



The Spoonbill

A Publication of the Ornithology Group (OG)
of the Houston Outdoor Nature Club

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LETTER FROM MARCY BROWN incoming OG CHAIR

I stumbled into birding later in life than most. Several years ago I read an article in the Chronicle about “Hawk Watch” at Smith Point, and it brought to mind counting the hawks along the side of the road during our family driving trips when I was a kid. So, I decided to make the drive to the point and check it out. I parked in the large empty lot, walked up the steps of the platform, and finally got up the nerve to say hello to the hawk watch personnel. I asked if they had seen any hawks that day. With a disbelieving stare, they quietly said, “Umm, look up.”

Fortunately, very patient counters were there to point out a lone Swainson’s in the midst of 400 Broad-wings. They showed me the straight wing and round tail of the Cooper’s versus the bent wing and straight tail of the Sharp-shinned.

That spring, there were friendly birders, who politely pointed out that, no, that bird is a western species, and I probably didn’t see it in the park. Then they patiently pointed out how I could tell the difference between that and its eastern equivalent. And even now, my friends smile as they answer me the 57th time I ask which flycatcher says, “Quick- three beers!” The patience of many fine birders has made all the difference.

Now the OG is beginning a new season, and our board is enthusiastic about providing the members with a great program. We want to hear from you about what will make your membership experience what you want it to be. Because most of the board members are new, we hope you will be patient as we learn how to make that happen.

Marcy Brown
OG Chair

MONTHLY MEETING

MONDAY, AUGUST 1

LEARNING CORNER 6:30

AARON STOLEY:

LITTLE THICKET NATURE

SANCTUARY and THE

BIRDING OPPORTUNITIES

GENERAL MEETING 7:00

EVENING PROGRAM SPEAKER

MARK BARTOSIK

FIELD PHOTOGRAPHY:

**USED AS AN EXCELLENT TOOL
TO ENHANCE NOTES AND
DOCUMENTATION**

**AS AN IMPORTANT SOURCE OF
DATA FOR FURTHER ANALYSES**

INCOMING OG BOARD MEMBERS

August finds us introducing the newest Ornithology Group board members. These volunteers are following in the footsteps of the other dedicated individuals that gave the group its wings in the past. They all look forward to a year of wonderful activities, educational and recreational events, as well as providing opportunities and insight into ways to participate in preservation of birding habitat. We also hope our membership numbers will grow, thus encourage each of you to inspire birding as a hobby and the Ornithology Group as a great way to get involved in a life long journey.

Marcy Brown: My first encounter with birding was in the fall of 2004 with an interest in raptors, but quickly became enamored with migrant passerines when I visited “Lunch with the Birds” at the Nature Discovery Center in Bellaire the next spring. From then on, you would not find me without a pair of binoculars nearby. I volunteer with Houston Audubon at High Island both during spring migration, and during the off-season doing habitat work. Also, I do what I can to help them out with the Pocket Prairie Management Team. I became certified as a Master Naturalist in 2009, with my volunteer hours directed mainly at birds and bird habitat. One of my favorite times of the year is December – not for the holidays, but because I get to participate in some CBC’s!

Harlan Evans: Completing my training in physics I moved to Houston in 1974 where I started my career doing medical research for the space program. I worked at Baylor College of Medicine and at the Johnson Space Center. Now that I am semi-retired more of my time is devoted to birding and bird photography. Since the 1980’s I have been a birder enjoying the OG field trips, birding at local parks and wildlife refuges, and occasionally on trips to more distant locations. For several years I took birding pictures by digiscoping, now I am using a standard DSLR. I am a novice photographer but enjoy it and find that it complements birding by sometimes allowing me to ID a bird I could not ID in the field.

Vicki Sims: Bird watching became a significant passion for me during the years I traveled back and forth to New Mexico to help care for my aging parents. There are wonderful places for birding day trips around Albuquerque, and birding is such a great way to leave the pressures of the world behind! I love to travel, camp, and experience new vistas.

Hi! My name is Debbie Valdez and I have been a birder for about 10 years, and have been in charge of the OG library for 2 or 3 years. Even though we have so many multimedia /online resources available, books are still invaluable resources for information about birds. Besides, they're fun to look through. When I'm not looking at birds or birding books, I teach biology, environmental science, and aquatic science at Kerr High School, where I try to interest my students in birds.

Margret Simmons: I was first introduced to birding by my mother at a young age. I became more seriously interested in 1968 & joined the National Audubon Society in Houston. I joined ONC in 1997, am a member of both the Ornithology Group & Botany/Entomology Group, have been on field trips with both groups. I’ve taken birding tours led by OG members & others, been on several Elderhostels with birding as a primary focus, but still have many birds to observe to add to myriad lists I keep.

JoAnn Raine: I am an Easterner, having spent all my birding time in the Delaware Valley of Pennsylvania. The invitation to join a Conservancy board and help manage a 2,000 acre preserve started my bird species listing days. I kept the Ebird records for them for 25 years. I met many fine birders through my long association with the DVOC, Delaware Valley Ornithological Society. Trips and planned vacations all over the world always added to my interest in seeing all possible birds. Some favorite places were Alaska, Mexico and Bulgaria. Texas is a really good place to bird year round.



photo: JoAnn Raine

Boardwalk graphics

Be Inspired to Travel

Favorable winds left coastal warbler watchers fanning out to alternative sites this past spring. This Spoonbill editor would love to relay stories and places you found to fill your bird watching itch. What inspired you just might inspire someone else! Many thanks to JoAnn Raine and Stephan Lorenz for the following articles and pictures. Plan ahead and find yourself standing on the Magee Marsh boardwalk next year or heading to remote west Texas. Email the editor oncspoon@gmail.com

THE BEST EASTERN WOOD WARBLER WATCHING

The advertising in the birding magazines was very intense. See all the wood warblers in one area! I grew up in southern Ohio and had experienced Sandusky birding. I had seen the tanagers and orioles even without binoculars. The idea that the Great Lakes presented the same water barrier to the migrating birds that the Gulf of Mexico does to the migrants coming to Texas, was irresistible.

I flew to Cleveland to spend May 9-15, met by three friends that I knew from my days in Pennsylvania. They drove out and we stayed in a small town called Port Clinton. It was a short driving distance to the hot spots and had sufficient motel rooms to house both fishermen and birders. All along the lake shore, the marshland is protected by duck hunting clubs and state parks. Magee Marsh is a great example. The Black Swamp Birding Observatory presents a May birding festival billed as the "best place in the world to see warblers." It astounded me. The birds fly north only to run up against a large body of water. They have to wait for a wind blowing north to help them cross to Canada. That keeps them feeding in these marshes for days. The numbers and species mount and it becomes a warbler treasure. I could not tear myself away from the trips to the "boardwalk". There was no bad time to be there.

It is still very early spring along the boardwalk. With only budding leaves on the trees, birds are easily seen. Those tiny warblers seem fearless as they cavort right in front of you. 8 am was prime time. You could be part of hundreds of polite birders and have a fantastic day. Enjoy sitting on a bench, with the birds feeding near you. Listen for the buzz of the word being passed along in the crowd. Down the boardwalk, a Canada warbler was being seen, a woodcock, a nighthawk, and many thrushes.

The festival was very well attended and each day would easily find 500 birders in the woods. But the boardwalk keeps it rational and the Tropical Guides helped contain the mob if a rare bird was in view. I felt compelled to be at the Magee Marsh every day at 8AM and then again at 5PM. Evening birding was so pleasant and productive. The middle of the day could take you sight seeing to other suggested places or to long lunches in local restaurants. Make no mistake- the business people of the area knew how much the birders were spending to be here. Signs were out to WELCOME BIRDERS. European birders were here in groups and were promising to spread the word back home. I was happy birding with my friends from back east but I also spotted others I knew from past trips and some very famous guide faces.

The Black Swamp offered early morning car-pooling, bus transport, half and whole day trips that you could sign up for on initial registration. Kelley's Island is a short ferry ride into Lake Erie and is quite beautiful. It is a summer vacation spot for Ohio families and has a lighthouse, historic camps and a park that preserves the best example of Glacial Grooves in the USA. You go there to sight see, not to see better warblers than the boardwalk. The hydro ferry to Point Pelee demands a passport and a whole day of your time. It was not as good as Ohio because you can't arrive there early enough. Pelee shines in the autumn when the birds need to move south. It is still a good birding day and a fun experience for \$85 including a lunch. I saw Black terns and Bonapartes' gulls on the lake.

Be aware that most of the ducks and geese have already moved north. Farm fields will have limited shorebirds but we found Bobolinks, Am.Pipits and Horned Larks. The flycatchers are fun to try to ID and Least flycatcher will be the dominant species. It is an easy trip to plan on your own. The Black Swamp web site will have lots of useful info for planning and it will also list the weeks when certain especially desirable warblers might present. Tropical Birding offers a guided trip. Just think- between 5 days at High Island and 5 days at Lake Erie-you can see all the eastern wood warblers!

I saw 25 species of warblers and 147 total birds at Ottawa National Refuge area and Magee Marsh. And I saw them repeatedly. Not just one good look but every day. I even tallied a Connecticut warbler! It was a brief flit, while he danced around in the background, but this was a rare bird for most people. The Southern breeders are harder to find in mid May, but that is why we have High Island birding. When added to my April Texas birding experience- I only missed 2 eastern warblers for the season. Combining these two places made this year among my best for counting eastern wood warblers. That's a goal worth traveling for!

JoAnn Raine



Early morning on the boardwalk

photo: JoAnn Raine



Birding the Devil's River State Natural Area

photos: Stephan Lorenz

We couldn't say that we hadn't been warned, this place was a long way from anywhere. After seven hours of driving from Houston, we finally turned off Highway 277 onto the gravel of Dolan Creek Road. Darkness fell quickly as the rutted caliche wound into increasingly rugged country. By the time we set up camp, stars ablaze above black hills, we had been traveling nearly a whole day. The remote Devil's River State Natural Area in Val Verde County definitely falls off the beaten birding path. From Houston it's a long haul west past San Antonio and Kerrville and then south to the small town of Rocksprings, the last chance for an obligatory refueling stop.

The land further west becomes increasingly hilly and vegetation sparse. The state natural areas lies at a meeting point of three major ecosystems, the Chihuahuan Desert, the Hill Country, and Tamaulipan Brushland. The clear waters of the Devil River support strips of riparian woodlands. The large variety of habitats harbors a great diversity of bird species. It's a place where east meets west, where Scott's Orioles sing alongside Yellow-throated Warblers, where Eastern Wood-Pewees breed in the same oaks as Tropical Parulas.

We woke up to clear skies and a morning chorus of Painted Buntings, Yellow-breasted Chats, and Bell's Vireos, in fact the small chattering vireo was abundant, seemingly singing from every dense shrub. A pair of Ash-throated Flycatchers investigated a cavity as a potential nest site and chased off a hapless Ladder-backed Woodpecker. We stopped by the headquarters, where Cassin's Sparrows sang with drawn-out whistles, hovering above the mesquite flats.

A pair of Hooded Orioles fed on small blooms and a Cactus Wren visited its nest wedged in mistletoe. The influence of the Chihuahuan Desert on the regions birdlife was most apparent along the road leading from the office to the campgrounds. We heard the simple songs of Canyon Towhees and Black-throated Sparrows were common along the roadside.

Since the forecast called for 104 degrees, we wasted no time and made our way to the river. In order to reduce the impact on the ecologically fragile area, visitors must hike at least a mile before reaching the refreshing springs along the Devil's River. The park has one mile of waterfront and a wide trail allows easy birding in the riparian woodlands. Within a hundred feet, going from desert to river, the birds changed dramatically, Common Yellowthroats, hidden among dense reeds, called. Hiking along the river we saw Summer Tanagers, Orchard Orioles, Bewick's and Carolina Wrens. While Pyrrhuloxias had been numerous around the campsite, Northern Cardinals were common in the canyon.

One group of birds that exemplifies the unique geographic location and ecotones of the state natural area are the vireos. Within a short stretch, among towering live oaks and sycamores, I saw breeding White-eyed, Bell's, Yellow-throated, Red-eyed, and even endangered Black-capped Vireos. Gray Vireos nest away from the river in arid canyons and breeding Hutton's Vireos may be present. During migration it would be possible to add three other vireos to that list. Visiting late May the only migrants we found where Wilson's Warblers.

The river trail ends at private property in a grove of stately pecans. It's a great place to seek shade in the afternoon heat and look for Zone-tailed Hawks, which nest here, calling and soaring above the river. We also found good number of another south Texas specialty here, Tropical Parulas. We heard at least four singing along the river and had great views of two pairs foraging from the live oaks through the mesquite.

Evenings are quiet at the park. During the night Common Poorwills and Western Screech-Owls are often heard and with some luck even Elf Owls. With less than 1,000 visitors a year the trails and swimming holes are usually deserted. Camping is primitive, but showers and a bunkhouse are available. While many areas of the park are off limits to the public to protect sensitive archeological sites, there are still plenty of trails, nooks and crannies to explore that may turn up a surprise or two and definitely offer several days of rewarding birding. Make sure to take good notes and if possible submit your sightings.

Stephan Lorenz



VOLUNTEER HELP NEEDED FOR SMITH POINT

HAWK WATCH BEGINS IN AUGUST

The GCBO has decided to run the Smith Point hawk watch using volunteers this year. The focus will be on the Swallow-tail Kite migration.

The Kites are one of the higher priority species passing through the area which they can get a good count on at Smith Point.

Interested volunteers are urged to check TexBirds for the announcement of the starting date.

Houston Hosts A Different Kind of Hawk Watch

The Legend of Pale Male

Houston Audubon announced the movie coming in September chronicling a true story of the Red-tailed Hawk known to New Yorkers as Pale Male.

For me this will be another chapter in my own journey for birding. It began with a book that Marie Winn wrote. It is a charming book, *Red-Tails in Love*, which was also inspired by this special Red-Tail. Winn begins the saga as a reporter sent for a story on the hawk; she quickly becomes caught up in the stories of the watchers and the birds that the Central Park bird watchers are keeping their eyes upon. Passing seasons with the resident birds and the migrants, bringing to life a wonderful park that is a hot spot of activity, she is now an avid birdwatcher. I was captivated with a desire to travel to this migrant trap and experience for myself the park she described. In 2010 for Mothers Day I spent 3 wonderful days at a hotel across from the park, able to be in the park from daylight to dark for a great birding adventure. Add this book to your list and treat yourself to the film, Central Park might just lure you there.

Vicki Sims

Via the Internet

New Names for Old Favorites:

Keep current with the changes made to names of Warblers and Thrush. Read about the Warblers by going to <http://birdingblogs.com/2011/kennkaufman/dendroic> This is an international blog site of interest to birders.

FYI App Users:

BirdsEye is an app that links tech-savvy feather fiends with eBird, an online database of sightings around the world. Users enter a list of the birds they've seen, then BirdsEye locates users with the phone's GPS and displays birds they haven't seen that have been spotted nearby.

About the Ornithology Group

The Ornithology Group (OG) is a division of the Outdoor Nature Club (ONC), a non-profit organization dedicated to greater knowledge about the environment and wildlife of the Upper Texas Coast. The OG is a club of individuals interested in all aspects of birding, including bird identification, listing bird sightings, competing in birding events, and preserving bird habitat. Some members study bird behavior, biology, distribution and migration, while others just enjoy watching birds. The organization is designed to accommodate these diverse birding interests. Monthly meetings and field trips provide an opportunity to interact with and learn from experts in local and international birding.

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OG website:	http://www.ornithologygroup.org/		
ONC website:	http://www.outdoornatureclub.org/		

Ornithology Group Houston Outdoor Nature Club Minutes of Meeting Monday, May 2, 2011 Bayland Community Center Number of Attendees: 49

- 1. Silent Auction:** A silent auction was held during the Learning Corner time as an OG fund raiser. Bids were taken on old OG library books and were purchased.
- 2. Sightings:** Birds recently sighted includes: 4 Soras, 2 King Rails and 5 Least Bitterns at Anahuac; a Pileated Woodpecker feeding babies; Swainson's Warbler at Boy Scout Woods; Yellow Warbler, Peregrine Falcon, American Redstart, Downy Woodpecker. A number of Cassin's Sparrows on the Katy Prairie can still be seen. A Yellow-billed Cuckoo at El Franco Lee Park and a Great Blue Heron seen on top of Dr. Marrack's pool cover.

3. **Minutes:** The minutes from the April 4, 2011 meeting were approved as printed in the May issue of *The Spoonbill*.
4. **Library:** Deborah Valdez said to contact her over the summer if anyone would like to borrow any of the OG Library books. She will work it out to get them delivered.
5. **Membership:** Margret Simmons introduced JoAnn Raine who will be assisting Margret with Membership duties. Margret reminded everyone to please sign in and also to pay your membership dues for 2011 if not already paid. She has a few ONC Yearbooks left for anyone who would like one.
6. **Treasurer's Report:** Jerry Stanislav handed out copies of the proposed budget. A motion was made to accept the budget followed by a second. The budget was voted on and approved.
7. **The Spoonbill:** Al Shultz reported that the reason *The Spoonbill* was not mailed as yet was because HISD, the printers, were busy with other projects and would be mailed on Tuesday 5-3-11. Vicki Sims will be taking over the Editor position.
8. **Announcements:** (a) Pam Smolen proposed that a \$200.00 donation be given to KPC and the Warren Ranch land acquisition project and also \$200.00 to Anahuac for trees to be planted by the Friends of Anahuac. Both donations were voted on and approved. (b) Dr. Marrack discussed two environmental issues; The White Stallion Coal Power Plant and the Nuclear Power Plant in Bay City. (c) Pam Smolen announced that a Vice-chair was still needed. This position arranges for the speakers for the monthly OG meeting. It is an important part of the OG organization. If you are interested in volunteering for this position, please contact Pam Smolen. She discussed that the Board members will help with suggestions for speakers and John Schneider already has 3 speakers lined up for the Fall. (d) Pam thanked this year's Board Members for all their time and work they did for OG.
9. **Past Field Trips:** Adam Wood reported that on the April 16th Field Trip, about 108 species were seen for the day. On the Quarterly Trip to Corpus Christi 170 species were spotted including 23 of Warblers, Ovenbirds and a Least Bittern.
10. **Future Field Trips:** Adam Wood announced that May's Monthly Field Trip on 5-21-11, will be to The Katy Prairie area. Adam and Kevin will not be able to attend and will need someone to volunteer to lead this trip. Meeting time is 7:00 a.m. at Paul Rushing Park.
11. **Election of Board Members:** Adam Wood presented the following slate of officers for the Ornithology Group of the Outdoor Nature Club for the 2011 to 2013 term:

Chair:	Marcy Brown		
Membership:	Margret Simmons and Joanne Raine		
Vice-Chair:	open	Treasurer:	Harlan Evans
Secretary:	Marie Asscherick	Field Trips:	Kevin Poling
Librarian:	Deborah Valdez	<i>The Spoonbill:</i>	Vicki Sims

It was moved and seconded that we accept the slate of officers for 2011-2013. Motion passed.

12. **Program:** John Schneider introduced Stephan Lorenz who presented the program "Birding and Living in the Kimberley". Stephan spent 3 months living on the very remote region of western Australia known as the Kimberley. He worked 10 hours a day in the field doing research on the species of birds known as Fairy-wrens. This region has 2 seasons: wet, when the roads are shut down, and dry. There is much animal life on the Mornington Wildlife Sanctuary; 202 species of birds, 76 Reptiles, 22 Amphibians, 33 Mammals and also 600 plant species. Stephen studied the species Purple-crowned Fairy-wren along the rivers and creeks where there are tall river grasses and Pandanus, a Palm like plant where they live, eat and breed. These birds along with the Gouldian Finch, are threatened species. Other birds located in this region include: Rainbow Bee Eaters, Australian Bustard, Crimson Finches, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Great Bowerbird and Grey-fronted Honeyeater. Education programs and measures are taken to protect this region.

**SEPTEMBER LABOR DAY
CHANGES THE
MONTHLY MEETING DATE
MARK YOUR CALENDAR

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 12**

The Spoonbill Wants Your Help...

Stories, notes, trip reports, or other materials for future issues are always welcome. Send to the Editor by email at

oncspoon@gmail.com

Outdoor Nature Club
 Ornithology Group
 P.O. Box 270894
 Houston, TX 77277-0894

TO START OR RENEW A MEMBERSHIP:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

E-Mail: _____

	<i>Individual</i>	<i>Family</i>
ONC Annual Dues:	\$ 8.00	\$ 15.00
OG Annual Dues:	\$ 14.00	\$ 19.00
Total:	\$ 22.00	\$ 34.00

Additional contributions are welcome in any amount.

Send to:
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Discount for Electronic *Spoonbill*

Members who do not wish to receive a printed copy of *The Spoonbill* can save \$4 off their dues:

	<i>Individual</i>	<i>Family</i>
ONC	\$ 8.00	\$ 15.00
OG	\$ 10.00	\$ 15.00
Total	\$ 18.00	\$ 30.00

Membership questions
 Contact Margret Simmons
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