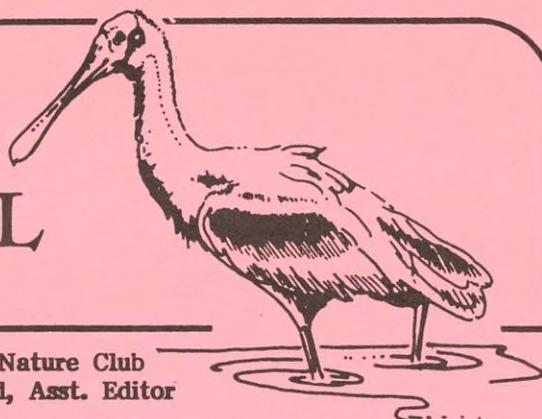


# The SPOONBILL



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Houston, Texas, Libby Price, Editor; Ellen Red, Asst. Editor

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## Coming Events

Saturday, Feb. 3: Deadline for Clearing House reports and for Spoonbill material.

Tuesday February 6: Ornithology Group meeting at 7:30 p.m. at Bayland Park, off Bissonnet just west of Hillcroft. Dr. Warren Pulich, who teaches ornithology at the University of Dallas, will present "Birding in North Central Texas."

Novice Time has attracted more than just novice birders, so it will henceforth be known as the LEARNING CORNER. The February subject and leader are to be announced. Time 7:00 p.m.

Thursday, Feb. 8: Outdoor Nature Club meeting, at 7:30 p.m. at the Houston Arboretum. The Galveston Bay Foundation will present the program on the bay.

Monday, Feb. 12: Steering Committee Meeting. All members welcome. Time and place to be announced or call Richard Uzar, 527-0454.

Saturday, Feb. 17: Ornithology Group fieldtrip, the only one in February, will be to Bear Creek Park and the Addicks Dam area in West Harris Co. Sterling Essenmacher will lead this foray for sparrows, towhees and other residents and visitors. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the Clay Rd. entrance to Bear Creek Park, in the parking lot at the northwest edge of the park near the golf course and picnic area. Bring lunch and a drink. Also wear waterproof boots as part of the hike will be in the wet. Although he makes no promises, Sterling says we will search hard for Rusty Blackbird and have a fair chance for it if conditions are right. He also says Great Horned and Barred Owls are routine. This is a good chance to bird a seldom-visited area with a birder who is thoroughly familiar with it. Note that the trip will cover entirely different spots than the January 13 trip, and should produce a significantly different trip list. Call John Buckman at 359-4685 for more information.

Friday-Sunday, Mar. 16-18: The first of the two OG field trips in March will be to the Rio Grande Valley. Travel on an individual basis Friday; birding to begin early Saturday. The trip will be led by Lynne Aldrich, Peter Gottschling and John Buckman. Call John at 359-4685 if you are going, to help him plan. The trip will go, regardless of numbers.

Saturday, March 31: OG field trip from High Island to Sabine Pass with Mike Austin leading.

FOR OG information, checklists, maps, contact Maxine Davis, 10602 Cedarhurst, Houston 77096, 723-8559.

SEND bird sightings for Clearing House to: Clearing House (OG), P.O. Box 271374, Houston TX 77277.

TEXAS RARE Bird Alert Tape, sponsored by Piney Woods Wildlife Society and Houston Audubon Society: (713) 821-2846.

FOR LOCAL nature societies' meetings and field trips call the Audubon Society's "Voice of the Naturalist" tape: 932-1392.

SEND material for Spoonbill to Editor, Libby Price, 3715 Sunset, Houston 77005, 665-1159.

SEND dues, subscriptions and address changes to Jerry Patrick, 814 St. Francis, Houston 77079. Members' annual dues: \$15 (ONC \$5, OG \$10). Spoonbill subscriptions for non-members: \$13.

# Noel's Niche Looking Back

## NOEL'S NICHE LOOKING BACK

by Noel Pettingell

10 YEARS AGO/FROM JAN., 1980 SPOONBILL

"AU REVOIR from John Eyre

Well, all good things must come to an end! That is the way I feel about my stay in Houston, which ends on the 11th of January when I return with my family to the cold, wet English winter! Before I leave I want to take this opportunity of thanking all of you in the OG group who have helped me get so much out of the last 15 months. This is a great place to bird, and it would be hard not to enjoy the spectacular numbers and variety of shorebirds on Bolivar Peninsula, or the abundance of hawks and wildfowl of a West Harris County winter. Even so, my enjoyment has been increased enormously because folk had the time and patience to help me with subtle differences between the plumages of fall warblers or the calls of look-alike sandpipers! I have been impressed, not only by the skills of the birders but also by the excellent 'back up' services which the OG has to offer...the Spoonbill and Clearing House, the UTC check list, etc. I think each of these sets a standard which is unsurpassed not only in the States, but also in Europe where birding is even more popular than it is here."

## A.O.U. CHECKLIST CHANGES

Among the changes to the A.O.U. Checklist of North American Birds in the 37th supplement are some splits that will affect life lists. The Western Flycatcher has been split into Pacific Slope Flycatcher, which nests on the western slope of the Cascades and Sierra Nevada from Alaska to Baja California, and the Cordilleran Flycatcher (Anglicized "L" sound is acceptable), which nests in the eastern portion of the Western's range. There is a difference in vocalization, but silent birds must be called "Western" for lack of other means of sight identification of non-breeding birds.

The gray-bellied "California race" of Black-tailed Gnatcatchers is now the California, separate from Black-tailed. They have different vocalizations and habitat preference and never hybridize.

The Brown Towhee has been split into California Towhee and Canyon Towhee. The Eurasian Collared-Dove, which some of us have seen in Florida, has been added to the list, and so has the Greenish Elaenia, from its well-documented appearance on the UTC. The Mottled Owl has also been added due to a Texas sighting.

Among the name changes Water Pipit is now the American Pipit, Common Pauraque is back to Pauraque, and the Common Barn-Owl is just Barn Owl without a hyphen.

It was too much to hope that the Common Moorhen, not a hen and not living on moors, would revert to Gallinule, but at least we gained a few lifers and didn't lose any. Consult the article by Paul A. Benedictis in the Fall, 1989 issue of American Birds for more information.

## THE CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

The Christmas counts are behind us and we're all recovered from the bitter weather. A new season, in a new decade is upon us. Hopefully, that'll mean plenty of new opportunities for growth and lots of Christmas counts to participate in.

The Houston Christmas Count was held on the first day of the count period. And what an unbelievable day it was we awoke to that Saturday morning. The temperature was in the late teens before sunrise and never went higher than the thirties all day. In spite of these adverse conditions fifty of our friends and neighbors dutifully showed up for the annual censusing in the Baytown area. Not surprisingly, the number of hours and miles on foot was down by nearly half. There was a corresponding increase in hours and miles by car. Our species total was down by five from last year, and I suspect the cold was the major factor, partly due to the obvious inability to beat the bushes. I thought, too, that this may be the reason they only find 22 to 79 species on the Alaska counts. But that can't be the whole reason because our weather here on the 16th of December was colder than that experienced in Anchorage or Juneau in their counts last year.

The bird of the count award goes to David Bradford who spotted a nighthawk species at 06:30 while looking for owls. A nighthawk has been reported only once before in 1964. The hero of the day award goes to Stennie Meadours and Dave Holman, who spent the entire day boating in the bays and around the islands. This would be an admirable feat in the best of weather. They brought in two species not seen elsewhere (Peregrine Falcon and Short-eared Owl), and our hat's off to them. Also of note were sightings of Piping Plover and American Oystercatcher, both reported by Andrew Franks from Area 7. Both of these have been reported only four times before in the 55 years of our count's history. Brown Pelican were again reported in two areas. They haven't been reported two years in a row since 1955/56. Let's hope the time will come again when we can equal the all-time high of 320 birds.

A late-breaking news flash as we go to press: a lovely, talented, 7½ pound child was born to Rene and Andrew Franks on January 2. It's a girl and her name is Erin. Our heartfelt congratulations go out to the three of you.

Richard Uzar, Chairman (527-0454)

## DON'T GO LOOKING FOR TREE SPARROWS!

Ah, December, month of Christmas rush, record cold and the Spoonbill Editor's record goof in typing up Judy Boyce's account of the November 18 field trip. First of all I left off Judy's name, for which I would apologize more abjectly if I hadn't transformed the Tree Swallows she correctly reported into Tree Sparrows. At least she is not getting twitted about it. Mea culpa! Sorry for goofing, Judy and fellow members.

Libby Price, Editor

# Clearing House - DECEMBER, 1989

December Editor: Wally Gardner

The Clearing House is a monthly record of bird sightings made on the Upper Texas Coast. How to read the CH: Location-(how many) date, observers. Common, widely distributed species on the UTC during the reported month are listed as follows: number of reports/total number individuals seen. Noteworthy sightings will be underlined, capitalized, or both, according to their status in the 7th edition of the UTC Checklist. Birds with very rare, vagrant, accidental or no status on the Checklist at the date of sighting require details. All observations affecting the species' status on the current UTC Checklist must be accepted by the Checklist Committee. Documentation is a must for consideration by the committee.

Loon, Pacific G-TCD(1)14,UL; C-OB(1)15,GL  
 Loon, Common 9/103  
 Grebe, Pied-bill 16/411  
 Grebe, Eared 7/32  
 Gannet, Northern B-(4)3,EM; B-(1)18,CHU; G-(1)18,EM  
 Pelican, Amer Wht 19/1182  
 Pelican, Brown B-(1)18,CHU; B-FJ(5)24,TPF; C-(8)6,JG;  
 G-(6)3,UBF; G-(1)5,JJH; G-TCD(1)14,UL; G-(4)18,EM;  
 U-(5)3,EM  
 Corm, Dbl-crested 18/13480  
 Corm, Olivaceous B-BW(1)3,AB; B-(3)3,UBF; B-(2)18,CHU;  
 F-(4)30,JJN; G-(7)3,EM; G-30(6)UP; G-(11)14,UL;  
 G-(25)18,EM; H-(1)9,CPJ  
 Corm, Olivaceous 9/120  
 Bittern, American C-AW(1)28,EM; H-(1)9,CPJ  
 Heron, Great Blue 25/243  
 Egret, Great 25/801  
 Egret, Snowy 18/715  
 Heron, Little Blu 12/91  
 Heron, Tricolored 13/68  
 Egret, Reddish 6/21  
 Egret, Cattle 12/298  
 Heron, Grn-backed H-(1)9,CPJ; U-(1)3,CJ  
 Nt-Heron, Blk-crn 15/326  
 Nt-Heron, Yel-crn B-BW(8)3,AB; B-(4)3,UBF; B-(1)18,CHU;  
 F-(1)2,LU; G-(1)3,EM; G-(2)6,UP; G-(2)14,UL  
 Ibis, White 11/546  
 Ibis, White-faced 11/924  
 Spoonbill, Roseat 10/170  
 Whsl-Duck, Fulvs B-BW(1)3,AB; G-HI(21)28,EM;  
 H-WHC(5)27,GG  
 Whsl-Duck, Blk-bd B-BW(1)3,UBF; F-(2)2,LU;  
 H-WHC(10)27,GG  
 Swan, Tundra C-(4)28,EM  
 Goose, Gr Wht-frn 9/11060  
 Goose, Snow 14/337973/1650  
 Goose, Ross' C-(2)28,EM; H-(1)9,JM  
 Goose, Canada 5/1310  
 Duck, Wood B-(3)3,AB; B-(2)3,UBF; F-(8)2,LU; U-(2)3,CJ  
 Teal, Green-wing 12/2738  
 Duck, Mottled 15/290  
 Mallard 9/175  
 Pintail, Northern 9/1441  
 Teal, Blue-winged 10/238  
 Teal, Cinnamon B-BW(2)3,AB; B-BW(2)3,UBF; B-SB(7)8,CS;  
 H-WHC(1)27,GG  
 Shoveler, Northrn 16/2841  
 Gadwall 12/835  
 Wigeon, American 10/434  
 Canvasback B-(5)3,AB; C-AW(8)28,EM; F-(5)2,LU;  
 H-(1)9,DU  
 Duck, Ring-necked 11/369  
 Scaup, Greater G-TCD(2)10,TPF; U-(6000)28,EM  
 Scaup, Lesser 16/434  
 Oldsquaw G-(1)3,EM; G-(1)6,UP; G-(1)10,TPF;  
 G-(1)10,TPF; G-(1)14,UL; G-(1)18,CHU; G-(1)18,EM  
 Goldeneye, Common G-(4)1,JJH; G-(2)3,UBF; G-(1)6,UP;  
 G-TCD(2)10,TPF; G-(1)14,UL; H-(9)9,JM  
 Bufflehead 9/96  
 Merganser, Hooded G-(2)10,TPF; H-(30)9,DU  
 Merganser, Red-br 8/120  
 Duck, Ruddy 12/391  
 Vulture, Black 9/92  
 Vulture, Turkey 20/395  
 Osprey B-(2)3,AB; B-(1)3,UBF; G-(1)6,UP;  
 G-(1)14,UL; H-(2)9,DU; H-SJ(1)15,RU  
 Kite, Blk-shouldr 18/64  
 Eagle, Bald B-(1)8,CS; F-(6)2,LU; H-(1)9,CPJ; U-(2)3,CJ  
 Harrier, Northern 26/384  
 Hawk, Sharp-shin B-(1)30,JJN; G-(1)3,EM; H-(1)9,CPJ;  
 H-(1)9,JM; H-(1)26,GM  
 Hawk, Cooper's F-(1)2,LU; F-(1)30,JJN; H-(1)9,CPJ;  
 H-WHC(1)27,GG; U-(1)3,CJ  
 Hawk, Red-shouldr 13/25  
 Hawk, White-taild C-(18)10,BU; F-(2)2,LU; W-(1)9,CPJ;  
 W-(1)9,JM  
 Hawk, Red-tailed 25/522  
 Hawk, Ferruginous H-SJ(1)15,RU; H-SJ(1)15,RU; U-(1)3,CJ;  
 W-(2)9,JM  
 Caracara, Crested B-SB(1)8,CS; H-(3)9,JM; H-WHC(6)27,GG  
 Kestrel, American 28/591  
 Merlin B-BW(1)3,UBF; B-(1)3,EM; G-(1)18,EM;  
 H-(1)17,EM  
 Falcon, Peregrine B-BW(1)3,AB  
 Bobwhite, Northrn F-(13)2,LU; H-WHC(10)27,GG; U-(1)3,CJ;  
 W-(4)9,JM  
 Rail, Clapper 5/10  
 Moorhen, Common 7/197  
 Coot, American 14/1094  
 Crane, Sandhill B-(50)3,AB; B-(240)3,UBF; B-(5)24,TPF;  
 G-(60)3,UBF; G-(2700)3,EM; G-(45)18,CHU; G-(5)18,EM;  
 H-WHC(25)27,GG  
 Plover, Blk-belli 11/353  
 Plover, Snowy G-(8)3,EM  
 Plover, Semipalm G-(25)3,UBF; G-(1)3,EM; G-(1)18,EM  
 Plover, Piping B-(9)18,CHU; G-(1)3,UBF; G-(30)3,EM;  
 G-(7)18,CHU; G-(6)18,EM  
 Killdeer 22/1099  
 Oystercatcher, Am G-TCD(2)10,TPF  
 Stilt, Black-neck B-(3)3,EM; B-(2)24,TPF; G-HI(10)28,EM  
 Avocet, American B-(30)3,EM; F-(12)2,LU; G-(75)18,EM  
 Yellowlegs, Great 13/182  
 Yellowlegs, Less 7/29  
 Willet 12/346  
 Sandprr, Spotted 5/8  
 Whimbrel G-(2)18,CHU  
 Curlew, Long-bill 12/139  
 Godwit, Marbled B-BW(1)3,AB; B-(3)3,EM; G-(15)3,UBF;  
 G-(20)18,EM  
 Turnstone, Ruddy 6/111  
 Knot, Red B-(10)3,EM; G-(7)3,UBF  
 Sanderling 11/723  
 Sandprr, Western 7/590  
 Sandprr, Least 6/227  
 Sandprr, Purple B-(1)17,PG; B-FJ(1)18,CHU; B-(1)30,PG;  
 B-(1)18,GL  
 Dunlin 9/447  
 Sandprr, Stilt G-(7)6,UP; G-(1)14,UL; G-HI(2)28,EM  
 Dowitcher, S-bill G-(40)6,UP; G-(20)14,UL; G-(75)18,EM;  
 U-(15)3,CJ; U-(200)3,EM  
 Dowitcher, L-bill 9/401  
 Snipe, Common 12/122  
 Woodcock, Amer B-SB(2)8,CS; H-(1)9,CPJ; H-(1)17,JB  
 Gull, Laughing 16/319653/132  
 Gull, Bonaparte's 6/252  
 Gull, Ring-billed 16/104503/50  
 Gull, Herring 12/1469  
 GULL, GRT BLK-BCK G-SL(1)18,EM  
 Tern, Gull-billed B-BW(1)3,UBF; G-(1)3,EM; G-(1)28,EM;  
 J-(1)9,DU  
 Tern, Caspian 10/320  
 Tern, Royal 7/677  
 Tern, Sandwich G-(1)3,UBF  
 Tern, Common G-(32)3,UBF; U-(30)3,EM  
 Tern, Forster's 13/760  
 Skimmer, Black 5/1953  
 Dove, Rock 16/3011  
 Turtle-Dove, Ring H-(9)1,GM; H-(9)28,GM  
 Dove, White-wingd 6/131  
 Dove, Mourning 22/437  
 Dove, Inca 8/79  
 Ground-Dove, Comm C-(2)10,BU; F-(1)30,JJN  
 Barn-Owl, Common B-BW(1)3,AB; G-(1)3,UBF  
 Owl, Great Horned U-(2)9,CPJ  
 Owl, Barred F-(1)2,LU  
 Owl, Short-eared B-(1)3,EM  
 Hummer, Ruby-thrt G-(1)9,JJH  
 Hummer, Rufous H-(1)13,EM  
 Kingfisher, Beltd 15/41  
 Wdpeckr, Red-bell 8/32  
 Sapsuck, Yel-bell 12/27  
 Wdpeckr, Downy 8/12  
 Wdpeckr, Hairy G-(1)9,JJH  
 Flicker, Northern 13/35  
 Wdpeckr, Pileated B-LB(1)3,AB; F-(6)2,LU; H-(2)21,EM;  
 J-(1)9,DU; W-(1)9,JM  
 Wood-Pewee, East H-WHC(1)27,GG  
 Phoebe, Eastern 18/115  
 Flycatcher, Vermiln B-BW(1)3,UBF; F-(1)2,LU  
 Flycatcher, Ash-thr H-(1)9,JM

Lark, Horned B-(7)3,UBF; U-(1)3,CJ  
 Swallow, Tree B-BW(10)3,AB  
 Jay, Blue 11/69  
 Crow, American 13/297  
 Chickadee, Carol 11/95  
 Titmouse, Rufed 6/23  
 Nuthatch, Red-brs G-(1)27,DW; H-(2)9,JM  
 Wren, Carolina 6/24  
 Wren, Bewick's H-(1)9,JM; W-(1)9,JM  
 Wren, House 12/51  
 Wren, Sedge B-(15)3,AB; C-(1)10,BU; H-(2)9,JM  
 Wren, Marsh C-AW(2)28,EM  
 Kinglet, Gold-crn H-(1)9,CPJ; J-SW(1)28,EM  
 Kinglet, Ruby-crn 14/118  
 Gnatcatch, Blu-gra 7/43  
 Bluebird, Eastern B-(8)30,JJN; F-(8)2,LU; H-(1)9,DU;  
 W-(75)9,JM  
 Thrush, Hermit 7/32  
 Robin, American 11/1105  
 Catbird, Gray B-LB(1)3,AB  
 Mockingbird, N 21/174  
 Thrasher, Brown 7/16  
 Pipit, Water 8/240  
 Waxwing, Cedar J-SW(1)28,EM  
 Shrike, Loggerhed 23/185  
 Starling, Euro 20/1461  
 Vireo, White-eyed G-(1)9,JJH  
 VIREO, BELL'S G-(3)6,UP  
 Vireo, Solitary B-LB(1)3,AB; F-(1)2,LU; J-SW(1)28,EM;  
 W-(1)9,JM  
 VIREO, RED-EYED U-(5)28,EM  
 Warb, Orange-crn 7/87  
 Warb, Yellow B-BW(1)3,AB  
 Warb, Yellow-rump 19/500  
 Warb, Pine W-(1)9,JM  
 Warb, Palm B-SB(1)8,CS; B-SB(1)8,CS; C-AW(1)28,EM  
 Yellowthroat, Com 6/12  
 Warb, Wilson's F-(2)2,LU; G-(1)6,UP  
 Cardinal, Northern 18/166  
 Pyrrhuloxia H-(1)7,PL; H-(1)9,JM; H-WHC(1)27,GG  
 Dickcissel H-(1)9,JM  
 Towhee, Grn-taild H-(1)22,GM; H-(1)28,GM  
 Towhee, Rufus-side F-(1)2,LU; J-SW(1)28,EM; W-(2)9,JM  
 Sparrow, Chipping 8/146  
 Sparrow, Field 5/38  
 Sparrow, Vesper 6/306  
 Sparrow, Lark H-WHC(4)27,GG  
 Sparrow, Savannah 16/1032  
 Sparrow, Grasshop H-(4)9,JM  
 Sparrow, Le Conte B-(15)3,AB; H-(40)9,JM  
 Sparrow, Fox H-(4)9,JM; J-SW(2)28,EM; U-(4)3,CJ;  
 W-(1)9,CPJ; W-(20)9,JM  
 Sparrow, Song 8/56  
 Sparrow, Lincoln 8/56  
 Sparrow, Swamp 9/93  
 Sparrow, Wht-thrt 13/419  
 Sparrow, Wht-crn C-(1)10,BU; C-(1)28,EM; G-(6)3,EM;  
 H-(40)9,JM; H-WHC(15)27,GG; U-(5)9,CPJ; W-(90)9,JM  
 Sparrow, Harris' H-(8)9,JM; H-WHC(1)27,GG  
 Junco, Dark-eyed B-BW(1)3,AB; G-(2)1,JJH  
 Longspur, sp AB-(1)3,AB  
 Blackbird, Red-wg 13/524122  
 Meadowlark, East 19/709  
 Meadowlark, West U-(40)28,EM  
 Blackbird, Brewer C-(1)10,BU; W-(12)9,JM  
 Grackle, Gr-tail 14/1092  
 Grackle, Bt-tail B-(10)3,UBF; J-MW(2000)28,EM  
 Grackle, Common 12/16300  
 Cowbird, Brn-head 11/324851/50  
 Oriole, Northern F-(1)30,JJN; H-(1)11,GM; H-(1)8,MJ;  
 H-(1)28,GM  
 Finch, Purple B-LB(4)3,AB; H-(3)24,TPF; W-(1)9,JM  
 Siskin, Pine H-(3)10,GM; H-(3)24,GM  
 Goldfinch, Amer 25/2106  
 Sparrow, House 17/486

#### Observers for December, 1989

AB = Mike Austin, Ron & Carol Bookout; BM = Bill McClure; BU = Dave Bradford & RU; CPJ = CJ & Patricia Jones; CJ = Charles Jones; CS = JC & Bob Schwartz; CHU = Carolyn Callery, Sandy Hoover & RU; DU = Jim Day & RU; DW = Diane Wise; EM = Ted Eubanks, Jr & MJ; GG = Gene Guinn; GL = Greg Lasley; GM = Gretchen Mueller; JB = MJ & Norma Barnes; JC = Jerry Caraviotis; JG = John Grimes; JM = Jim Morgan; JJH = John & Jane Hamilton; JJN = Jack & Jimi Neal; LU = Geneva Lavern & RU; MJ = Margaret Jones; PG = Peter Gottschling; PL = Frank Pease & Minor Long; RU = Richard Uzar; UL = RU & GL; UP = RU & Jerry Patrick; UBF = RU, Christine Bourgeois & Bill Fisherman; TPF = Tony & Phyllis Frank

#### UTC county codes

B=Brazoria; C=Chambers; F=Fort Bend; G=Galveston; H=Harris; J=Jefferson; W=Waller, U=UTC

#### Optional location codes for December, 1989

AW=Anahuac NWR; BW=Brazoria NWR; FJ=Freeport Jetty; HI=High Island; SB=San Bernard NWR; SJ=San Jacinto Monument; SL=San Luis Pass; SW=Sabine Woods; TCD=Texas City Dike

## CLEARING HOUSE NOTES

NOTES were submitted for the following birds listed as very rare status on the date seen:

Yellow Warbler, 12-3-89, Mike Austin  
 Oldsquaw, 12-3-89, Jim Morgan  
 Oldsquaw, 12-6-89, Richard Uzar  
 Ash-throated Flycatcher, 12-9-89, Jim Morgan

**Longspur, sp 12-3-89 Mike Austin**  
 (UTC checklist status - Very Rare first 3 wks in december)  
 Small field bird with pale undersides flew over high overhead in early morning light giving characteristic longspur "tick-a-tick" call. Too pale and call too rapid to be Smith's, call wrong for Chestnut-collared. Diagnostic "tew" note for Lap not heard nor was tail pattern discernable at bird's great height.

**Tundra Swan 12-28-89 Jim Morgan**  
 (UTC checklist status - Very Rare in Winter)  
 Four individuals at Jenken's Road Pond. Huge, all white waterfowl with very long necks and all black bills. Seen with 10x binocs for 2 minutes at distance of 200 m.

**Stilt Sandpiper 12-28-89 Jim Morgan**  
 (UTC checklist status - Very Rare in December)  
 In High Island oilfields in association dowitchers and Dunlin and a few yellowlegs. Fairly large long legged sandpiper in basic plumage, but still with a distinctive whitish eyebrow; greenish legs; fairly long bill that was slightly curved. Seen with 10x binocs for 2 minutes at a distance of 20-30 m.

**Stilt Sandpiper 12-6-89 Richard Uzar**  
 Observed feeding in flooded tidal marsh mudflat. Manner very different from Lesser Yellowlegs or Short-billed Dowitcher in same field. Large long legged sandpiper with long (1 1/2 x head) bill markedly decurved but much less so than say a Whimbrel. Bill

**Purple Sandpiper 12-18-89 Richard Uzar**  
 (UTC checklist status - Very Rare in winter)  
 A plump looking bird about the size of Ruddy Turnstone. Long bill about equal to head depth, bicolored, black at tip and yellow at head. All dark head & mantle & on through tail, slate gray color. Head showed light cream colored eye ring. Primaries and secondaries all dark - greater and lesser wing coverts edged in white. Showed fine but bright white wing stripe in flight, revealed white rump patches in flight also. Neck and breast slate gray color fading to white belly - white flanks finely streaked. Legs and feet yellow. Observed for 20 minutes feeding on algi and in flight through 10x binoc in fair light (overcast) at distances of 6 to 80 M. Clearly seen by all in party.

**Purple Sandpiper Dec 17 & 30, 1989 Peter Gottschling**  
 One bird seen on the barnacle, moss and algae encrusted rocks on the sides of the concrete pier and on the concrete pier itself of the Quintana Jetty from a distance of 20-40 feet for 5 minutes each sighting. The bird was larger than a sanderling. This bird was generally dark purplish gray on the back, head and upper breast and throat. The underparts were white with streaked flanks. The bill was about one and one quarter times the width of the head from the side and was two toned with yellow on the basal third and slightly decurved at the tip. The legs were yellow. The head was slightly lighter in color than the back. There was a white spot above the front center of the eye touching the eye and about the same size as the eye. The folded wing feathers and the scapulars had a light edging but no white. In flight there is a thin white wing stripe along the base of the secondary that extends to the body. The tail is dark with white edges. I eliminated the Rock Sandpiper by range only. Surfbird and Black Turnstone have short bills. Wandering Tattler is larger, lighter gray, and has an eyeline and supercilium.

**Great Black-backed Gull 12-18-89 Jim Morgan**  
(UTC checklist status - Vagrant)  
Seen by Ted Eubanks, Jr and Jim Morgan on sandbar in Galveston Bay for 30 minutes (0815-0845) at a distance of 70-100 meters in fair to slightly good light conditions with 10x binocs, 22x scope, Questar & 560 & 800 mm photos. Dramatically contrasting white head; massive all black bill, particularly impressive in its' depth for the whole length; coal black eye; area immediately surrounding eye dark trailing posteriorly onto auriculars creating a thin black eyebrow (to Morgan, somewhat reminiscent of Black-browed Albatross); light indistinct buffy wash (with faint streaking) on nape; mantle gray and white checkerboard effect; rump light with a few light bars posteriorly; undersides generally white with faded gray wash on flanks and belly; vent with similar barring as distal rump; tail white with broad black subterminal band; narrowly tipped in white; white on tail with some very indistinct barring; in flight, these characteristics combined to give the impression of a dramatically white-rumped gull; upper wing surface with pattern similar to mantle; primaries generally dark; secondaries tipped in white; wing tips extended significantly beyond tail; tertials dark centered, broadly tipped in white, lacking any notching or subterminal barring as in Herring Gull; legs flesh (similar in color to adjacent Herring Gull). The combination of bill size, dark eye and "eye-brow" gave this gull a very "fierce" and powerful look. Photographed - Through Questar views it became clear that the tail band was created by the juxtaposition of irregular wavy bars proximately and a diffuse subterminal band distally.

**Green-tailed Towhee Dec 22 to 27, 1989 Gretchen Mueller**  
(UTC checklist status - Very Rare in winter)  
Sparrow-sized bird with a slightly longer tail. Overall pale gray with a bright rusty-red crown, gray conical bill, white lores, white throat bordered by black line from bill to bottom of throat patch. Black marks bordered by thin white malar stripe. All the rest of head, throat and upper breast gray; Nape and back greenish gray. White area on lower belly; wings and tail a dull greenish yellow with the undertail a brighter yellow. A tiny bright yellow spot on the bend of the wing was often visible. The tail of the bird is constantly flicking as it kicks leaves while feeding. The bird was observed 5 to 7 times daily as it emerged from a brush pile to feed in a backyard in Bellaire, at a distance of approximately 20 feet, for several minutes at a time with 10x50 binoculars. It feeds in an area of the yard where grain is thrown out for birds. Other observers were Judy Boyce, Greg Mueller and Richard Uzar.

**Oldsquaw 12-10-89 Tony and Phyllis Frank**  
Saw one adult male moulting from summer to winter plumage in Galvesto Co in a body of water on east side of I45 between frontage road and railroad tracks, 1/2 mile south of exit 7A from 8:30 to 8:50 AM from a distance of 100-200 yards with 45x scope and 10x40 binocs for 20 min in good light. Ducklike bird swimming on water. Bird was diving for food periodically for 20 seconds at a time during observation. Bill appeared dark, was a triangular type of bill, unlike a Mottled Duck, more like a Goldeneye or Bufflehead type of bill. Head was round. Eye was surrounded by a black tear shaped patch. This black patch was surrounded by a large white area. Rest of head was grayish in color. Neck was grayish in color. Back was a gray and white checkerboard pattern with color underneath being white. Tail came to a point but did not have a long central feather extending past tail. This ducklike bird was approximately same size as Red-breasted Merganser which was feeding in same vicinity but obviously smaller (by a 1/3) than a common loon which was also feeding in area.

**Pyrrhuloxia 12-9-89 Jim Morgan**  
(UTC checklist status - Mainly gray with dark maroon-red in wings and on elongated, sharply-pointed crest. Very stubby, yellow bill with strongly curved upper mandible. Seen for 30 sec at distance of 25-40 ft in excellent light with 10x binocs. Photographed.

**Pyrrhuloxia 12-7-89 Frank Pease**  
(Notes compressed by editor) Bird seen in NW Harris Co by Frank Pease and Minor Long from a distance of 35-40 ft with 10x40 binocs on overcast day. Medium gray bird with a lighter gray breast and wings and tail that were darker than the back and neck. The crest was the most striking feature, appearing longer than a Cardinal's and appearing to grade darker toward its fine tip. The eye looked black and the lores looked dark gray. The bill was short and conical and colored a dirty yellow. Red along the leading edge of the primary wing feathers was seen. the entire underside of the tail was dark red.

### LOOKING FOR MR. GOODBIRD [from Discover, October, 1987, p. 8]

He's tall. He's handsome. He's got the brightest tail feathers she's ever seen. There's something about that bird that drives her wild.

Garish plumage, Darwin argued, evolved in male birds because it catches the eye of female birds. That it also catches the eye of the occasional predator is apparently a risk that simply must be taken. But why? What is so appealing about a few extra feathers that a male is willing to jeopardize his life to show them off to his intended?

A few years ago two University of Michigan zoologists, William Hamilton and Marlene Zuk, offered a weird answer: Females use the glossy feathers of vivid male birds to find mates that are resistant to parasites.

Now that explanation has been tested by Andrew Read of Oxford University. "The idea," says Read, "is that if the male has this elaborate tail and he is sick, then he'll be hard-pressed to make it bright and shiny. Instead it will be shabby and dull."

Read knew that if this theory was correct, his research would turn up a paradoxical finding: The showier a species is, the more parasites it carries. Birds highly resistant to parasites could go through life collecting them without being any the worse for it.

Examining thousands of North American and European birds, Read found that, indeed, the flashier the bird, the more parasites it's likely to carry. So far, so good. But Read also recognized a potential hole in his findings: Wasn't it possible that by simple coincidence, nature's most ornate birds descended from common ancestors who just happened to be parasite-tolerant?

To plug this research leak, Read checked for flamboyance among the most parasite-plagued of species with common roots. This extra step verified his hunch: Species to species, from the most elegant to the most drab, the better groomed the male, the greater his parasite load.

To humans, it may seem like a strange way to pick a mate; but for a husband-hunting bird, it appears that parasites make the man.

DIVINING THE MOTIVES OF SOCIALISTIC  
RAVENS: Review by Herbert Mitgang of the book  
"Ravens in Winter," by Bernd Heinrich..from the  
New York Times, Sept. 9, 1989.

"Ravens in Winter" isn't about politics; it's about birds. Yet in this fascinating book, Bernd Heinrich theorizes about the "left-wing behavior" of ravens. Ornithology and anthropomorphism are all part of this scientific investigation clothed in the form of a zoological detective story.

Are ravens socialistic birds who believe in sharing the wealth beyond their immediate families? In search of the answer to that question, the author spent four years in the Maine woods watching them. Sometimes he was himself perched like a bird in a tree, freezing in winter, waiting for hours in darkness, luring the ravens with the bait of dead animals, hoping they would land nearby so he could spot them through his binoculars and observe their behavior.

Setting up his theory about ravens, the author, a professor of zoology at the University of Vermont who previously wrote "Bumblebee Economics," draws the political analogy himself.

"In some of the same fields and woods where I had made the observations on bumblebees, I had often noticed a pair of ravens. I now saw the birds, which had always seemed to me solitary animals, doing something solitary animals are not 'supposed' to do: they were sharing valuable food--those who had, it seemed, were giving to those who needed. It was the most left-wing behavior I had ever heard of in a natural system."

These initial observations about ravens--supposedly the most intelligent as well as the most garrulous in the bird kingdom--aroused Professor Heinrich's curiosity. As a biologist, he was always looking for some evolutionary, self-serving reason to explain why animals did certain things. He decided to turn his instinct into a scientific investigation. Could ravens possibly possess motives? As a teacher, he knew that an anthropomorphic approach (that is ascribing human characteristics to non-humans) could help students understand his ideas more clearly. In "Ravens in Winter" he uses the same analogies for readers.

Professor Heinrich started with a minimal knowledge of ravens when he first began studying them at the edge of Mount Blue State Park in western Maine. He found most of the literature anecdotal rather than factual and many of the conclusions about the birds, even those written by ornithologists, misleading. Ravens resemble crows but weigh about four times more; their wingspan can be up to four feet. The author observed hundreds of ravens and wrote down details of their behavior...His study shows that most of the meat bait he set out was consumed by crowds of ravens--ranging from 15 to nearly 300--even though the birds normally don't band together in such numbers. By contrast, species like blue jays defended bait vigorously against other birds instead of sharing. Ravens at the bait were very noisy, suggesting that this was a signal to other ravens to come and get it.

Why did the ravens recruit other ravens to share their food? "Perhaps ravens sought a crowd

to have 'more eyes' to be alert to danger," he writes. Another "perhaps" is offered: "Perhaps a raven that shares is recognized by its peers and thereby gains 'friends' or a friend from whom he is able to choose a mate later." He surmises that recruitment of other ravens at feeding places could be related to sexual selection.

How does all this information add up? Fitting his data together, Professor Heinrich finds that young ravens leave home to wander. They are gregarious, joining other juveniles to roost and feast with, enabling them to choose an attractive mate. An unmated raven finding food invites eligible singles to join him (or her) at the feast, "thereby not only gaining or maintaining access to the food, but possibly also increasing its status and demonstrating fitness as a future provider for rearing offspring."

Professor Heinrich calls this motivated sharing "an elegant, simple and beautiful system. But it is clothed by intricate detail and subtlety. As far as I know, no other family shows a similar system." His detective story doesn't really offer a solution, nor does it conclude that ravens are left-wingers or right-wingers, socialists or neoconservatives. Nevertheless, in "Ravens in Winter" he does challenge the reader to think about the meaning of altruistic behavior in ravens and humans.

LONE STAR SPRING SHOOT-OUT  
APRIL 28 OR 29

This year we birders are invited to compete in the Lone Star Spring Shoot-Out, sponsored by the Houston Audubon Society. Teams of two to six people may enter to see which team can find the most bird species between midnight of April 27 and midnight of April 28, or else from midnight of April 28 to midnight of April 29.

THERE ARE MAJOR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN  
THE SHOOT-OUT AND PREVIOUS BIRDATHONS:

1) Teams will solicit pledges from friends and businesses as usual, but the proceeds will go to the charity of YOUR CHOICE! This means that OG teams may raise money for the OG itself or for any other worthy cause. Teams from other parts of Texas may benefit their clubs or projects likewise.

2) The American Birding Association's Big Day rules will apply. Therefore birds attracted to tape recorders may be counted, according to Rule 1(d).

3) Like last year, but unlike previous years, the area in which birds may be counted is all 254 counties of the Lone Star State.

To enter the Lone Star Spring Shoot-Out send the names of your 2-6 team members, not forgetting a return address, and \$10 per team member to Houston Audubon at 440 Wilchester, Houston TX 77079. You will then be sent a copy of the rules and a checklist.

On May 12 there will be a Countdown Barbecue at Edith L. Moore Sanctuary (address same as above) where the winning teams will receive trophies for the most species, most warbler species and best bird. The entry fees will all go to fund the Shoot-Out and Countdown Barbecue. If you have questions, call HAS at (713) 932-1639.

Now here is an invitation that should appeal to many OGers! We should field several teams and twist arms to get pledges for the things we want to support.

## MARION TAYLOR

by Avis Brister

On December 30, 1989, Marion Taylor died. With her passing, her husband, Edward, lost a loving wife; the Outdoor Nature Club lost a loyal friend; and this earth lost a remarkable lady.

The Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary will have reminders of Edward and Marion Taylor for many years to come. When the shelter building was under construction, they would take their camper up and work on the building for days at a time. The current rest rooms were built by Edward with Marion's help. Every year they contributed their time to trimming the trails and making them a pleasure for visitors to hike. The Little Jordan trail was their personal responsibility and they watched over it with loving care.

Marion was an avid photographer, and at one time served as director of the Photography Group. She truly appreciated the natural world, and in addition to photographing it, one of her greatest pleasures in that world was the opportunity to visit High Island each spring migration time and help with the banding of birds. This was a regular routine for her and Edward for several years.

There are several ways to describe Marion Taylor: she was a thoughtful person who endeared herself to many members of the club by writing a note of thanks to one who had done a good job of leading a field trip, presenting a program, etc.; she was a delightful person with a sense of humor--many members will remember little anecdotes about her that will bring a smile, like the time after the new rest rooms were built when she objected strenuously to calling the previous ladies' room the "old ladies" rest room; she was an environmentally conscious person who loved God's world and wanted to help preserve it not only by supporting the Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary but also conservation in all its aspects; she was a Christian who lived her faith rather than just give lip service to it.

The Outdoor Nature Club has been very fortunate to have been a part of the life of this lovely lady. We will miss her.

## UTC CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

SUMMARY 1988/89

by Noel Pettingell

I. SPECIES AND OBSERVER TOTALS	CBC Area	Species	Observers	Rank by Species	
				UTC	US*
Bolivar Peninsula		175	20	2	15
Brazoria		156	47	6	43
Brazos Bend		139	38	7	--
Buffalo Bayou		94	25	10	--
Cypress Creek		138	33	8	--
Freeport		208	170	1	2
Galveston		158	46	5	42
Houston		163	62	4	30
Old River		134	14	9	--
San Bernard NWR		170	34	3	17
Spring Creek		92	50	11	--

\*150 or more species (56 U.S. counts)

### II. HIGHEST INDIVIDUAL TOTALS (U.S./Canada)

(Subspecies in parentheses) (A) Equals or exceeds previous all-time US/Canada high.

Species	CBC Area	Individuals
Gr. White-fr. Goose	Cypress Creek	22,725
Black Vulture	Freeport	805
Red-Sh'l'd Hawk	"	176
(Harlan's R.-T. Hawk)	Cypress Creek	7
Am. Kestrel	Freeport	339
Yellow Rail	"	13
Piping Plover	Galveston	95
Spotted Sandpiper	Houston	98
Gull-b. Tern	San Bernard NWR	106
Caspian Tern	Freeport	160
Common Tern	San Bernard NWR	41
Barred Owl	Freeport	39
Nighthawk, sp.	Brazoria	2
Buff-b. Hummingbird	Freeport	5
Broad-tailed "	"	2
Rufous "	"	8
E. Phoebe	"	641(A)
Marsh Wren	"	221
Ruby-cr. Kinglet	"	1,951
Brown Thrasher	"	405
Solitary Vireo	"	132(A)
Orange-cr. Warbler	"	687
Nashville "	"	7
Bay-breasted "	Brazoria*	1
Oporornis "	sp. " **	1
Wilson's "	Freeport	28
Savannah Sparrow	"	2,054
LeConte's "	"	99

\* Tied with 2 other CBC areas.

\*\* " " 1 " " area.

Source: American Birds, Vol. 43, No. 4, 1989

## DON RICHARDSON'S 1990 BIRDING TRIPS

Don Richardson, who has taught beginning birding for several years, will be leading a series of ten trips to area hotspots. One may choose to go on one or more trips. For a schedule and fee information call Don at 661-1365 (h) or 661-1365 (w).

## THE SPOONBILL STAFF

Editor	Libby Price
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Layout Artist	Connie Clark
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Checklist Committee:	Noel Pettingell, David Dauphin and Ed Rozenberg

## MINUTES OF OG MEETING, JAN. 9, 1990

David Bradford led the sparrow identification session in the Learning Corner at 7:00 p.m. Richard Uzar called the meeting to order at 7:30 and presented the following business items: Rene and Andrew Franks had a baby girl, Erin, on January 2. Long-time OG member Marion Taylor died December 30. Judy Boyce will take over as editor of The Spoonbill from Libby Price, who will resign in May.

Jim Day would like some volunteers to help with a project to compile a mailing list of influential people. Regular mailings would promote a positive awareness of the OG and birding on the UTC. Ed Rozenberg asked for volunteers to lead bird walks in Challenger Park as part of the Earth Day celebration on April 21/22. Gretchen Mueller would like help to support Bolivar Flats as a bird sanctuary. Initially she would like an interpretive sign erected in the area.

Larry Shelton then presented a fascinating program on Papua, New Guinea. He went with ornithologists from other zoos to study and capture birds for zoo breeding programs around the U.S. Larry entertained us with accounts of the expedition accompanied by slides showing the habitat and some of the beautiful native birds.

[Besides preserving some members of a species, zoo breeding programs often discover ways of breeding difficult birds. Their methods are copied by commercial breeders and collection of wild members of the species is greatly reduced..Ed.]

Kathy DeFord, Secretary

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