

## **Monthly Meeting January 6, 2014**

**Bayland Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet St, Houston, TX**

6:30 pm [Learning Corner](#): Katy Prairie Update by Bob Honig

7:00 pm [Ornithology Group](#) (OG) Business Meeting

7:30 pm [Program](#): The iPhone as a Birding Tool, Part 2, by Kendra Kocab

Field Trip: January 11, 8 am – Brazos Bend State Park, led by David Heinicke

[Membership Renewal for 2014 | Steve Gross | Grand Mesa Colorado:  
Birding the Boreal in the Summer?](#)

## **Katy Prairie Update**

**By Bob Honig**

Bob will summarize the results of the Cypress Creek Christmas Bird Count held January 1, 2013 on the Katy Prairie. He also will discuss some of the recent activities of the Katy Prairie Conservancy (KPC) and the Katy Prairie in general. This will be a good preview to our February 15 field trip that Bob will lead, focusing on KPC properties. [↑top↑](#)

## **The iPhone as a Birding Tool, Part 2 of 2 Parts**

**By Kendra Kocab**

This the conclusion of the November Learning Corner. Kendra will continue her talk about using applications on your smartphone as a birding tool. Although she will focus on the iPhone, most applications are also available on an Android phone and tablet and iPad. She will include bird-specific applications such as field guides and bird call applications, but will also cover a few applications that are not bird-specific such as WindAlert. [↑top↑](#)

## **Brazos Bend State Park Field Trip (January 11, 8:00 am)**

Arrive at the 40 Acre Lake rest rooms by 8 am. "Earlier birders" will be directed to the pier and can census the lake until the full group has arrived. We will then circumnavigate 40 Acre Lake clockwise to the tower and back to the parking lot. Next we will drive to Elm Lake and snack, rest briefly, and bird the north (viewing platform) side. Based on the weather and Christmas Bird Count results, we will then suggest other options within the park such as a full walk around Elm Lake or Old Horseshoe Lakes. [↑top↑](#)

## Steve Gross

By Larry Dybala

Steve Gross passed away on November 26, 2013. He was a teacher, musician, fly fisherman, wine connoisseur, and birder. He was President of the Texas Ornithological Society for the previous two years. He made presentations for OG and led OG's week-long trip to Idaho which I was happily able to participate in. We shall miss him. [↑top↑](#)

## Grand Mesa Colorado: Birding the Boreal in the Summer?

By Stephan Lorenz

With the New Year here and fresh birding prospects on the horizon, it is never too early to make spring and summer travel plans. Let me recommend a late summer escape to Colorado, where cool mountain air and unique boreal birds will offer reprieve from the local weather. While Colorado boasts a relatively large diversity of bird species for a landlocked state during any time of the year. For birders visiting from Texas, the high altitude and boreal specialties will be top on their list, no pun intended.

The Grand Mesa in western Colorado provides relatively easy access to a variety of high elevation habitats atop the largest flat topped mountain in the world. Scenic Highway 65 heads north from Highway 92, passing through Cedar Ridge, before snaking its way into the mountains. Highway 65 can also be reached via its northern end along Interstate 70 just east of Grand Junction. While Grand Junction itself does not have much to offer, it would make a good base for exploring the nearby mountains.

By the time I reached the Grand Mesa area, after spending much of the day crossing southwestern Colorado and photographing Black Swifts near the town of Gunnison, I could barely discern the rough outlines of the mountainous landscape. With the forest stretching and still under a moonless sky, I decided it would be an excellent time to try for one of the more famous and difficult denizens of the mature spruce and fir forests, the Boreal Owl. It was not until the 1980s that nesting of the species was confirmed in the state, and the area where the owls are resident is often inaccessible in the early spring due to heavy snow. Many bird watchers try to hear the species at famous Cameron Pass, but deep snow and cold temperatures make it difficult to actually see one there.



I pulled into the lot at the Grand Mesa visitor center and stepped out of the car into a decidedly chillier climate, but did not need more than a sweater to keep comfortable. No gloves and no hat required, I could have almost chased Boreal Owls in a T-shirt. My plan was simple, look and listen for the owl either all night or until I would collapse from fatigue. After the long day, driving from Arizona, stopping

further south and the long slog here, I doubted I would last very long. Surprisingly by midnight and a handful of unproductive stops later, I was still going strong.

I stopped the car in a large gravelly pullout halfway across the mesa and found an unused forestry road disappearing into a patch of scattered spruce trees. I followed the track and within five minutes had a response from a Boreal Owl. I was able to carefully follow the bird over an hour, as it hunted from low perches, even running along a log on the ground, and flew between openings in the forest. Apparently, Boreal Owls prefer spruce-fir forest interspersed with openings and this one stayed mainly along the edge of the clearing. A second individual called and briefly flew over.



Once the owls moved off for the final time, I sat down on a stump, realized that I was truly tired and a bit lost. Eventually, I found the track and made my way back to the car. Thirty minutes later, I was encamped in one of the nearby campgrounds. The following morning was predictably slow. When I finally crawled from my tent, Yellow-bellied Marmots were sunning themselves on nearby rocks and shy elk slipped back into the forest. Miles and miles of hiking

trails atop Grand Mesa offer endless opportunities to access forests, alpine meadows, lakes, and wetlands. Yet much good birding habitat is accessible along the numerous roads. During a brief stop and walk near Island Lake I saw a large accipiter flash through the canopy. A bit of squeaking quickly brought the bird back into view; an immature Goshawk flew onto a branch overhead and eyed me suspiciously.

An evening stop at Mesa Lake proved very productive. Balmy temperatures lured me down another trail. This one mostly paved encircling the small body of water. Near the end, I found not one, but three American Three-toed Woodpeckers. A pair was industriously working on a fallen tree, ignoring me completely as I snuck up to take many close-up pictures. A nearby campground proved to be in the middle of perfect habitat and I pitched my tent. A bull moose wandered across a clearing into the night and an unseen Boreal Owl screeched once.

Any trail leading through conifer habitat on Grand Mesa can hold species that are usually rare further south. These include Red Crossbill, Pine and Evening Grosbeaks, and Gray Jay. I was fortunate enough to encounter all these species along a hiking trail near Griffith Lake. Plenty of more common birds were busy feeding in the trees, including Mountain Chickadees, Yellow-rumped Warblers, and a variety of sparrows.

I decided to take a break from the mountains for half a day and visited Colorado National Monument west of Grand Junction. The easily accessible site is reached via exit 31 going westbound on I-70. The dramatic landscape of red sandstone cliffs and rugged rocky terrain harbors a completely different set of low elevation arid habitats, including pinyon-juniper woodland. At the first stop, I picked up the distant calls of Pinyon Jays and saw a handful of these wonderful birds moving along the far crest of a steep hill. I found a nearby trail and rushed

towards the top. I should not have worried as suddenly Pinyon Jays came streaming down the slopes, perching on scattered trees, landing on the ground and flipping pebbles, and even alighting on rocks right next to the trail. At least fifty of the powdery blue and noisy birds moved rapidly through their favored habitat, crossing the main road and disappearing from view as quickly as they had appeared.

Longer trails explore the backcountry of the canyons, but shorter paths lead to photogenic viewpoints. Other birds of note here included Gray Vireo, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Gray Flycatchers, and Golden Eagles. The Grand Mesa area and surroundings offer several days of great birding with many special target species. While visiting at the end of the summer is not the prime time for migrant warblers and flycatchers, many boreal species are easier to find during that time, especially the owl.



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## **Membership (2014 Membership Renewal)**

ONC/OG dues are paid yearly on a calendar basis beginning January 1st. Life Members of ONC still need to pay yearly OG dues used to help pay for Spoonbill expenses, speakers and their travel, OG donations to other organizations, and other OG expenses.

Pay by check at the next OG meeting or mail the form to submit updated information for the ONC Yearbook and database along with your check. If you have questions about your membership status, contact Margret Simmons at [msimmons@compassnet.com](mailto:msimmons@compassnet.com) or 713-776-2511I

IF YOU ARE ATTENDING THE MEETINGS AND FIELD TRIPS, THEN YOU SHOULD BE PAYING YOUR DUES!

**TO START OR RENEW A MEMBERSHIP:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

ONC Annual Dues: \$ 8.00 for individuals; \$ 15.00 for families

OG Annual Dues: \$ 12.00 for individuals; \$ 15.00 for families

**Total: \$ 20.00 for individuals; \$ 30.00 for families**

Additional contributions are welcome in any amount.

Send to:

Outdoor Nature Club

PO Box 270894

Houston, Tx. 77277-0894

*Membership questions?*

Contact Margret Simmons

Phone 713-776-2511

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