Langham, Judy Lehnberg, Ann Little, Twan Lonquist, Todd Love, David Marrack (Area VI), Elric McHenry, Vicki McLenore, John McMillon, Karen McNish, Stennie Meadours, William Mealy (Area II), Bob and Mary Moore, Charles and Polly Moore, Jim Morgan (Area I), Bob Moulton, Paul and Phyllis Nimmons (Area X), Bob Norris, Norma Oates, Steve Olson, Kathleen Orr, Frances and Walter Pagel, Buz and Sara Peine, David and Ellen Red, George Regmund, Will Risser, Pat Sadler, Connie Schimbor, D. K. Smith, Gwen Smith, Linda Snyder, Ena Spalding, Walter Springall, Carmine Stahl, Aaron, Karen and Kristin Stoley, Wade Strickland, Colin Summerhayes, Albert and Kathy Swarts, Bobby Sylvester, Ed and Marion Taylor, Marjorie Thompson, Doug Troeger, Leslie Tucker, Gloria, John and T. D. Tveten (Area IV), Don and Grey Verner, Pat Warner, Jerry Weir, Stephen Williams, Sandra Williamson, Bob and Edith Willman, Kris Wilson, W. J. Wissel, Marshall Yost.

FREEPORT CBC - 1980...by Jim Morgan, Co-compiler

On a cold December 21, 1980, the Freeport CBC once again proved to be a most successful and memorable count. One hundred and twenty seven observers saw 214 species, fifth highest total in the 24-year history of Freeport CBCs. Outstanding birds observed were Yellow Rail, Whimbrel, Purple Sandpiper, Black-necked Stilt, 2 Jaeger (sp.), Franklin's Gull, six hummingbird species including Broad-tailed and Buff-bellied, Scissortailed Flycatcher, Greater Kiskadee (m.ob. and new to count), Red-breasted Nuthatch, Yellow-throated Vireo, Blackpoll Warbler (Jim Tucker), 6 Oven-birds, 3 Northern Waterthrush, Orchard Oriole (Marilyn Crane), 2 Bullock's Orioles, 6 Henslow's Sparrows, and a whopping total of 74 Harris' Sparrows.

In addition to the above rarities there were 37 ten-year high counts of individual species that are recorded every year. These high counts are no doubt due to the better and better coverage we seem to be getting with more observers, and the fact that birds are in good numbers this winter. Especially noteworthy were high counts of seven species of sparrows. After finding Harris' Sparrows when scouting the area a week before the count I predicted that several areas would turn up these normally rare (for Freeport) handsome sparrows. No less than 5 areas reported Harris' Sparrows, a species recorded only twice in the last 10 years of Freeport CBCs. Birders from Austin who participated in the count said that this normally common (in Austin) sparrow was virtually absent this winter in the Hill Country. They speculated that the poor food crop there, which is apparently due to the summer drought, caused the birds to winter in invasion numbers further south. A region-wide check of our counts for this species and other sparrows should prove most interesting.

I personally want to thank everyone who participated in this year's count. Special thanks go out to the area leaders who did their usual good job of recruiting participants and covering their areas. A very special thanks goes out to the jetty observers for braving a near zero chill factor to locate those necessary species which help boost the count to its nationwide competitiveness. Also, thanks goes out to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife personnel who persisted in finding the Yellow Rail and other good marsh birds, and thanks to all the Brazosport Birders for their enthusiastic help. And most important of all, a great big THANK YOU to all the property owners who allow us on their property, and a special thanks to Dow Chemical USA for hosting our tally dinner and letting us bird their extensive properties within the count circle. Thank you all!

ATTWATER NWR CBC - 1980...by Jim Morgan

Last year this was the best inland CBC in North America. The 1980 count should again hold this honor, and it may be easy! Why? Because this intensely rich birding area produced a fantastic total of 167 species seen by 27 participants! And the individual species count totals for sparrows will surprise many people. Numbers of Savannah, Vesper, Chipping, Field, White-crowned, White-throated and Song Sparrows were astonishing! And those Harris' Sparrows! I personally saw one flock of 50 of these large handsome sparrows. Incredible for this far south in Texas!

Top birds for the count were Fulvous Whistling Duck, White-tailed Kite (will probably soon be regular in the count circle), Rough-legged and Ferruginous Hawks, Osprey, Prairie Falcon, Wild Turkey, Burrowing Owl, Say's Phoebe, Bewick's Wren, Curve-billed Thrasher, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Henslow's Sparrow, and Lapland Longspur.

With a few more observers in the count circle, particularly in the better areas, this count has a potential for 175 species! Let's try to help our good friend and refuge manager, Wayne Shifflett, reach this goal in coming years.

GALVESTON CBC - 1980...by David Dauphin

The Galveston Count was held Saturday the 27th in perfect weather. Wild food crop was excellent. This count, first held in 1946 with 3 observers and 70 species seen, is rapidly growing into a popular Count. This year 67 observers found 166 species. Noteworthy birds seen were Lark Bunting, Yellow Rail, Glaucous Gull. Sparrow and woodland birds were well up, this year. Most noticeable, however, were the missed birds: White-faced Ibis, Bittern, Green Heron, and low wader and duck numbers. Those marshes are dry, dry, dry, reflecting the lack of rains last summer and fall. Woodland birds on the Island reflect the mild weather so far this fall and winter, and, thus, plenty of green foliage, berries, seeds, acorns, and bugs. Good birders in the field helped, too!

BOLIVAR CBC - 1980....by David Dauphin

The Bolivar Count was held Sunday, the 28, in perfect weather. As at Galveston, all marshes in the area, including Anahuac NWR were extremely dry. More green foliage was noted at High Island than in the past previous years on the Count. Noted were the high number of sparrow species and woodland birds, including Downy Woodpeckers and Bluebirds. Of note, too, was the low number of shorebirds, ducks, and waders. No Lesser Scaup were seen nor White-faced Ibis. Best bird had to be the Long-eared Owl.

OLD RIVER COUNT - 1980....Jonelle Buckels

20 observers found 145 species + 1 form. Of note were 4 Reddish Egrets, 2 Ruddy Turnstones, 2 Rufous Hummers, 14 Inca Doves, 1 Ferruginous Hawk and 250 Sandhill Cranes. [Ed. note: This count, with marvelous habitat, is the most under-covered Count in our area. Jonelle, who yearly struggles to spread her thin ranks around, reported the flu bug decimated her crew of observers even more this year. Paul Jones, who has worked this Count for a number of years, says he had the greatest birding day of his experience this time: he spent 11 1/2 hours in a boat exploring the waterways and marshes from Cove, parts of Old and Lost Rivers, the inlets and passes making up the Trinity River delta, up the Trinity to just north of the bridge, and all around that area. He and John Daves, the only ones in the boat, had 106 species. The water level was so low, they could not get from the Trinity River or any of the passes out into Trinity Bay! Do yourself a favor next year, go on the Old River CBC.

THE EFFECT OF HL&P'S COOLING PONDS ON GALVESTON BAY SYSTEM DUCK POPULATIONS

by David Dauphin

Houston Lighting and power Company's Cedar Bayou Generating Station's Cooling Ponds on Trinity Bay in West Chambers County is showing a definite effect on area (Houston, Old River, Bolivar, Galveston) Christmas Counts. The best waterfowl refuge in this State, and certainly on the UTC is acting like a vacuum on coastal waterfowl, particularly diving ducks, and deserves some mention as to why.

HL&P built the Cedar Bayou Generators in the late sixties to provide needed power to growing industries in West Chambers County. This, the largest of HL&P's plants needed a great deal of water to cool their turbines. HL&P impounded a marsh (to the ire of many environmentalists) near Cotton Lake, dredged a canal from their plant on the banks of Cedar Bayou to this impoundment, and began pumping water from the bays near the Baytown Tunnel, up Cedar Bayou stream, through their generators where the water is polluted with heat, down the canal, dropped and circulated in the Cooling Ponds, where the heat is removed, and then dumped into Trinity Bay. The environmentalists were wrong. Fishing and shrimping in upper Trinity Bay has improved steadily since the Ponds were built.

The water is screened at the entrance to the Generating Station to remove fish, thus the low numbers of Loons in the Ponds. The warm water, with its circulating currents, aeration, and high nutrient content generates a tremendous supply of shrimp, vegetation, clams, crabs, and small fish within the Ponds. Being maintained as a refuge and outdoor laboratory for graduate biology students, all these factors help to stack up the ducks, primarily divers, since most of the Ponds is too deep for dabblers.

This is perhaps the best place on the UTC to see Horned Grebes, Olivaceous Cormorants, the "odd" waterbird--Scoters, Oldsquaw, Red-necked, and Western Grebe. But its greatest importance is to the ducks. Plenty of food, no pressure from man (with the exception of birders) and the warmth of the waters themselves has, over the past decade, entrapped the majority of UTC diving ducks. Wallisville, Anahuac Refuge, the Trinity Delta, and marshes from Freeport to Smith Point, within the Galveston System show a dropping off in duck numbers, while the Cooling Ponds tend to show an increase.

The problem to the Christmas Count compiler is what this data will look like to future researchers. Why the decrease in diving duck numbers within the Galveston complex while Baytown shows substantial duck increases. The attractiveness of the Cooling Ponds must be considered, but published data never shows that 95% of the Houston Counts diving ducks are within one small area on the circle. See the problem?

Of more exciting interest is this: if it is ever completed, will HL&P's South Texas Nuclear Project's Cooling Ponds do to the hunter, refuge manager, and birder, in the Freeport-Matagorda area, what the Cedar Bayou Ponds have done on the Galveston complex? The only one who loses in all this is the duck hunter, and he is the one that provides virtually all the monies to provide National Wildlife Refuges lands, to protect wintering waterfowl. With development such as the Cooling Ponds, as well as a great deal of lands in Federal control on the UTC, the UTC duck hunter may, in the next ten years, be hard-pressed to harvest a diving duck.

HL&P can only be praised for the responsible way they have maintained the Cooling Ponds. If they continue to do so, just imagine the duck numbers to show up on future Houston Christmas Counts.

I counted over forty thousand divers at the Cooling Ponds on the Houston Count, not one Lesser Scaup was counted on the Bolivar Count, nor were any seen off the dike at Texas City. No Ruddy Ducks were found on the Anahuac Refuge on the Bolivar Count, and few were seen at Texas City on the Galveston Count. Nimmons has stolen Galveston's and Bolivar's Ducks and its not fair!

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FEEDBACK

In December, Mary Ann Chapman mentioned a Captain Murphey of Port Isabel, who vows he had been seeing an albatross since Hurricane Allen. This intrigues Gladys Donohue of the Valley, a SPOONBILL subscriber and active in Hawk Watch sightings compilation. She has copied for us an entry from her field notebook (pointing up the value of keeping a journal!)

4 April 1978 Tuesday (Watching hawks at Rancho Chiquito, my home 2 miles w of Mission, Texas).

0915 hours. Large bird with wingspread of perhaps an eagle (78-80") came from south not quite to me and turned and went back south. He was about over Old Hwy 83, I should think (now Loop 374) .2 miles away.

Head thick, not slender like a goose. Slow, strong, deep wingbeat, more or less below the body. Tail short. Coloration uniform.

My first conclusions: Must have been a dark shearwater blown in by violent winds of past few days and looking for its way back to the sea. I would have to conclude a Sooty. Pale-footed outline looks good, but very unlikely.

YET: Only the albatross has the wingspread of an eagle. It could not be that. Or could it? I have never seen one. Maybe narrowness of wings makes it seem spread is bigger. See p. 4 of Bent for flight characteristics of albatross. This bird matched that description. Description of shearwaters flights by Bent do not satisfy me. Nor did those I saw off the coast of Massachusetts so frequently fly like this bird.

Size was way bigger than Broadwings (33-38) which were in the air above and around him at the same time. Wingspread was easily double that of Broadwings'.

Sun was partly behind clouds. Light not good, but I am sure no white rump. Just a dark bird. Altitude was moderate, perhaps 1000'.

See Black-footed albatross' photo in Arnold Small's Birds of California, p.146. It certainly looked like that. Possibly it was this species.

NOTE: According to my notes, from dawn of 1 April, winds were strong SE 25-30 mph, on the 2nd they were gusting to 50 mph. On 3 April they continued at 15-20 mph and I noted "violent winds last night". On 4 April the winds laid, and at 0900 hours were SE at 10 mph. Clouds had been high, thin hazy, some mare's tails, but on 4 April it was 95% overcast until 0930.

[ED. note: Gladys lives just 4 miles from Bentsen Park gate, and says anyone visiting the Park passes within a half mile of her house no matter what road they take. She cordially invites anyone down that way to stop in and visit her. She especially wishes visitors to Bentsen Park would report their findings to the office there as the personnel would like them to do. If you are going to be in that area, drop a line to Gladys Donohue, Dr. 400, Penitas, TX 78576].

CLEARING HOUSE, December 1980

The Clearing House is a monthly record of bird sightings made in the six counties comprising the upper Texas coast: Brazoria, Chambers, Ft. Bend, Galveston, Harris and Jefferson. How to read the CH: Species: Location--(how many) date, observers. Those common species which can be readily identified and are widely distributed in the UTC will also be listed, followed by the number of reports, with the lowest and highest number seen in parenthesis, i.e. (1-42). Noteworthy sightings will be underlined, capitalized, or both, according to their status.

The Christmas Bird Counts conducted in the UTC are listed this month in the following manner: Species: Symbol for the Count, number observed. Field notes of Count unusual or rare species are not published, since they have been already accepted by the Count compilers. Symbols for the various CBCs and date of Counts: H-Houston, Dec. 20, 1980; F-Freeport, Dec. 21, 1980; G-Galveston, Dec. 27, 1980; C-Cypress Creek, Dec. 26, 1980; B-Dollar, Dec. 28, 1980.

Loon, Common: F-12 (10 year high); G-56; H-11; W. Galveston--(4)20,J&JH
 Loon, Red-throated: G-1
 Grebe, Horned: F-1; G-5; H-6
 Grebe, Eared: C-4; F-16 (low); G-115; H-378; 4 reports (1-4)
 Grebe, Pied-billed: B-2; C-18; F-311; G-131; H-26
 Pelican, White: C-69; F-283; G-202; H-515; 21 reports (1-450)
 Pelican, Brown: G-3
 Gannet, Northern: F-1; Galveston--(2)27,J&WR
 Cormorant, Double-crested: C-406; F-1207 (10 year high); G-354; H-4650; 27 reports (2-600)
 Cormorant, Olivaceous: F-2; G-10; H-52; 5 reports (1-10)
 Anhinga: C-2; F-128 (10 year high); H-2 (low); 2 reports (1)
 Heron, Great Blue: B-2; C-43; F-543 (10 year high); G-279; H-210; 32 reports (1-123)
 Heron, Green: F-4; H-3; Brazoria Co.--(1)14,M
 Heron, Little Blue: C-1; F-44; G-16; H-25; 7 reports (1-5)
 Egret, Cattle: C-68; F-90; G-15; H-42; 13 reports (1-80)
 Egret, Reddish: F-8; G-16; Chambers Co.--(3)30,PJ&JD
 Egret, Great: B-1; C-107; F-436; G-216; H-263; 30 reports (1-136)
 Egret, Snowy: C-16; F-251; G-149; H-163; 24 reports (1-100)
 Heron, Louisiana: C-3; F-94; G-48; H-25; 15 reports (1-10)
 Night Heron, Black-crowned: C-35; F-330; G-118; H-138; 8 reports (1-120)
 Night Heron, Yellow-crowned: F-6; G-13; H-2 (low); Chambers Co.--(1)30,PJ&JD
 Bittern, American: C-1; F-5; H-1; Maner Lake--(1)12,14,TG; San Bernard NWR--(1-2) 5,6,TG&DS; Brazoria NWR--(1)19,TG&KM
 Ibis, White-faced: C-34 (new to count); F-346; H-64; 8 reports (1-43)
 Ibis, White: C-29; F-290; G-56; H-15; 12 reports (1-50)
 Spoonbill, Roseate: C-7; F-58; G-44; H-1 (low); 5 reports (1-70)
 Goose, Canada: C-52 (low); F-175 (low); G-70; H-145; 9 reports (4-500)
 Goose, White-fronted: B-15; C-15,490; F-147 (low); G-69; H-89; 15 reports (1-4000)
 Goose, Snow: B-40; C-125,067; F-10,146; G-13,535; H-3,000; 34 reports (10-80,000)
 Goose, (Blue): C-49,500; F-2,447; G-1,905; H-730
 Goose, Ross': C-1; W. Harris Co.--(1)5, TG&DS; Anahuac--(1)6,ES&JB
 Whistling Duck, Fulvous: Angleton--(1)4,L&MB
 Mallard: B-3; C-307; F-113; G-2; H-211; 15 reports (2-1440)
 Duck, Mottled: B-28; C-54; F-125; G-27; H-148; 17 reports (4-100)
 Gadwall: C-475; F-470; G-44; H-1318; 13 reports (1-1000)
 Pintail, Common: C-635 (low); F-1027; G-16; H-3130; 13 reports (1-2000)
 Teal, Green-winged: C-12,066; F-1640; G-134; H-350; 17 reports (1-9060)
 Teal, Blue-winged: C-3; F-259; G-48; H-2 (low); San Bernard NWR--(6)13,TG
 Teal, Cinnamon: C-20; F-1; W.Harris Co.--(14)5,TG&DS; (16)24,TG&GG; San Bernard NWR --(1)19,TG&KM
 Wigeon, American: C-200; F-588; G-81; H-1045; 12 reports (1-531)
 Shoveler, Northern: C-3000; F-309; G-388; H-188; 17 reports (15-2675)
 Duck, Wood: F-120; H-25; Lake Jackson--(1)7,MR; Big Slough--(2)14,M; Cinco Ranch--(2)6,OG
 Redhead: F-300; H-5; W.Harris Co.--(2)5,TG&DS, (4)28,B&EW, (5)6,MR, (2)24,TG&GG; Brazoria NWR--(1)19,TG&KM
 Duck, Ring-necked: C-84; F-39; G-8; H-54; W.Harris Co.--(4)5,TG&DS, (1)24,TG&GG
 Canvasback: C-203; F-1262; G-34; H-815; 9 reports (1-150)
 Scaup, Greater: C-2; H-184; Mercury Drive--(4)14,MA; W.Harris Co.--(2)24,TG&GG
 Scaup, Lesser: B-7; C-10; F-383; G-148; H-35,634; 7 reports (1-17)
 Goldeneye, Common: F-18; G-6; H-58; W.Harris Co.--(1)24,TG&GG
 Bufflehead: F-10; G-30; H-271
 Scoter, White-winged: G-3; H-3; High Island--(5)20,SC; Quintana Jetties--(1)22,TG
 Scoter, Surf: H-1; High Island--(13)20,SC

Scoter, Black: H-1; High Island--(9)20,SC
 Scoter, sp.: F-3; G-4; H-1
 Duck, Ruddy: C-612; F-180; G-1841; H-1108; 10 reports (1-80)
 Merganser, Hooded: F-17; H-17; San Bernard NWR--(38)12, (5)13, (1)14, (5)22, TG;
 Mercury Drive--(37)14, MA
 Merganser, Red-breasted: F-32; G-31; H-127; Quintana Jetties--(1)23, MR; (1)22, TG;
 Brazoria NWR--(3)19, TG&KM
 Vulture, Turkey: B-89; C-256; F-421; G-3; H-60; 26 reports (1-75)
 Vulture, Black: B-20; C-49 (previous high-5); F-337 (10 year high); H-6; 10
 reports (1-50)
 Kite, White-tailed: C-4; F-53; G-6; H-6; 14 reports (1-11)
 Hawk, Sharp-shinned: B-2; C-5; F-8; G-1; H-7; Chambers Co.--(1)30, PJ&JD; Brazoria
 Co.--(1)14, M; Cinco Ranch--(1)6, OG
 Hawk, Cooper's: B-1; C-7; F-3; H-6; Baytown--(1)6, JM; Cinco Ranch--(1)6, OG
 Accipiter sp.: H-1; Baytown--(1)6, JM
 Hawk, Red-tailed: B-6; C-273; F-243; G-33; H-200; 35 reports (1-200)
 Hawk, (Harlan's): C-3; H-1; W.Harris Co.--(1)5, TG&DS, (1)6, MR, (1)24, TG&GG, (1)16,
 TE
 Hawk, Red-tailed (Kridler's): C-2; W.Harris Co.--(1)5, TG&DS, (1)6, MR
 Hawk, Red-shouldered: B-9; C-20; F-160 (10 year high); G-2; H-67; 21 reports (1-10)
 Hawk, Ferruginous: C-1; H-1 (DM, KM)
 Eagle, Bald: C-6; F-1; Maner Lake--(1-1st yr. bird)12, TG; W.Harris Co.--(1)6, MR,
 (2)27, P&MJ, (1)24, TG&GG, (2)16, TE
 Hawk, Marsh: B-4; C-327; F-257 (10 year high); G-68; H-155; 34 reports (1-30)
 Osprey: F-6; H-3; Kemah-Seabrook--(1)12, TG; Armand Bayou--(1)17, ES&JB; Chambers
 Co.--(2)30, PJ&JD
 Falcon, Peregrine: F-1; San Bernard NWR--(1 ad.)5, TG&DS; Galveston--(1-U.S. Natl
 Bank Bldg.)8, J&JH; Brazoria NWR--(1)19, TG&KM
 Merlin: F-5 (10 year high); G-1; H-1
 Kestrel, American: B-8; C-204; F-297 (10 year high); G-127; H-279; 31 reports (1-25)
 Bobwhite: C-150; F-35 (low); G-5; H-74; 4 reports (1-18)
 Pheasant, Ring-necked: Anahuac--(1)6, ES&JB, (1)6, TE&VD
 Crane, Sandhill: C-432; F-433; G-8; H-36; 6 reports (2-500)
 Rail, King: C-8; F-20; G-24; H-7; 10 reports (1-12)
 Rail, Clapper: F-24; G-56; H-10; 5 reports (1-6)
 Rail, Virginia: F-3; G-3; H-1; W.Harris Co.--(2)12, TG; San Bernard NWR--(1)14, TG;
 Brazoria NWR--(1)19, TG&KM; Maner Lake--(1)22, TG
 Rail, Sora: F-2; G-2; H-1; Maner Lake--(1)12, TG, (8)22, TG; Brazoria NWR--(1)19,
 TG&KM
 Rail, Yellow: F-1; G-1
 Gallinule, Common: F-12; G-10; H-5; 1 report (2)
 Coot, American: C-298; F-1321; G-596; H-2667; 18 reports (1-600)
 Oystercatcher, American: G-10
 Plover, Semipalmated: F-25; G-116; H-6; 2 reports (1-4)
 Plover, Piping: F-18; G-76; H-1; 1 report (3)
 Plover, Snowy: F-1 (low); G-4; Bolivar--(2)6, ES&JB
 Plover, Wilson's: G-5
 Killdeer: B-20; C-846; F-1663; G-437; H-1163; 30 reports (1-500)
 Plover, Black-bellied: F-784 (10 year high); G-605; H-63; 11 reports (1-20)
 Turnstone, Ruddy: F-45 (10 year high); G-34; H-12; 5 reports (1-20)
 Woodcock, American: B-7; C-1; F-14; G-7; H-24; W.Harris Co.--(1)12, TG; White Oak
 Bayou--(1)all month, WC; Lake Jackson--(1)7, MR; Chambers Co.--(10)30, PJ&JD;
 Cinco Ranch--(1)6, OG
 Snipe, Common: C-273; F-96; G-15; H-16; 13 reports (2-60)
 Curlew, Long-billed: C-131; F-129; G-148; 9 reports (1-48)
 Whimbrel: F-1 (TE)
 Sandpiper, Spotted: C-2; F-22; G-20; H-54; 3 reports (1-14)
 Willet: F-625 (10 year high); G-362; H-195; 10 reports (1-30)
 Yellowlegs, Greater: B-2; C-68; F-136; G-45; H-22; 19 reports (1-25)
 Yellowlegs, Lesser: C-15; F-313 (10 year high); G-57; H-55; 9 reports (1-20)
 Knot, Red: F-16; G-48
 Sandpiper, Purple: F-1 (TE); Surfside Jetties--(1)22, E
 SANDPIPER, PECTORAL: C-1 (TE, VD)
 Sandpiper, Least: C-154; F-222; G-920; H-283; 7 reports (1-120)
 Dunlin: C-20; F-5406 (10 year high); G-3158; H-8; 9 reports (2-250)
 Dowitcher, Short-billed: 2 reports (4-20); F-12; G-33; H-108
 Dowitcher, F-531; G-46; H-14; 8 reports (5-500)
 Dowitcher, sp.: C-526; F-3162; G-5639; H-1529; 10 reports (3-600)
 Sandpiper, Stilt: San Bernard NWR--(4-150)6, TG&DS
 Sandpiper, Western: C-15; F-711; G-2284; H-669; 9 reports (1-300)
 Godwit, Marbled: F-2; G-24; H-2; W.Galveston--(1)18, J&JH; Freeport--(2)23, MR;
 Bolivar--(2)6, ES&JB

Sanderling: F-503 (10 year high); G-1337; H-53; 6 reports (5-100)
 Sandpiper sp.: F-1815; G-6425; H-400
 Avocet, American: F-16 (low); G-373; H-204; San Bernard NWR--(1)6,TG; Bolivar--(10)
 6,ES&JB; Mercury Dr.--(4)14,ES&JB, (33)6,JM; Chambers Co.--(4)30,PJ&JD
Stilt, Black-necked: F-5 (Paul Nimmons, John Tveten, et al.); San Bernard NWR--
 (2)6,TG&DS; W.Harris Co.--(1)16,TE
Phalarope, Wilson's: C-1 (TE,VD)
 Jaeger sp.: F-2
 Gull, Glaucous: G-1
 GULL, GREAT BLACK-BACKED: Matagorda Co.--(1)12,TG (See notes, p.15)
 Gull, Herring: F-92; G-445; H-131; 8 reports (1-30)
 Gull, Ring-billed: B-23; C-230; F-2209; G-2071; H-3100; 23 reports (1-290)
 Gull, Laughing: F-3480; G-5882; H-8300; 10 reports (1-300)
 Gull, Franklin's: F-1 (TE)
 Gull, Bonaparte's: F-162; G-66; H-13; 4 reports (3-500)
 Kittiwake, Black-legged: Quintana Jetties--(1)22,TG
 Tern, Gull-billed: F-5; G-3; H-1
 Tern, Forster's: F-266; G-376; H-720; 16 reports (1-80)
 Tern, Common: F-4; G-20; H-30
 Tern, Royal: F-143; G-111; H-44 (low); 5 reports (2-60)
 Tern, Sandwich: G-11; Quintana Jetties--(3)22,E
 Tern, Caspian: F-142; G-61; H-90; 7 reports (2-9)
 Tern sp.: C-1
 Skimmer, Black: F-5; G-445: 1 report (30)
 Dove, Rock: B-19; C-10; F-50; G-4077; H-415; 13 reports (10-50)
 Dove, White-winged: G-19; 2 reports (2-7)
 Dove, Mourning: B-44; C-415; F-907; G-159; H-847; 26 reports (1-150)
 Dove, Ringed Turtle: Yard--(2-4)all month, P&MJ; Bellaire--(50)19,P&MJ
 Dove, Ground: C-3; F-22; San Bernard NWR--(1)5,DS; W.Harris Co.--(4)6,MR, (2)16,
 TE; Anahuac--(1)14,SC; Cinco Ranch--(6)6,OG
 Dove, Inca: B-32; C-4; F-15; G-279; H-4; 6 reports (1-50)
 Ani, Groove-billed: F-23; H-1 (low)
 Owl, Barn: C-14; F-2; G-3; H-5; W.Harris Co.--(9)12,(1)14,TG; W.Galveston--(1)16,
 J&H
 Owl, Screech: B-6; C-10; F-4; H-25; W.Harris Co.--(1)12,TG
 Owl, Great Horned: C-12; F-12; H-9; W.Harris Co.--(2)12,(1)13,TG; Yard--(1)14,WC
 Owl, Burrowing: H-1
 Owl, Barred: C-1; F-37; H-5; San Bernard NWR--(1)14,TG; Brazoria Co.--(1)14,TG,
 (2)14,M; W.Harris Co.--(1)12,D&VE; Lake Jackson--(1)7,MR; Chambers Co.--(1)30,
 PJ&JD
 Owl, Short-eared: C-1; F-2; G-1; H-2; W.Harris Co.--(1)12,TG, (1)18,TG
 Owl sp.: C-1
 Hummingbird, Ruby-throated: F-1
 Hummingbird, Black-chinned: F-2; Lake Jackson--(1)22,MR
 Hummingbird, Anna's: F-4 (Margaret Anderson, et al)
 HUMMINGBIRD, BROAD-TAILED: F-3 (Margaret Anderson, et al)
 Hummingbird, Rufous: B-1; F-28; Yard--(1)all month, WC; Lake Jackson--(2)6-23,MR;
 Winnie--(1)1-25,SC
 Selasphorus sp.: B-3; G-1; H-1; yard--(1)16,TE
 Hummingbird, Buff-bellied: F-3 (Margaret Anderson, et al)
 Parrot, Red-crowned: G-1 (escaped bird)
 Kingfisher, Belted: B-2; C-12; F-84; G-52; H-88; 15 reports (1-15)
 Flicker, Common (Red-shafted): C-1; F-5; H-1
 Flicker, Common (Yellow-shafted): B-30; C-158; F-468 (10 year high); G-112; H-432
 Woodpecker, Pileated: B-6; C-3; F-91 (10 year high); H-29; 11 reports (1-5)
 Woodpecker, Red-bellied: B-19; C-48; F-183 (10 year high); G-6; H-75; 19 reports
 (1-5)
 Woodpecker, Red-headed: C-1; F-6; H-2
 Sapsucker, Yellow-bellied: B-14; C-15; F-192; G-19; H-53; 12 reports (1-12)
 Woodpecker, Hairy: F-4; Mercer Arboretum--(1)17,18,DC; W.Harris Co.--(1)14,D&VE;
 Chambers Co.--(1)30,PJ&JD
 Woodpecker, Downy: B-9; C-46; F-84 (10 year high); G-12; H-42; 16 reports (1-9)
 Flycatcher, Scissor-tailed: F-1
 KISKADEE, GREATER: F-1 (m.ob.)
 Flycatcher, Ash-throated: F-2; H-1
 Phoebe, Eastern: B-10; C-62; F-454 (10 year high); G-21; H-145; 26 reports (1-30)
 Empidonax sp.: F-2
 Flycatcher, Vermilion: F-20; San Bernard NWR--(2)13,TG; Chambers Co.--(3)30,PJ&JD;
 Big Slough--(2)14,M
 Lark, Horned: C-1; F-20; G-66
 Swallow, Tree: C-1; F-107; G-1; H-41; San Bernard NWR--(2)13,TG
 Jay, Blue: B-140; C-58; F-171; G-40; H-204; 15 reports (1-13)

Crow, Common: B-91; C-56; F-716; H-370; 26 reports (1-50)
 Chickadee, Carolina: B-257; C-61; F-559; G-5; H-226; 17 reports (1-25)
 Titmouse, Tufted: B-237; C-50; F-423; G-1; H-46; 10 reports (1-10)
 Nuthatch, Red-breasted: B-2; C-2; F-3; H-2; ELMNS--(1)13,HAS; Friendswood--(3)4,MA;
 Westbury--(2)28,PM
 Nuthatch, Brown-headed: Yard--(1)12,JM
 Creeper, Brown: B-10; C-25; F-59; G-1; H-28; 16 reports (1-8)
 Wren, House: B-7; C-23; F-74; G-30; H-81; 12 reports (1-7)
 Wren, Winter: B-3 (new to count); C-7; F-21; G-2; H-11; White Oak Bayou--(1)all
 month,WC; ELMNS--(1)2-16,HAS; Arboretum--(1)4,ES&JB; W.Harris Co.--(1)27,P&MJ;
 Chambers Co.--(1)30,PJ&JD; Cinco Ranch--(1)6,OG
 Wren, Bewick's: C-1
 Wren, Carolina: B-26; C-19; F-166; G-3; H-68; 12 reports (1-6)
 Wren, Marsh: C-5; F-34; G-11; H-6; 6 reports (1-130)
 Wren, Sedge: C-23; F-157; G-30; H-35; 4 reports (1-80)
 Mockingbird, Northern: B-49; C-253; F-669 (10 year high); G-311; H-538; 27 reports
 (1-70)
 Catbird, Gray: C-2; F-26 (10 year high); G-5; H-20; Galveston--(2)11,J&JH; Chambers
 Co.--(6)30,PJ&JD; Cinco Ranch--(4)6,OG
 Thrasher, Brown: B-27; C-96; F-754 (10 year high); G-67; H-302; 20 reports (1-30)
 Robin, American: B-605; C-832; F-19,743; G-1992; H-18,500; 33 reports (1-1000)
 Thrush, Wood: F-3; G-1; Cinco Ranch--(1)6,OG
 Thrush, Hermit: B-15; C-15; F-271 (high-2nd in 10 years); G-14; H-156; 10 reports
 (1-6)
 Thrush, Swainson's: F-2
 Bluebird, Eastern: F-104; H-190; Maner Lake--(4)12,TG; Brazoria Co.--(1)6,TG&DS;
 W.Harris Co.--(2)6,D&VE; Chambers Co.--(40)30,PJ&JD
 Gnatcatcher, Blue-gray: B-6; C-33; F-578; G-65; H-306; 9 reports (1-65)
 Kinglet, Golden-crowned: B-41; C-54; F-100; G-1; H-152; White Oak Bayou--(2)all
 month,WC; ELMNS--(1)2,12,(2)9,HAS; Friendswood--(1)4,MA; High Is.--(1)20,SC;
 Chambers Co.--(3)30,PJ&JD; Brazoria Co.--(1)14,M; Cinco Ranch--(4)6,OG
 Kinglet, Ruby-crowned: B-176; C-358; F-2021 (10 year high); G-317; H-1956; 26 re-
 ports (1-60)
 Pipit, Water: B-2; C-127; F-536; G-148; H-520; 19 reports (4-300)
 Pipit, Sprague's: C-1; F-12; G-5; H-3; San Bernard NWR--(9)13,TG,(2)6,TG&DS;
 Brazoria--(25)14,M; Brazoria NWR--(4)19,TG&KM
 Waxwing, Cedar: B-157; C-40; F-36; G-24; H-342; 10 reports (1-250)
 Shrike, Loggerhead: B-18; C-289; F-371; G-265; H-391; 27 reports (1-30)
 Starling: B-46; C-985; F-3272 (10 year high); G-8851; H-3451; 16 reports (1-750)
 Vireo, White-eyed: F-1; H-3
 Vireo, Yellow-throated: F-1 (Sherri Collins)
 Vireo, Solitary: B-1; C-5; F-47; G-1; H-42; 9 reports (1-4)
 Warbler, Black and White: F-6; G-1; W.Harris Co.--(1)6,D&VE
 Warbler, Orange-crowned: B-22; C-49; F-384; G-57; H-270; 16 reports (1-16)
 Warbler, Nashville: F-10; G-1; H-4
 Warbler, Yellow-rumped (Myrtle): B-247; C-467; F-2302 (10 year high); G-2200;
 H-5968; 28 reports (1-110)
 Warbler, Yellow-rumped (Audubon's): C-1; F-1
 Warbler, Blackpoll: F-1 (Jim Tucker)
 Warbler, Pine: B-36; C-19; F-9; H-102; 3 reports (1-2)
 Warbler, Palm: B-1 (new to count); F-14; G-7; H-3; San Bernard NWR--(1)13,TG; Cedar
 Point--(1)13,WC; Chambers Co.--(1)30,PJ&JD
 Ovenbird: F-6 (10 year high); H-2
 Waterthrush, Northern: F-3
 Yellowthroat, Common: C-5; F-163; G-14; H-21; 3 reports (2-9)
 Chat, Yellow-breasted: H-1
 Warbler, Wilson's: B-3; C-1; F-82 (10 year high); G-5; H-13; White Oak Bayou--
 (1-2)all month,WC; Galveston--(1)11,J&JH; Lake Jackson--(1)7,MR; Chambers Co.--
 (1)30,PJ&JD; Brazoria Co.--(2)14,M; W.Harris Co.--(1)16,TE
 Redstart, American: H-1; Galveston--(2)11,J&JH
 Sparrow, House: B-250; C-258; F-424 (10 year high); G-2533; H-647; 14 reports (1-
 200)
 Meadowlark, Eastern: B-18; C-205; F-1698; G-65; H-410; 23 reports (1-150)
 Meadowlark, Western: C-4; H-1
 Meadowlark sp.: C-599; G-592; H-407
 Blackbird, Red-winged: B-3102; C-10,697; F-14,950; G-1896; H-16,900; 19 reports
 (1-"millions")
 Oriole, Orchard: F-1 (Marilyn Crane)
 Oriole, Northern (Baltimore): Galveston--(1)17,J&JH
 Oriole, Northern (Bullock's): F-2; ELMNS--(1)13,HAS
 Blackbird, Rusty: B-103; C-2; F-20; H-88
 Blackbird, Brewer's: B-10; C-324; F-584; G-31; H-1536; 7 reports (1-300)

Grackle, Boat-tailed: F-345; G-51; H-13; 9 reports (1-90)
 Grackle, Great-tailed: B-45; C-395; F-383; G-1773; H-82; 17 reports (1-15,000)
 Grackle, Common: B-3347; C-10,116; F-7639; G-446; H-395; 15 reports (1-1000)
 Cowbird, Brown-headed: B-5030; C-19,330; F-1818; G-3394; H-445 (low); 13 reports (10-8000)
 Blackbird sp.: C-19,317; F-30,705; G-1303; H-16,945
 Cardinal, Northern: B-125; C-267; F-1429; G-45; H-705; 28 reports (1-40)
 Grosbeak, Black-headed: F-4
 Grosbeak, Blue: Lake Jackson--(1)13,MR
 Bunting, Indigo: F-2
 Dickcissel: High Is.--(1)20,SC; Baytown--(1)6,JM
 Finch, Purple: B-13; C-3; F-19; G-3; H-19; White Oak Bayou--(2)27,WC; Yard--(1-3) 15-17,P&MJ; Chambers Co.--(36)30,PJ&JD; Brazoria Co.--(2)14,M; Cinco Ranch--(1)6,)G
 Siskin, Pine: B-3; C-1; F-23; H-15; White Oak Bayou--(2)27,WC; ELMNS--(2)29,HAS; Friendswood--(4)18-20,MA
 Goldfinch, American: B-231; C-108; F-1314 (10 year high); G-75; H-825; 20 reports (1-126)
 Towhee, Green-tailed: H-1 (Larry Ballard)
 Towhee, Eastern: B-3; C-17; F-21; H-27; Mercury Drive--(2)14,MA; High Is.--(1)20, SC; Brazoria Co.--(1)14,M; Cinco Ranch--(2)6,OG
 Towhee, (Spotted): F-1
 BUNTING, LARK: G-1
 Sparrow, Savannah: B-15; C-1102; F-1808; G-539; H-309; 13 reports (1-200)
 Sparrow, Grasshopper: B-4 (new to count); C-3; F-6; H-1; W.Harris Co.--(1)27,P&MJ
 Sparrow, LeConte's: C-68; F-38; G-12; H-9; W.Harris Co.--(18)12,TG; Baytown--(1) 6,JM; Brazoria Co.--(2)14,M
 Sparrow, Henslow's: F-6; G-1
 Sparrow, Sharp-tailed: F-4; G-37; H-11; Brazoria NWR--(10)19,TG&KM
 Sparrow, Seaside: F-29; G-25; H-2; 3 reports (1-25)
 Sparrow, Vesper: C-95; F-77 (10 year high); G-21; H-72; 3 reports (1-5)
 Sparrow, Lark: G-2; H-3
 Junco, Dark-363d (Slate-colored): B-22; C-31; F-278 (2nd high in 10 year); G-7; H-383; 9 reports (1-30)
 Junco, Dark-eyed (Oregon): H-1 (Wes Cureton); Lake Jackson--(1)20,MR
 Sparrow, Chipping: C-33; F-185 (10 year high); G-4; H-201; Cedar Point--(1)13,WC; W.Harris Co.--(15-35),D&VE; Brazoria Co.--(20)14,M; Cinco Ranch--(2)6,)G
 Sparrow, Clay-colored: Bolivar--(1)6,TE&VD
 Sparrow, Field: B-5; C-94; F-89 (10 year high); G-12; H-100; White Oak Bayou--(1) 27,WC; Yard--(10)8,ES&JB; Chambers Co.--(2)30,PJ&JD; Brazoria Co.--(2)14,M
 Sparrow, Harris': B-1 (new to count); C-11; F-74; G-1; H-16; Baytown--(3)6,JM; Brazoria Co.--(5)14,M; Cinco Ranch--(6)6,OG
 Sparrow, White-crowned: B-2; C-64; F-241 (10 year high); G-15; H-240; 6 reports (1-19)
 Sparrow, White-throated: B-89; C-282; F-1598 (2nd high in 10 years); G-193; H-5182; 21 reports (1-100)
 Sparrow, Fox: C-15; F-22; H-16; W.Harris Co.--(1)27,P&MJ; Chambers Co.--(1)30,P&MJ; Cinco Ranch--(10)6,OG
 Sparrow, Lincoln's: B-3; C-7 (low); F-206; G-36; H-46; 8 reports (1-15)
 Sparrow, Swamp: B-3; C-238; F-734 (10 year high); G-125; H-107; 7 reports (1-75)
 Sparrow, Song: B-7; C-46; F-162; G-78; H-49; 9 reports (1-10)
 Longspur, Lapland; C-2

Clearing House Contributors, December 1980: MA-Mike Austin; L&MB-Larry & Martha Ballard; JB-John Bargman; DC-Diane Cabiness; SC-Steve Calver; WC-Wesley Cureton; JD-John Daves; VD-Virginia Davidson; E-Party of TG, Chuck Sexton, Kelly Bryan, Betsy and Greg Lasley; D&VE-Dick and Vesta Eshbaugh; TE-Ted Eubanks Jr.; GG-Giovanni Gallucci; TG-Tony Gallucci; J&JH-Jane and John Hamilton; HAS-Houston Audubon Society; PJ-Paul Jones; MJ-Margaret Jones; M-Party of JM, Ron & Marcia Braun, Marilyn Crane; KM-Ken Merritt; PM-Peggy Milstead; JM-Jim Morgan; OG-OG field trip, 12-06-80; J&WR-Jan & Will Risser; MR-Matt Robinson; DS-Douglas Slack; ES-Ena Spalding; B&EW-Bob and Edith Wilman.

SPECIAL REPORTS, December 1980

Kite Mississippi: (1)4, Larry & Martha Ballard, Lake Jackson--"a gray barred kite with a slender black tail".

Hummingbird, (coquette sp.): (1)19, Margaret Anderson et al, West University Place. "At 9 a.m. Mrs. Donohue saw a small hummer with a distinct white bar across its back. The bird was feeding on Loquat blooms outside her kitchen window.

At 11:00 a.m. she saw the bird again and called me. My husband, Wilmer, and son, Robert, and I went to her house, as did John Earthman, her grandson. At 12:35 p.m. all 5 of us saw the bird. I was about 20 feet away and used 8x36 binoculars. We saw the following details: 1) A very tiny hummer....the smallest I have ever seen. 2) A dark green head, tail, and back. The rump and lower back were completely crossed by a pure white bar 1/4"-3/8" wide. This white bar did not fade into the green, it looked like a white ribbon laid across the back. The tail appeared to be straight across at the end, not notched. 3) The front was not seen well enough to definitely establish whether it was a Black-crested Coquette or a Rufous-crested Coquette. Both John and I thought we saw a dark mark around the eye, and Mrs. Donohue thought she saw a small amount of pure white somewhere in front. I called 5 other birders who were able to come within an hour but we did not see the bird again although they all stayed 2 hours. As of this writing no one has seen it again. (Dec. 29, 1980). --Margaret Anderson

Chickadee, Black-capped: (1)21-present, Linda Snyder et al, Morgan's Point. A large chickadee with large amounts of white on the upper wing surfaces; also with a harsher call note than surrounding Carolina Chickadee. Photographs taken by John Tveten. More field notes hopefully to follow.

Bird was observed by Paul and Margaret Jones 1/10/81 (same day I started typing the CH...how's that for timing?...Ed.) Bird observed coming to feeder, rapidly choosing a seed and flitting to nearby tree, never perching on feeder for more than a second. Observed low in tree, about 10-12 feet high and about same distance from car. Noted were: startlingly distinct, large white wing patches, white cheeks appeared to extend farther to the middle over the bill, black throat patch had "scraggly" lower edge, tail appeared to have white in outer rectrices, overall size was larger than nearby Carolina Chickadees. These Carolinas showed no white in wings, black throat patches had even lower edge, no white in tail was noted. No rusty or buff was noted on sides of Black-capped, though this may have been a matter of light. No call note was heard that was different from the chatter of surrounding Carolinas. Bird was observed for 10-12 minutes between 8:00 and 8:15 a.m., flitting from feeder to tree, feeding, then back to feeder, etc. Bright clear morning, sun just rising over roof of house.

Literature consulted makes points that wintering Black-capped Chickadees wander, the white in wings becomes very pronounced, the ragged edge of throat patch and call notes are determining factors. Ted Eubanks, Jr., who has banded them in the East, says the ragged edge was a main factor in identification used by banders with whom he worked. --Paul Jones

More on Dark-backed Gull, first reported in Special Reports last month:

Two observations reported: (1)12,TG, (1)14,MA

Following are some notes made by Tony Gallucci from literature consulted and personal journal:

All of the pictures of Great Black-backed Gulls in the British Birds (BB) article further help eliminate that as a consideration--further size comparisons, massive bill, light eye with dark ring. Except notice that subadult birds may have "dark eyes and yellow eyering".

Four important characters come from reading the BB article. 1) The underside of the primaries and secondaries (seen very well in the photos) is dark gray in the Lesser Black-backed Gull. It grades into dark black at the tip--it looks exactly like what I saw on the Kemah bird on the 30th. 2) If a Lesser Blackback, the bird would be a third winter bird based on the bill color and pattern (fits very well) but based on plumage characters it would be an adult winter bird. Also the head of an adult winter bird is described as having extensive gray on the head with fairly heavy dark streaking. The streaking on the Kemah bird was present but I considered it light and thin streaks. 3) The eye of all age class Lesser Blackbacks possible (seen very well in the photos) was a very light color--described as whitish-yellow with an obvious dark ring (orange to red by description). The Kemah bird has a dark eye with a yellowish ring. I want to point out that in the photos in BB which showed a blown-up picture of a Lesser or one that appeared distant this eye color/eye-ring contrast was still very obvious. 4) The BB article says all third year and older Lesser Blackbacks have yellow legs, no color change in the third year. It is possible, although my reading of the article could not confirm it, that all age class Lesser Blackbacks have yellow legs. This also appears to be true for the Yellow-legged Gull (race of the Western from the Sonoran Gulf of California). I did not specifically (in my Sonoran field notes) note that immatures

from Sonora, had leg color other than yellow and I think I would have if they did. This tends to indicate a Western Gull of U.S./Canada Pacific Coast origin.

Other notes: based on what I saw of the Kemah bird and examination of the descriptions of the Lesser Blackback races (3) and also photos in BB, it looks to me that the Kemah bird (if it were a Lesser Blackback) matches the Scandinavian race more closely than the British race.

A field mark of the Western Gull, not shown in Robbins, is that the bird has a subterminal elongate white spot on the outermost primary in addition to the terminal band (which wears off before the next molt). Reading of some references indicates Lesser Blackbacks have two subterminal spots but the BB article describes and shows only one subterminal spot. In fact I find no realistic differences between the wingtips of the Western Gull (as described by Godfrey, Birds of Canada, and some field guides), the Lesser Black-backed Gull (as described in the BB article) and the Kemah bird. This apparently is also true of the underwing lining, the underside of the primaries and secondaries. The mantle color of both Western and Lesser Black-backed Gulls runs about the same gamut. There is a specimen of an adult Western Gull in the A&M collection and its mantle color is not but slightly darker than one specimen in the collection of Herring Gull. I think the Kemah bird was much darker on the back and upperwing than this specimen.

I want to point out also that I thought bill size or shape might be important but in addition to the adult, there is an immature Western Gull in the A&M collection and the difference in bill size is significant.

There is obviously as wide variation in these species as in most other gulls and I think we are best depending on only absolute characters. The only five gulls I know that really should be considered are the following:

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*. Should be eliminated because it is too large for the bird we are looking at and the eye and eye-ring color are wrong.

Lesser Blackbacked Gull *Larus fuscus*. Should be eliminated because the eye, eye-ring and leg color are all wrong.

Western Gull *Larus occidentalis* (and Yellow-legged Gull *Larus o. livens*, considered by some to a separate species). Yellow-legged Gull should be eliminated because the leg color is wrong.

Slaty-backed Gull *Larus Schistisagus*. Should be eliminated because the eye and eye-ring color are wrong.

Siberian Herring Gull *Larus argentatus vegae*. Should be eliminated because the eye and eye-ring color are wrong.

Based on my reading the Siberian Herring Gull is least likely geographically (one U.S. record), followed by the Slaty-backed, the Lesser Black-backed (especially of the Scandinavian race), the Great Black-backed and the Western (most likely I think). It is said that the Western is a bird that does not stray but I find little positive evidence of this statement. Perhaps some have been overlooked in the east and identified as Lesser Black-backed. I have been unable to locate a reference but I faintly remember reading of a Florida record of a Western Gull. There are three reports from New Mexico since the 50's and several Arizona records, also Illinois and Manitoba specimens.

CLEARING HOUSE NOTES, December 1980

Great Black-backed Gull: Matagorda Co.--(1)12, Tony Gallucci. Seen on beach side of San Bernard NWR. Immature (1st year?) bird. First spotted sitting next to short dike with 2 imm. (1st y.) Herring Gulls. Immediately attracted by its larger size (significant...20% larger?), very light head contrasting with dark mantle. Mantle mixed black and chocolate brown, dusky below; tail not seen well but definitely with blackish subterminal band, whitish tipped. Birds flew to water and I went for my camera; the Herring Gull flew before I got the picture but got the GBB with 300mm at about 75 yards. Bill of GBB about 1/2 black tipped, bill base flesh or yellow. Herrings had mostly fleshy bases with only tip dark. 50-100 yards with 7x35 binocs. Good but fading light (sunset). --Tony Gallucci

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