



THE SPOONBILL

Volume V No. 2
June 1956

 * RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD *
 * No marsh is complete without this touch *
 * of color, this flashing stoplight in the *
 * rushy rushes. The Redwing is a commuter *
 * by choice -- his home in the swamp, his *
 * business in the orchard. Like many males *
 * he is uncertain as to the ideal number of *
 * wives, but he is very sure about the best *
 * place to live. When the last swamp is *
 * drained, where will he go to sing "Con- *
 * ka-ree"? *
 * E. B. WHITE - Nov. 1955 Ford Times *

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

FORTHCOMING ACTIVITIES

June 17 -- Sunday - June Ornithology Group field trip to Galveston and High Island, Meet at 8:00 a.m. at Busch Stadium on Gulf Freeway.

ORNITHOLOGY GROUP REPORTS

May 19-20 - Outdoor Nature Club Trip to Austin - (Vic Emanuel)

The Houston participants of this field trip met at a roadside park just north of Columbus and proceeded to Monument Hill to join the Travis Audubon Society group. Lunch was eaten by the two groups among the pine trees at Bastrop State Park. One stop was made between Bastrop and Austin where an attempt was made to locate a Verdin in a mesquite covered area.

Upon reaching Austin the group went to Zilker Park and birded around the low water bridge. Some went on the Bee Creek Nature Trail. Birds seen included golden-fronted woodpeckers, black-chinned hummingbirds, cliff swallows and a Bullock's oriole. A barbecue supper in Zilker Park Saturday night was followed by an interesting program of slides.

Sunday morning many of the field trippers met at the Austin Breeding Census area to see the exclusive Edwards Plateau bird, the golden-cheeked warbler. Our leader, Fred Webster, had hardly finished his talk about the area when a golden-cheeked warbler was seen in a nearby bush. Other birds found here included the white-eyed vireo, Empidonax flycatchers, black-and-white warblers, Bewick's wren, black crested titmice and several more golden-cheeks. Mr. Webster told us that because of the drought there were fewer birds here than in previous years. Other birds seen in Austin Sunday morning included a gray-cheeked thrush and several Western Kingbirds (newly discovered residents).

About 9:00 a.m. some of the group went to Mount Benel while others prepared to leave for Box Canyon. After a very dusty drive from Austin, Box Canyon seemed like an oasis in a desert. The surrounding country was barren and hot but within the canyon were tall trees giving deep cool shade. Walking up the canyon we saw another golden-cheeked warbler, also canyon wrens, a yellow-throated vireo, eastern phoebes and other birds. At the end of the canyon is a steep cliff where erosion has formed a cave. Here numerous springs give a steady flow of lime water and there are many beautiful mosses carpeting the ground about the pools of water. Exploring a shallow nearby cave we found beautiful formations of stalactites and stalagmites. The canyon was more beautiful than the pictures we had seen of it.

After returning to the cars the group broke up - some staying, others leaving to eat at a nearby roadside park. Everyone enjoyed this visit into the hill country and appreciated all the Austin group did to make this an enjoyable week-end.



May 27 - Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary Breeding Bird Report - (Vic Emanuel)

Five observers stayed at the sanctuary Saturday night and made a breeding bird census on a portion of the area Sunday morning. Norma Oates and Ella Wolfer covered the northern half of the area, Mr. and Mrs. James Greer covered the Dilla Walla-Dogwood Bend-Camp Cove section, and I covered the southwest slope-Little Jordan section. A complete report of the census will be compiled later and distributed to anyone who is interested.

Saturday afternoon J. M. Heiser heard a Swainson's warbler near Little Jordan Trail and I observed a Louisiana Waterthrush at Enchanted Isle. Saturday afternoon we heard quail calling near camp and later the chuck-will's widows started calling.

By 4:30 Sunday morning the bird chorus was already in full swing and just before leaving Camp Cove a wood thrush was heard singing in a nearby thicket. Each area was covered as thoroughly as possible and by 9:00 a.m. the sun was getting hotter and most of the birds had stopped singing. Nesting birds included Painted and Indigo buntings, white-eyed vireos, red-eyed vireos, pine, hooded, Kentucky and Parula warblers, crested flycatchers, blue-gray gnatcatchers, summer tanagers, and many others.

May 6 - Spring Roundup --- A report on this count will appear in the July SPOONBILL.

Report from Arlie K. McKay, Cove, Texas (May 26, 1956)

Under a large and very old Cypress tree, a line tree on south line of a Mexican land grant to my great-grandfather, there is an old boat. I was sitting in this boat squeaking for Prothonotary warblers this morning when a fox squirrel ran toward the boat, stopping about four feet away, then he ran back to the tree. Squeaking again, he came and jumped on the side of the boat, four inches from my knee, about nine inches from my hand, then again returned to the cypress tree. I didn't see a prothonotary but there was a Parula warbler and a yellow-throat in the tree and a pair of red-bellied woodpeckers brought their family to feed in the old Cypress.

Baltimore orioles were present by April 15 in small numbers. The first one I saw was alone, high in a tree on a dead limb. I observed it from side, back and front. It was quite different from any other I ever saw. Its head was all black, as was the flight feathers of the wings, and center feathers of tail from above. Lower back and breast were orange, fading to near yellow on belly and upper back, and wing coverts. There was a suggestion of wing-bars in that the orange varied in shade. Two or three outer tail feathers on each side were orange, all orange below. I observed it several minutes with 7x35 glasses.

The following is from my spring records.

Feb. 5 - 76 species; 20 goldeneyes; 67 canvasbacks; 1 spotted sandpiper; 19 turnstones; 1 eagle; 1 barn owl; 1 short-eared owl, and vermilion flycatcher.

Feb. 26 - 67 species; 4 white-fronted geese; 1 spoonbill; 2 Florida gallinules (first February record); 1 caracara.

Feb. 28 - 103 species; 12 Bonaparte gulls; 17 Mexican cormorants (first); 5 blue-winged teal (first); canvasback; 8 goldeneyes; 2 or 3 flocks white-fronted geese; 2 avocets; 2 golden plover (earliest before was March 2); 2 ringed plover; 20 turnstones; 1 albino mourning dove; 7 goldfinch (last); 2 sharp-tailed sparrows; rough-winged swallows (first for Feb. earliest before was March 6).

Mar. 15 - 40 species; 4 black-and-white warblers (first); first parula warbler; first yellow-throated warbler; first hooded warbler (earliest ever by 2 days)

Mar. 16 - 80 species; 350 canvasbacks; 200 golden plover; chimney swift (first); 4 martins (first); 2 white-eyed vireos (first - very late).

Mar. 25 - 1000 canvasbacks; 10,000 lesser scaup (a big migration wave); 10 white-fronted geese; 25 white-faced ibis (first); 1 sora; 5 Florida gallinules; 1 solitary sandpiper (first); 4 upland sandpipers (last); 100 golden plover; 2 Swainson's hawks (first) earliest ever by 1 day; kingbird (first); crested flycatcher (first); 20 white crowned sparrows; white-throated sparrows (peak - many thousands); first Indigo bunting (earliest ever by 9 days); last orange-crowned warbler; palm warbler; 2 IA. waterthrush.

Apr. 15 - 85 species - 4 Franklin gulls (first and last); 2 Wilson's phalaropes (earliest ever by 2 days); 4 Baird's sandpiper (3rd or 4th record here); 2 Hudsonian Godwits (earliest ever by 7 days); sharp-shinned hawk (last); 1 duck hawk; first Baltimore oriole; first rose-breasted grosbeak; first and last blue-winged warbler; first black-throated green warbler; 1 unidentified thrush, apparently a late hermit thrush.

Apr. 21 - 120 species (This would probably have been my biggest day, if I had not had measles); 12 Bonaparte gulls; 50 double-crested cormorants (last); 8 canvasbacks (last); 400 scaup (last); sora rail (last); 8 sanderlings; 5 buff-breasted sandpipers (first); 4 red-headed woodpeckers (first); 1 chuck-will's widow (last); 10 white-crowned sparrows (last); last field sparrows; last rose-breasted grosbeak; last crested flycatcher; first scarlet tanager; 7 summer tanagers (first); first red-eyed vireo; first prothonotary warbler; 3 worm-eating warblers (first); 3 Tennessee warblers (first);



5 parula warblers; 3 yellow warblers (first); last Myrtle warbler; first Magnolia warbler; 2 ovenbirds (first); 10 waterthrush; 3 Kentucky warblers (first); first chat (very late); 9 catbirds (first); last house wren; 2 short-billed marsh wrens (last); last ruby crowned kinglet; 10 wood thrush (first); 4 veery (first); 5 gray-cheeked thrush (first)

Apr. 22 - 68 species; 2 purple gallinules (first); last upland sandpiper; first dickcissel; first Cerulean warbler.

Apr. 23 - 105 species; 7 Gadwall (last); 3 baldpates (last); 20 fulvous tree ducks (first); spotted sandpiper (first migrants); first yellow-bellied flycatcher; 1 scarlet tanager; 3 prothonotary warblers; 1 worm-eating warbler; 4 golden-winged warblers (first and last); Nashville warbler (first and last); 1 Cerulean warbler; 4 chestnut-sided warblers (first); 5 blackburnian warblers (first); 3 veerys; 20 gray-cheeked thrush; 6 olive-backed thrush (first)

Apr. 24th - 115 species; Herring gull (last); 2 Bonaparte gulls (last); 2 solitary sandpipers (last); last American bittern; 6 stilt sandpipers (last); 25 buff-breasted sandpipers; 150 golden plover; 15 ringed plover (last); 1 duck hawk; pigeon hawk (first and last); black-billed cuckoo (first and last); kingfisher (last); yellow-bellied flycatcher (last); orchard oriole (thousands); Baltimore oriole (many) (last); 6 scarlet tanagers (last); summer tanagers (common); 1 warbling vireo; yellow-throated vireo; last worm-eating warbler; last 10 Cerulean warblers; 4 bay-breasted warblers; 1 La. waterthrush; 15 Kentucky warblers; chats (common) gnatcatchers (last); 30 wood thrush; 7 veerys (most I ever saw); gray cheeked thrush (100).

* * * * *

CLEARING HOUSE

May 13 - Black-pollled warbler seen twice in the yard of Carl Aiken, 3767 Georgetown.

May 13 - Thelma Smith and Carrie Holcomb birding around the lake on Miller Road reported painted buntings, about 5 yellow-crowned night herons and one very mottled immature white ibis.

May 19 - The following sandpipers were seen at San Jacinto Battlegrounds by Leota Stilwell and N. Oates - three pectoral; about 75 semipalmated; a few western and six stilt sandpipers.

May 27 - Biggest find in Galveston was a female magnificent frigate bird perched on a post in the water near West Bay Fishing camp - Leota Stilwell, Ruth Moorman Thelma Smith and Carrie Holcomb.

May 27 Jimmie Murray reported two families of young willets at Sargent as well as other shore birds.

* * * * *

Cattle Egret

The TOS NEWSLETTER dated April 15, 1956, reports as follows: "Dr. Charles E. Hall writes that on the afternoon of March 26, 1956, he certified a Cattle Egret near Galveston. The bird had been noticed on the previous day at the same place by Mr. John Hildebrand and a 'chap' he was with. The egret had 'a yellow bill and yellowish-green legs. A rather large bulge occupied the base of the bill as it joined the throat. The top of the head was covered with creamy fawn feathers which also appeared in mid-back. It persistently followed cows and horses.' Dr. Hall viewed the individual at about fifty feet through 8x40 binoculars and a 40x prism telescope. This appears to be the first record for the upper Texas coast. * * *"

By telephone Dr. Hall informed Carrie Holcomb that this egret was seen by him as recent as the first week in May in the vicinity of the intersection of "S" Road and 9-Mile Road, (west Galveston Island).

O.G. members on trips to Galveston please check the pastures in this area and report any egrets fitting the above description to the SPOONBILL editor.

MISCELLANEOUS CORRESPONDENCE

Katherine Richmond - Rockport, Texas

April 29, 1956 " * * * After you left that Sunday (April 22, 1956) Connie and I went to Mustang Island and enjoyed the fine push of birds you reported. Plenty of Yellowheaded Blackbirds, a Lazuli bunting (my second and best look at one), a Cape May warbler right in my face - dont know whether I was more astounded to be able to identify him or to be actually seeing one - and of course to have Connie Hagar right there to confirm the identification. Also saw Swainson's, Black-pollled, Sycamore, Black-and-white, Tennessee and Nashville warblers. April 17-24 was the best warbler week in many years."



May 5-6 - Ruth Stamm visiting in Rockport, reported the following birds: Rose-breasted grosbeak, cat bird (singing), blue grosbeak, buff-breasted sandpiper, scarlet tanagers, olive-sided flycatcher, Wilson's phalarope, Bullock's oriole, and bay-breasted warbler

Etta Coffman vacationing in Yuma, Arizona reported she recognized the beautiful Evening grosbeak and his mate on her first day in the Arizona mountains.

NEWS OF MEMBERS

Mac Ramsey (ex-O.G. Chairman) and his bride, the former Betty Wood (married in Houston on April 11, 1956) are now residing at 4332 Lafayette, Bellaire, Texas.

ITS A BOY for Noel Perley and his wife -- Mark John Perley, born May 11, 1956.

Ruth Stamm, a former O.G. and T.O.S. member, recently accepted a position with an Oklahoma firm and is now making her home in Bartlesville, Oklahoma.

OFF THE PRESS

HOUSTON CHRONICLE - May 13, 1956

Coogee Beach, Australia. - Scientists report they have proved a bird found on the beach here flew 13,000 miles from Sweden, the longest known bird flight. The bird, a young common tern, was found exhausted and died the next day. It bore a tag with a Swedish address.

HOUSTON CHRONICLE - May 16, 1956

Germans say Sun, Stars keep Birds on Course

West German Research Association reports they have proved in experiments that, in daytime, birds adjust their course by the sun. But they have not been able to find out how the birds take into account the sun's movement.

Two other scientists of the Zoological Institute of Freiburg University, have investigated the effect of stars on birds which migrate at night.

They placed young hedge sparrows which had never migrated, in a round cage, from which only the sky could be seen. On starry autumn nights, the birds would take up a position facing between southwest and south-southwest, and would flutter about excitedly. The direction was that needed to reach their winter homes in the Mediterranean region. On starry nights in spring, they would take up a position in the opposite direction -- ready to return to Germany. But if the sky were clouded over, the birds would flutter around in all directions and then stop altogether.

New Orleans Whooping Crane Lays Eggs

New Orleans - Josephine made big news in the zoological world Saturday, May 5th (?) 1956, when she laid an egg. Josephine and Crip, her mate are the first whooping cranes to produce an egg in captivity. Josephine added egg No. 2 to the nest Wednesday May 9th 1956, while a photographer was waiting around for a picture of the first.

Whooping Cranes in Captivity become Parents

New Orleans - The only pair of whooping cranes in captivity hatched a chick from one of their two eggs Tuesday (May 29th). The blessed event set off whoops of joy in the ornithological world. "The offspring "looks" fine and seems to be all right," said George Douglass, director of the Audubon Park Zoo.

The two eggs were laid four days apart - the first one was hatched at 2:36 p.m. CST, Josephine was still sitting on the other egg. Crip, the father, is the "most attentive I've ever seen of animals in the zoo," Douglas said.

June 1, 1956 Houston Post shows a picture of the first young crane being fed an insect by its father, Crip, who looks after the youngster while the mother Josephine sits on the other egg.

Second Whooping Crane finally decides to Hatch

New Orleans - A tiny bird who doesn't like to rush things Friday (June 1) became North America's whooping crane No. 32. After almost two days of pecking, the whooper finally popped out of its egg. Its brother, or sister, whooping crane No. 31, only took four hours to crack through the shell Tuesday (May 29th). The usual pecking period for new-born cranes is 14 hours.

For a time, George Douglas, director of the Audubon Park Zoo, had given up hope that No. 32 would do the job. The pecking stopped for awhile Thursday.



The parents, Josephine and Grip, and 28 other cranes, who usually winter at the Aransas Refuge in Texas, were the only whoopers known to exist before No. 31 became the first ever hatched in a zoo. The whooping crane, tallest bird in North America is approaching extinction because it provides a huge target for hunters and does not reproduce easily.

HOUSTON PRESS (Picture and 3-column spread on front page)
Owl Lives in the Shamrock

A barn owl with five eggs and penthouse tastes was forcibly evicted from the Shamrock Hilton yesterday and put in a plain old zoo cage. She had been living, not so quietly in a concrete ornamental window box on the tip-top (16th) floor of the hotel - only a hoot and a holler from a swank suite. She was freeloading!

Madame Owl, like a genuine member of cafe society slept by day and flew high, wide and handsome by night. It was the nocturnal flip-flapping that brought discovery. A cleaning woman one night saw the owl swoosh by a window, circle majestically in the air and settle down cautiously in her lofty nursery. The incident was reported and sifted through official channels.

It was something of a problem, said Mr. Parris, general manager of the hotel. "Most birds have the homing instinct and this owl had good taste. She wanted to live at the Shamrock Hilton." Zoo officials were consulted and Manager Tom Baylor was enchanted with the prospect of acquiring an infanticipating owl. We dont have any baby owls" said Mr. Baylor. "Never have had as a matter of fact." Owl and eggs were gently removed from their luxurious quarters by zoo employees. Madam Owl did not audibly protest, but gave Mr. Parris a look of hurt reproach as she was carried out the door.

Condensed from - "Our Amazing Birds" - Robert S. Lemmon
Red-winged Blackbirds

Some mild, spring-tinged day in late February or early March the word that winter is over comes from the roadside marsh in the rich throaty con-ka-reee of a male red-wing's song. Days pass, and the first advance scout from the South is joined by others and still others until the wetlands are vibrant with their unmistakable voices. All of these early comers are males, and soon they form into flocks which range the countryside. Not until the females, migrating northward a few weeks later, have joined them in some numbers do the flocks break up as mating gets under way.

Eventually matches are made and the pairs scatter to build their woven grass and cattail nests, each to hold four or five eggs, among the sedges, tussocks, or bushes of the freshwater marshes. Family life there seems singularly free of dissensions, despite the fact that several pairs often settle in the same smallish swamp or meadow. The males stand watchful guard near the nests, alert to drive away marauding crows and other natural enemies, even lodging bold and noisy protests if a human being approaches too closely. Fussing with neighboring families rarely occurs, for each seems to respect the others' territories. By our standards, redwing moralities do have their flaws, for one male may have two or even three devoted wives. But, again unlike the human race, there are no jealousies! This favorite blackbird is very widely distributed, breeding from Nova Scotia to Alaska, southward to Florida, the Gulf Coast, and central Mexico. It is one of our most useful birds, too, for it destroys untold multitudes of insect pests.

DID YOU KNOW

Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) had this to say about what happens to swallows in winter: "Swallows certainly sleep all the winter. A number of them conglobulate together, by flying round and round, and then all in a heap throw themselves under water and lie in the bed of a river."

Aristotle once theorized that birds hibernated in trees, while certain thinkers of the Middle Ages believed that they wintered on the moon. The sunny southland, where the birds actually spend the cold months, seems much more sensible and attractive.

1956-1957 - O.G. Dues ----- NOW DUE

Annual membership dues of \$1.00 covering period --- May 1956 through April 1957 --- are now due and payable. Send name, address and telephone number with one dollar to Miss Thelma Smith (Secy-Treas.), 2148 Harold, Apt. 11, Houston, Texas.

Change of Address

In order to be sure you receive your SPOONBILL each month, please report any change of address as soon as possible to Miss Thelma Smith, 2148 Harold, Apt. 11, Houston, Tex.

Norma C. Oates, Editor
5908 Charlotte
Houston 5, Texas



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

