



THE SPOONBILL

N.P.

Volume III Number 4

AUGUST 1954

* "Bird watching is one of America's *
* most-joked-about — and fastest-growing *
* — hobbies... Its devotees are now some *
* two million in number." *
* — LOOK, June 1, 1954, (paraphrased) *

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

SCHEDULED:

Aug. 5, 8:00 P.M....Business Meeting.....5815 Schuler
Aug. 11, 7:30 P.M....Bird Study Class.....335 Terrace Drive
Aug. 14, 4:30 P.M....Field Trip to Juliff.....Almeda & Holcombe
Sept. 2, 8:00 P.M....Business Meeting.....5815 Schuler

August 5, (Thursday) - Business Meeting

It is suggested that each member try to set aside the first Thursday of each month to attend these meetings. In this way, you may keep abreast of the activities in which we are engaged with the knowledge "that the more you put into it, the more you will get out of it."

August 11, (Wednesday) - Bird Study Class

Eleanor MacMahon, is beginning a study class based on A LABORATORY AND FIELD MANUAL OF ORNITHOLOGY by Olin Sewall Pettingill, Jr.. This class will meet every two weeks until the course is completed. Please call Eleanor, VI-5551, if you desire further information.

August 14, (Saturday) - Field Trip

Meet at Almeda and Holcombe (SE corner of Hermann Park), just south of Holcombe on Almeda Highway esplanade. Our trip leader will be Josiephine Wilkin who will direct us south on Almeda (Texas 288) some 18 miles to Juliff in NE Ft. Bend County. Mrs. Wilkin adds the following information:

"At the July 1 Business Meeting, several locales were discussed for future field trips, one being around Juliff. A trip was made July 24 by your Field Trip Chairman to this area and it appears to be a very good choice for a late afternoon trip. During the course of a pleasant chat with Mr. A. M. Miller (owner of the property), the Ornithology Group was offered an invitation to view the Herons flying in to roost. The Little Blue Herons and Cardinals seem to have a "bumper crop" of young this year. Unusual birds seen on this short trip (which we hope to show the group) were: Wood Ibis, Barred Owl (beside the road at dusk), Yellow-billed Cuckoos, Indigo Buntings, Prothonotary and Black-and-White Warblers, and Yellow-throats."

September 2, (Thursday) - Business Meeting

Please keep this date in mind as this is the only notice you will receive.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

The August 1954 issue of NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE contains an article by Roger Tory Peterson entitled "A New Bird Immigrant Arrives." The article contains 9 illustrations of the Cattle Egret of the Old World which suddenly appeared in several States. Mr. Peterson made this significant statement: "I believe it will do extremely well when it reaches the coastal prairies of Texas. The veldlike, semiarid terrain, oak clumps, thicket-lined rivers, and hybrid Brahman livestock are made to order for the Cattle Egret's needs."

1. The first part of the document is a letter from the Secretary of the Department of the Interior to the Secretary of the Department of the Army, dated June 1, 1900. The letter is in the name of the Secretary of the Department of the Interior and is addressed to the Secretary of the Department of the Army. The letter is dated June 1, 1900.

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This amusing article was published in the HOUSTON POST, May 13, 1954

HER EFFORT WAS FOR THE BIRDS—69 OF THEM

Mrs. Carl Savage, a bird-lover, had her love put to test by a flock of Chimney Swifts Wednesday.

The birds descended into an unused chimney at her apartment at 3006 Beauchamp St. Sunday night and got trapped in the walls of her kitchen and dining room.

Mrs. Savage said she loved birds and had always wanted a canary, but the Chimney Swifts' constant "fluttering, flying, peeping and chirping almost drove me wild."

She hit on the solution Wednesday—she disconnected the water heater in her kitchen, took the pipe out of the wall and dropped a long rag into the hole for the birds to climb out on.

They did, one by one—69 birds in all—and Mrs. Savage stood with a broom, shooing them out the open kitchen door.

"I never saw such a mess of birds," Mrs. Savage said.

DID YOU KNOW

...That Woodpeckers drum on hollow limbs and rain gutters on houses in the spring because they have no vocal love calls?

...That birds are the most active of living things — and are more generally distributed throughout the world than any other animals?

CLEARING HOUSE

SWAINSON'S WARBLER A SUMMER RESIDENT NEAR HOUSTON - Noel Pettingell

It was during the first Little Thicket Sanctuary Nesting Census on May 31, 1953 that the Swainson's Warbler was first suspected of being a breeder in SE Texas. A Swainson's-like song was heard at this time but the bird was never seen. The Sanctuary is situated 2.1 miles S of Evergreen in W central San Jacinto County. Earlier in the month, on May 3, Armand Yramategui and I had found the Warbler along Garret Road between Sheldon Reservoir and Ralston Road, some 11 miles NE of downtown Houston. Exactly one year later, on May 2, 1954, I again found the bird at the same locale. Thus a second possible breeding site had been found. Then on May 12, 1954, Armand Yramategui SAW → found a Swainson's at a third locality, this time near Ralston and Garrett Roads, some 1-1/2 miles SW of where I had last seen it.

The scene then shifted back to the Sanctuary where, on May 30, 1954, a Swainson's-like song was again heard in the same area (E of Camp Cove) but, as when the last breeding census was taken a year before, the bird was never seen.

June 27, 1954, was the next significant date in The Search For Swainson's Saga. Since the Warbler had been seen several times in the Sheldon area during the last two spring migrations, it was the logical place to look for it as a summer resident — which I hoped to prove on the 27th. The night before leaving I received a call from Charles McNeese who informed me that Edgar Kincaid of Austin was in town for a brief visit and that he and Frank Watson wanted me to help them locate the Swainson's Warbler. How one-track-minded can bird watchers be — without knowledge of one another's plans! That morning we confirmed our suspicions as we actually heard the Swainson song several times at the May 12 spot. But, as at the Sanctuary, the songster was never seen. On July 4, I made another attempt to "pin down" this secretive Warbler on my own in the same area and was at least successful in catching a brief glimpse of a small, brownish bird where I had heard the Swainson song a moment before. I went back the next day, determined to establish certain identification once and for all. About half an hour after my arrival (8:15 A.M.), I started hearing the all-too-familiar song. My first glimpse of the bird came but a few minutes later. Then: Final confirmation as I watched it alternately singing and feeding on the ground at the edge of a small clearing in the heart of a densely-thicketed woodland area. It soon disappeared, however, and I was sure I wouldn't see it again that day. But a short time later I began to hear a loud "Chirp!" which I soon found was the Swainson's call note. Then came the biggest discovery of all: Seeing two birds in the area — a mated pair without any doubt as I watched them playfully chasing each other through the underbrush for some 10 minutes.







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On July 11, Frank and David Watson, Armand Yramategui, and myself attempted to locate the birds' nest so as to be able to provide authentic evidence of the Swainson's first (as far as we know) breeding site in Texas. But we were unable to do so, although we all saw and heard the birds in the area. In the meantime - in fact, on the very same day - at the Little Thicket Sanctuary Joe Heiser and Nance Cunningham watched a pair of Swainson's Warblers at close range along the Little Jordan Stream (at Redbud Rest) in the SW corner of the Sanctuary.

Thus this Warbler is definitely a summer resident in at least two widely separated locales in East Texas, completely outside the known breeding range of the bird, which is as follows: NE Okla., central Ark., SE Mo., S. Ill. and Ind., SE Ky. SE Ohio, NW Va., SE Md. and E Va. south to SE La., Miss., and Ala. and NE Fla. Howell in his monumental work FLORIDA BIRD LIFE (1932) gives the breeding range as "SE Mo., S. Ill., S. Ind. and SE Va. south to E Texas, La., S. Ala., and N. Fla." (P. 385). But A. C. Bent in his LIFE HISTORIES OF NORTH AMERICAN WOOD WARBLERS (c. 1948) give Jena and Baton Rouge, La. as the southwesternmost breeding range - 225 to 250 Miles ENE of Houston. At any rate, this rare (?) and unique Warbler is but an hour or so away from the life list of any Houston bird watcher. All that is needed is a little patience and persistence plus the following directions:

Take the Beaumont Highway (U.S. 90) to Ralston Road, 2.2 miles beyond the Two-point Gulf Station (where Farm Rd. 527 joins U. S. 90). It's the first road on your left after you cross Greens Bayou and there's an H & J Food Mkt. at the right of the junction. Proceed north on Ralston Road 3.5 miles to a bridge (the 5th and last one) over a dry creek bed,* which is .6 mile S of Garrett Road. Park your car at the north end of the bridge (half on pavement if shoulders are muddy), where you'll see an old log ramp over the ditch on the left side (going north) of the road. This is part of an old logging trail which leads into the heart of the Swainson's habitat. Proceed about 100 feet or so and then listen for this song: "sweet, sweet, sweet, too-twee, twee-o." The first three notes are loud and clear and on the same key, while the rest of the song is a sort of jumbled warble going down the scale. The Hooded Warbler also sings in the area much of the time but its song is shorter and lacks the clear, ringing Waterthrush-like quality of the Swainson's. If you hear a "tooweeet, tooweeet, tooweeteo" with the last note slurring downward then it's the Hooded. Both species are ventriloquistic and thicket-dwellers, thus being considerably easier to hear than to see. For this reason blue jeans are highly recommended as protection against the brambles frequently encountered by those not content with merely listening to the songs of these elusive Warblers. "Consolation prizes" in the form of other unusual species make a trip to the area worth-while in case the Swainson's is missed. These include the Kentucky and Black-and-White Warblers, Yellow-throated, Red-eyed, and White-eyed Vireos, Acadian Flycatcher, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Orchard Oriole, Crested Flycatcher, Summer Tanager, Red-headed, Pileated, and Downy Woodpeckers, and Red-shouldered Hawk. Time of arrival is not too vital a factor, as I heard the Swainson's singing from 6 A.M. till 10 A.M. (July 4), but it's an erratic singer, sometimes waiting over an hour before pouring forth its song.

We are still attempting to locate the Swainson's nest, and any assistance in this venture would be of great value. We think we have the nesting site narrowed down to an area some 200 yards in from the road. In order to reach this spot, continue to follow the old logging road mentioned earlier, which runs into another such road. Go right some 60 paces on this road to still another road at the junction of which is a sign reading "Swainson's Warbler" with an arrow pointing to the left. Some 50 paces south (left) of the sign you'll see a bare branch beside a stump and leaning against a tree on the right side of the road. This is the suspected breeding area of the Swainson's Warbler. It's approximately a 1/8 of a mile or a 10-minute walk from (west of) Ralston Road, and it's the exact spot where I saw the Warblers on July 5 and 11 and heard the male singing on July 20.

Further developments involving this highly significant ornithological discovery will be thoroughly covered in future "Clearing House" columns...

* Apparently due to an extremely dry season.

SEE PHOTO
#1

SEE PHOTO
#2

Omitted from July "Clearing House":

- June 6 - King Rail family - adult and 4 or more chicks - seen by Leota Stilwell, Norma Oates, and Ruth Moorman along Old Main St. Road between O.S.T. and Brays Bayou in SW Houston.
- June 15 - Screech Owls (two) seen by Ellen Greer in front of the First Evangelical Church opposite San Jacinto High School at 1311 Holman in Houston. Wrote Mrs. Greer, "flew down from the Magnolia tree that is floodlighted...This floodlight may attract insects and provide a good supply of food."
(Editor's Note; This is a possible site for a Big Day "staked-out" Screech Owl, as is the Rice Institute Varsity Practice Field where we heard a pair calling around 5:30 A.M. on July 19.)

HUGE MARTIN CONCENTRATION IN HOUSTON

Throughout the first two weeks in July great numbers of Purple Martins chose as their roosting site two large trees situated near the home of Jerry Baker in the vicinity of the Lawndale and Telephone Road junction. A peak total of at least 1,500 adult and immature birds was reached just prior to the birds' departure around the 15th of the month.

SCISSOR-TAILS GATHERING NORTH OF HOUSTON

These exotic-type flycatchers started flocking together around July 1 and now number some 200 along Steubner Airline and West Roads. Last year's post-nesting gatherings took place about a month later. (See this dept. in Sept., 1953 SPOONBILL.)

MR. AND MRS. MINOR A. HURST LEAVE HOUSTON JULY 30

All who wish to keep in touch with the Hursts, for so many years associated with Houston ornithology, may do so by writing them at their new address: Route 2, Clifton, Texas.

REMINDERS

Our Chairman, Mac Ramsey, asks members to remember that the birds feel the hot weather the same as we do and therefore urges everyone to keep our feathered friends supplied with fresh water throughout the remainder of the summer.

* * * *

Don't forget to send the Editor your vacation reports.

* * * *

As a final reminder to those who have not yet renewed their membership in the Ornithology Group of the Outdoor Nature Club, and for the benefit of new members, we are printing the membership blank once more:

Noel Pettingell
1814 Berry Street
Houston 4, Texas
August 1, 1954

Please send your blank to Mrs. Chas. F. Baker, 6430 Jefferson, Houston 3, Texas.

I am enclosing \$3.00 for membership in the Ornithology Group of Outdoor Nature Club (\$2.00 to O.N.C., \$1.00 to O.G.). Please check _____
I am enclosing \$1.00 for membership in the Ornithology Group. (Outdoor Nature Club membership fee having been paid.) Please check _____

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone Number _____

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