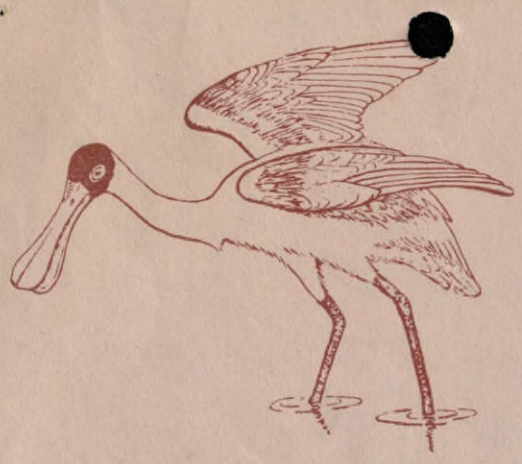

THE SPOONBILL

Volume IV No. 6

October 1955

* *
* "The beauty of birds, the music of their *
* song, the weird wildness of their calls, *
* the majesty of their soaring flight and *
* the mystery of their migration, always *
* have been subjects of absorbing interest *
* to poets, artists and lovers of Nature." *
* *
* ---E. H. Forbush --- BIRDLIFE OF VIRGINIA*
* *

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

FORTHCOMING ACTIVITIES

October 23 - Sunday Field Trip --- Hockley Area --- 11:00 a.m.

Meet at Hockley, Texas - a small town about 35 miles from Houston on the Hempstead Highway (#290). The Hockley Railroad Station is on the left side of the highway and the group will meet just across Highway 290 from the Station at 11:00 a.m. The leader on this trip will be Miss Carrie Holcomb. The territory to be covered includes some beautiful wooded areas and one or two lakes.

Anyone having room for extra passengers or anyone who needs transportation for this trip please call Mrs.Darris Massingill, FA-3-7766.

December 1 - The next regular meeting of the Ornithology Group is scheduled for Dec. 1. Time and place will be announced in the November Spoonbill.

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ORNITHOLOGY GROUP REPORTS

Sept.18 - Field Trip to Galveston County Park, etc. - (Noel Perley)

Nineteen birders were on hand for this trip which got underway at 9:15 a.m., under the able leadership of Darris Massingill. Biggest "find" at the park was a Small-billed (Northern) Waterthrush, which was at first thought to be a Cardinal or Carolina wren.

The nine-car caravan, including the writer's brand-new Bel Air (had to keep pace with the other prosperous birders! --see Aug. 20 field trip), proceeded along at a typical "Sunday-driver" snail-pace with frequent bird stops, much to the consternation and impatient frustration of non-birding motorists!

We ran into "intermittent showers" at about 11:30, but this, of course, failed to dampen in the least the spirits of the birders, whose unlimited patience was rewarded by the sight (at the Kemah bridge) of a beautiful flock of white pelicans wheeling about in a wide circle overhead.

The showers had ended (temporarily) when the group "joined forces" with Edna Miner and Mable Kaiser at "Breezy Nook", headquarters for all bird-watchers "working" the rich in migrants Kemah area. Mrs. Miner and Miss Kaiser had already identified an Olive-sided flycatcher, Canada and Tennessee warblers, and spotted sandpiper.

Picnic lunches were spread at this point, but shortly thereafter eating was interrupted by a rather heavy "intermittent shower." Despite the precipitation, however, a number of unusual birds were added to the list while we were at Kemah, including Red-eyed, White-eyed, and Yellow-throated Vireos and Black and white warbler.

The group next headed north via the Seabrook marshes, thence out of the intermittent shower area, and then on to the Baytown Tunnel. Here were added the Wood Ibis, Avocet, Stilt, Black-crowned Night Heron, Black-bellied and Ringed Plovers, both Yellowlegs, and the ever-present Horned Larks.

Next stop along the route was south end of the bridge over Tabbs Bay (Hog Island) where we added the Seaside Sparrow - almost a certainty at this particular spot (Olin Pettingill, please note in your next revision of "GUIDE TO BIRD-FINDING" But "the find of the day" was found along Miller Cut-off Road -- a pair of White-tailed Hawks spotted by Leota Stilwell at the same locale where they were first seen a week earlier.

The final birding site of the day was the San Jacinto Battlegrounds where the following were seen: 1) Yellow-crowned Night Heron; 2) at least 1,000 White Pelicans; 3) a Wood Ibis; and 4) Roseate Spoonbill, striking emblem of the Ornithology Group and symbol of Texas bird conservation -- a most fitting climax to a good day of Gulf Coast birding ....

For the sake of "the record" - and interested birders - we offer the following summary:

Total Species Observed: 68 Total Mileage: 47 (Incl. 2 on foot)

Number Observers at End of Trip (5:30 p.m.): 8 (4 cars)

Complete List of Observers:

Jerry Baker	Carrie Holcomb	Johnnie Murray
Carl Aiken	Mable Kaiser	Noel Perley
Mary Clark	Darris Massingill	William Schumann
Riley Clark	C. R. Mattei	Larry Semander
Vic Emanuel	Rita Mattei	Thelma Smith
Alice Filkins	Edna Miner	Leota Stilwell
Sue Harris	Jimmy Murray	Josiephine Wilkin

Josiephine Wilkin received the following report from Leota Stilwell:- On the way home they (Leota, Jimmy and Johnnie Murray, and Alice Filkins) turned off Highway 134 to Tidal Road (short-cut to Highway 225). Here, flying low over the field were a Caracara and a Marsh Hawk. It appeared as though the two birds were having a good argument over something. The Caracara finally perched on a post in the field and the Marsh Hawk continued his flight.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * *

Sept. 25 - Outdoor Nature Club Field Trip - Along the San Bernard (Nance Cunningham)

Do you know the long-tailed Skipper and the Sun-dial? We can now give the answers to both of these questions. The trip began when the little jeep herding the automobiles stopped near Sweeny, high on a bluff overlooking a bend in the San Bernard River. This property was entered by permission of Mr. and Mrs. Dick Marmion. For a moment, we admired the moss-covered oaks and watched a diminutive tug push two flatboats around the bend and down the river. Then bedlam broke loose and the people from the eleven cars rushed in all directions.

There was much to see and many interests to be satisfied. The herpetologists and the ornithologists searched, the ichthyologists seined and the botanists sighed over the many plants awaiting identification. All the while harried photographers attempted to get a pictorial record of the rapid proceedings. Perhaps the most easily satisfied were the two who just sat and sketched the scenic spot.

While the Laurel Cherry, Soapberry and different Haws delighted and confounded the botanists, the Chickadees and Titmice directed a continual chatter their way. Heliotrope, Desmodium and tiny Asters were blooming in the tall grass where the Wood Pewee plaintively repeated his name. In the woods, the White-eyed and Yellow-throated vireos and the Carolina wren called and a Red-bellied Woodpecker rattled his disapproval when a Cooper's Hawk sailed low across the path.

One of the loveliest sights was the butterflies - the black Long-tailed Skipper, the Giant Swallowtail, the Spicebush, the Sulphurs, and the Gulf Fritillary - hovering over the flowers of the Leaf Cup and the Cassia.

Some of us adjourned to the beach at Sargent where accompanied by Sanderlings, Pelicans and Willets, the beach was combed and we began initiation into the world of Olive Shells, Beaded Clams, Arcs and Sundials.

Then back to Houston, where one tired mind overbundened with new knowledge, dreamed of a chorus line of pelicans doing time-steps against a painted backdrop of bespangled butterflies and huge purple morning-glories.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * *

REPORTS FROM JUNIOR MEMBERS

Sept. 12 - Old Richmond Road Area - (Vic Emanuel)

Carl Aiken and I drove out to a small rice field reservoir off the old Richmond Road which we knew to be the site of a large concentration of water birds. Approaching the reservoir we saw fifteen Dickcissels fly. At the reservoir we saw many water birds including pied-billed grebes, anhingas, least bitterns, common and snowy egrets coming in in flights of around twenty-five birds, little blue and tricolored heron, approximately two-hundred and fifty white-faced glossy ibis, three hundred blue-winged teal and about one hundred fulvous tree ducks. Also we saw three sora rails, two purple gallinules, coots, barn swallows, five eastern kingbirds, black-crowned night heron and other common birds.

Our total for the day was twenty-eight species in one hour from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. This is an interesting area and we intend to explore it further.

Sept. 25 - Rosharon and Arcola Area - (Carl Aiken)

After attending the Outdoor Nature Club field trip on the San Bernard River near Sweeny where we saw Carolina wrens, yellow-throated vireos, summer tanagers, and Cooper's hawk, Vic Emanuel and I headed for Houston by way of Rosharon and Arcola. Our first stop was at Rosharon where we were about to give up when a black and white warbler and an American redstart were seen. Other birds seen here were yellow-billed cuckoos, orioles, tufted titmice, Carolina chickadees, swallows and sparrow hawks. The sky was full of small as well as large birds. Our next stop was at the lake near Arcola where we saw an anhinga and a bird which we believe to be a Mississippi kite but at such a distance we couldn't be sure. After this we hurried home by way of Stafford.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

NEWS OF O.G. MEMBERS

Frank Watson, president of the Texas Ornithological Society, member of the Houston Outdoor Nature Club, and one of Houston's best-known ornithologists, has recently been promoted by the Shell Chemical Corporation to Assistant to Vice-president and is being transferred to their New York offices. Mr. Watson assisted in the organization of the Ornithology Group and served as the first editor of the "Spoonbill."

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CLEARING HOUSE

August 28 - Mrs. J. H. Tabony reported a Caracara flew over her yard at 3713 Gulf, in Park Place

September 2 - A Yellow-breasted chat was seen by Mrs. Jerry Baker in her yard at 6430 Jefferson

September 3 - Buff-breasted and Pectoral sandpipers and marbled godwits observed feeding on golf course near western end of S Road, Galveston Island by Leota Stilwell and N Oates

September 7 - Pigeon hawk observed feeding on flying insects overhead by Jule R. Schmidt in his neighborhood in East Houston, the hawk was still in the vicinity on September 14.

September 8 - Mr. L. N. Dexter reported that while he was on an oil exploration boat about 25 miles out from Port Aransas several nighthawks landed on the boat. The birds appeared to be in a state of exhaustion probably caused by flying through one of the heavy squalls reported in the Gulf at the time.

September 10- Mrs. Darris Massingill reported the last nighthawks heard in her neighborhood on Sept. 10

September 10- Several Avocets were seen feeding at Baytown Tunnel and a White-tailed hawk was observed at close range perched near road to San Jacinto Battlegrounds by Darris Massingill, Ruth Moorman Leota Stilwell and N. Oates

September 10- Two Broad-wing hawks were reported flying over the Memorial Park area by Eleanor McMahon.

September 11- Thousands of Black terns with a few scattered least terns were seen resting in groups of 200-300 all along coast from Galveston to High Island. Other black terns were feeding over fields like swallows. Observations made by Leota Stilwell and N. Oates.

September 13 - Sparrow hawk observed perched in a tall pine at the crossing of Bray's Bayou at 75th Street by Jule R. Schmidt.

September 15 - Mr. Jule R. Schmidt reported that six Rose-breasted Grosbeak roosted in the trees in his yard during the night but were gone at dawn.

September 16 - Sparrow hawk noted in down-town Houston by Noel Perley

September 16 - Mr. George Charlton reports the Brown Thrashers have returned to his place in Tomball, Texas

September 17 - A migration of around 100 - 150 Broadwinged hawks was observed at the Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary by Joe Heiser, Jr. and Luta Buchanan. White-eyed and Yellow-throated vireos and Summer tanagers were singing at the sanctuary on the same day.

September 17 - About 100 Wood ibis were seen perched in trees around the lake on Highway 6 by Leota Stilwell.

September 19 - Mr. Jule R. Schmidt reported a large flight of migrant Robins passed his home in a southeasterly direction, some stayed to feed on the Houston Country Club grounds and in the evenings roosted in the tall trees nearby.

September 24 - A large migration of barn swallows was observed along the Katy-Hockley Road, and in a near-by lake blue-wing teal and many other water birds were seen by Carrie Holcomb, Thelma Smith and Leota Stilwell.

September 30 - Vic Emanuel reported that three hummingbirds flew in the R.O.T.C. room at Bellaire High School. Two managed to escape but the third fell to the floor, evidently stunned by flying against a window pane. It was picked up by one of the students but revived in a short time and was released.

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MISCELLANEOUS CORRESPONDENCE

Jule R. Schmidt - 1723 Esperanza St., Houston 23, Texas

September 14 - "* * * In the fall of 1953, Winnie and Minor Hurst visited an ailing friend in this vicinity and were impressed by the plant "Cestrum" at his home. They brought a sprig of the plant bearing a number of lemon colored fruits and a dried seed pod along as they stopped by to see us. None of us could identify the plant, so they left the seed pod with us, and took the spray of dark foliage and yellow berries to Robert Vines, who identified it as Cestrum and as being of the nightshade family. The dried pod contained numerous seed which we planted in flats in February and as I was hospitalized all of the following month of March, it was up to my wife to set out the little plants wherever she could find room. They bore fruit that year, went into and through the winter 1954-55 unprotected and only suffered frost bite on tender shoots. This year they have done well except that Jays, Cardinals and Mockers got the berries as quickly as they ripened. We protected two of the plants from the birds just for show and to make seed pods available.

In addition to bird attraction, the plants are quite ornamental and I want to offer seed-pods to any of our members who may want them and as long as the supply lasts. For the average home one pod contains enough seed, but for estate or sanctuary purposes it would require more. Those desiring seed may have them by sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope and their requirements to me."

D. S. (Don) Melstrom, 1405 Magnolia Ave., Manhattan Beach, Calif.

Sept. 6, 1955 - Thought you would be amused by the "close shave" a hummingbird, (presumably affected by the heat) had in a Santa Monica barbershop (See next page). Actually the heat wave is over as far as the beach cities are concerned, although downtown L.A. is still suffering from 100° (or over) maximum temperature, plus smog.

I have greatly enjoyed reading the SPOONBILLS you have sent me the past two months. I really miss the Houston Ornithology group, and also the wide variety of bird habitats that were close at hand in Houston. This whole area is so overpopulated, so dry, and so short of trees that one has to go a long way to find many land-birds. I haven't started on the shore birds yet, they look like gulls of one or two species, along with an occasional sandpiper, tern,or pelican. I trust things will pick up in the winter.

I did venture into a swamp near the Shell Chemical Plant yesterday, and was pleased to see a song sparrow, yellow warbler, black phoebe, and ash-throated flycatcher - the black phoebe was a new one for my life list.

I am planning to take a night course in bird study at U. of So.Calif, this will include field trips and I hope introduce me to some of the better spots for birding within a 50 mile radius. * * * The trip to Mexico sounds wonderful, as the field trip by skiff along Highland Bayou. Please continue to send the SPOONBILLS * * *."

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OFF THE PRESS

HOUSTON PRESS - August 29, 1955

No Interruption

Elizabethtown, Ill. - A high wind blew down an old maple tree here, blocking a street. When workmen started clearing the street, they found a nest of young woodpeckers in one of the limbs. The workmen tied the piece on to another tree and the parent woodpeckers resumed rearing their brood.

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LOS ANGELES TIMES - Sept. 6, 1955

Hummingbird Bends Wing in Barbershop

A flustered little hummingbird, its navigational equipment apparently affected by the heat, was recuperating yesterday after a close shave in a Santa Monica barbershop. The bird zoomed in through the rear door of the shop and as startled customers watched in amazement flew into a shiny front window and fell gasping to the floor.

A customer, Frank Hines, determined that the bird's injuries consisted primarily of a bent wing and an infinitesimal lump on the head. He took it home and soon revived the bird with a few eyedroppers of sugared water and an occasional milk and egg chaser.

Hines requests that any bird fancier with a knowledge of applying splints to a hummingbird wing contact him. Meanwhile, the diminutive flier is grounded, although it doesn't seem to mind too much. After all, how many hummingbirds get regular rations of sugared water -- with milk and egg chasers?

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HOUSTON PRESS - September 13, 1955 (Andy Anderson)

"* * * Congress is seeking a huge grassland area which can be set up as a prairie chicken haven. Actually the prairie chicken is a pinnated grouse and this species has entirely disappeared from some states * * *."

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HOUSTON PRESS - September 13, 1955

Milwaukee, September 13 - Two cranes at the Milwaukee Zoo just produced their first offspring in 28 years as mates.

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HOUSTON PRESS - September 26, 1955

Whooping Cranes

In the column "Fishin' with Andy" of September 26, a portion of an article by F. Moyle is reprinted from "News of the North" which gives one explanation of what may be happening to the young Whooping Cranes on their long trek from Northern Canada to their wintering grounds in the Aransas Wildlife Refuge. Excerpts from the article appear below:-

"* * * despite the continent-wide publicity given their protection, they (the young cranes) are likely being killed on their way south by ignorant trigger-happy or careless hunters.

"In the first place these young birds, like most of our game birds here, can scarcely be very well developed when early fall gales and frost forces them south. Long flights (we would imagine) would not at first be undertaken.

"Secondly, all bird lovers and conservation conscious sportsmen are on the lookout for a magnificent white bird with a black-tipped wing span of over six feet. Such a picture has been drilled into sportsmen everywhere.

"But the young birds are really brown and this may account for them not reaching their winter refuge. It may be that many an anxious or hungry hunter, who would wrathfully condemn anyone destroying one of these vanishing species, would nevertheless 'take a chance' and bag a sandhill or little brown crane in the same flight. These young birds are now about the size of the sandhill crane and almost the same coloring. Sandhills and their smaller cousins are also protected so there are two very good reasons to leave them alone."

* * * * * * * * * * * * * *

SHORT BIRD TALES

Sparrow Hawk vs. Crow -- (Noel Perley) PETTINGELL

I was watching some Black Vultures at Galveston County Park on September 18, when my binoculars picked up two smaller birds - a Crow chasing a Sparrow Hawk! The Crow was remarkably agile in that it was able to keep right on the Sparrow Hawk's tail. Then abruptly the pursuer became the pursued -- the hawk began chasing the crow! And that was the last I saw of these two birds who were undoubtedly playing an avian version of tag!

Frustration -- (Jerry Baker)

On our vacation this spring we searched and listened in all likely places for the Townsend's Solitaire, the bird which possesses (according to Mr. Pough) "the finest of bird songs." We finally found him, perched on the top of a tall pine tree -- just splitting his throat in song -- but for us, it was all in vain, as the tree was right beside the noisiest of mountain rivers -- and we couldn't hear a note he sang!

The Fence-climbing Shrike -- (Josiephine Wilkin)

Last summer (1954) a Shrike spent part of each day feeding in, and aroung my backyard, using the thorns of a crab apple tree as a storehouse for food. As a rule, the bird would fly to the light wires and perch. At other times, he would perch on the cyclone fence. The manner in which he returned to the fence fascinated me, as never once did I see him fly directly back to it. He would take his time feeding and searching through the grass. Upon reaching the fence, he would climb the fence, using his beak and flapping his wings. I saw him do this many times, but why he did I do not know as there was no apparent reason for this behavior.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * *

There are now 57 members of the Outdoor Nature Club registered in the Ornithology Group. Here is the May 1, 1955 thru April 30, 1956 membership list:

Aiken, Carl
Aldrich, Henry V.
Aldrich, Mrs. Henry V.
Amthor, Miss Nel
Andrews, Mrs. Wayne
Baker, Mrs.Charles F.
Barnes, Mrs.Lucille G.
Boettcher, Miss Agatha
Bradley, Mrs. L.L.
Brown, Mr. Fred E.
Cline, Miss Mabel
Coffman, Mrs. Etta W.
Crowley, Mrs. Betty
Cunningham,Miss Nance C.
Deats, Conrad G.
Deats, Mrs. Conrad G.
Dodge, Mrs. Carl
Emanuel, Vic
Ferguson, Olever S.
Frels, John J.
Gilman, Clayton B.
Gilman,Mrs.Clayton B.
Greer, Mrs.Walter J.
Harris, Mrs. Sue H.
Heiser, Joe M. Jr.
Holcomb, Miss Carrie
Hunt, Mrs.Harriet C.
Hurst,Mrs. Winnie
Hutton,Miss Lelia M.
Kirk, Miss Blanche
Looney, Ralph D.
Looney,Mrs.Ralph D.
Martin, Mrs. D. L.
Massingill, Mrs. Darris
Mattei, C. R.
Mattei, Mrs. C. R.
McDavid, Raymond H.
Miner, Mrs. Edna W.
Moorman, Miss Ruth S.
Murray, James F.
Nesom, Miss Hilda A.
Oates, Mrs. Norma C.
Palmer, George K.
Perley, Noel
Ramsey, Mac
Reid, Mrs. Bruce
Reindl, Charlotte S.
Rothschild, Sigmond
Schmidt, Jule R.
Semander, Larry
Simmons, Mrs. Carolyn
Smith, Mrs. Martha C,
Stilwell, Miss Leota
Wilber, Mrs. James G.
Wilkin, Mrs. B. H.
Wolfer, Miss Ella
Yramategui, M. Armand

The following people are subscribers to the "Spoonbill and have paid $1.00 toward its support:-

Clark, Mrs. Mary
Fleischman, Mrs.Flavia W.
Foster, Mrs. Marguerite
Kincaid, Edgar
Manley, John R.
McKay, Arlie K.
Melstrom, Don
Rosche, Richard C.
Suhm, Mr. R. P.
Wright, Ernest B.

Please check the above lists for your name. If it does not appear and you are a member of the Outdoor Nature Club, you may send your registration fee of $1.00 to Miss Mabel Cline, 4218 Lamar, Houston 23, Texas. Unless we hear from you we will assume you want your name dropped from our mailing list.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * *

NIGHTHAWKS -- (Noel Perley)

Summer resident birds had all left Houston (apparently) by the end of September. This is about 2 weeks earlier than last year when our resident birds were still here as late as the middle of October. Nevertheless, there seemed to be a very heavy concentration of birds in the Houston area throughout the summer months. Migrants from the North should be watched for toward the end of October. (Flights passed through Houston on October 23 and 28 last year) and in November (2nd and 26th) in 1954. Latest date, to the writer's knowledge, of Nighthawks migrating through Houston is December 1 (1954 by N.P.). The writer would like to add an interesting observation which he noted several times at night during the past summer viz: Nighthawks swooping down to street level in downtown Houston, apparently finding large numbers of insects available at this low altitude.

Outdoor Nature Club
(Ornithology Group)
402 Sue St.
Houston 22, Texas
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