



Monthly Meeting December 3, 2018
Bayland Community Center
6400 Bissonnet St, Houston, TX

6:30 pm Learning Corner: Group Social

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

7:30 pm Program: Birding in Madagascar by Lisa Li

Field Trip: [December 8, to Laas Farm led by John Berner and Harvey Laas](#)

[Minutes of November OG Meeting](#) | [Minutes of the October OG Meeting](#)

[Upcoming Texas Birding Events \(link to web page\)](#)

[Hart Beat: Reddish Egret \(link to web page\)](#)

Laas Farm Field Trip, Saturday, December 8, 7 am

Led by John Berner and Harvey Laas

Lass farm, located at 9870 FM 359, Brookshire, Texas (10 miles from downtown Brookshire) is 1500 acres, about 2.5 square miles. It has been in the Laas family since the 1800's. It is an ebird hotspot with 230 species recorded. <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L3107741>.

We will meet at Harvey's house. To get there, go through a small, short gate is on east side of road (just S of FM529 on FM359). The Gate is hard to see at 0.75 miles south of FM529 on FM 359. Once you go through the gate off FM359, Harvey has a one mile long quite bumpy dirt lane to the east so allow 5 minutes after leaving FM359 to drive due east across his property to reach his new house.

We will start field tip at 7am but some may bird earlier than that at the meeting place while were waiting for others to show.(Short-eared Owl is possible along entrance driveway before 7 on your way to the house. Harvey will be looking for the owl earlier in the week, and John will let us know).

Field trip Coordinator: Teresa Connell, (505) 280-7443.

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Minutes of November 5, 2018 Meeting

by Jean Greenhalgh

The November 2018 meeting of OG was held on November 5, 2018 at the Bayland Park Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet, at 7:00 pm.

As there was no Learning Corner, the meeting started at 7:00.

It was announced that long time OG member and Texas Master Naturalist Odie Asscherick passed away at the end of October. This is the link to his obituary.

<https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/webster-tx/odelin-asscherick-8037509/add-memory>

The December field trip will be on Saturday, December 8 to the Laas Farm, Brookshire. John Berner and Harvey Laas will lead the trip. The trip will start at 7am, but Short-eared Owl is possible along the entrance driveway before 7:00, for those wishing to bird earlier.

Christmas Bird Counts start December 14 and Texas CBCs are listed in chronological order, together with other forthcoming birding events, on the OG website at <http://ornithologygroup.com/Events/>.

A request was made for Learning Corner presenters.

There is a GoFundMe website for replacing the Christmas Oasis water tank.

The main program was entitled Cuba – Birds and Culture. This was presented by Gary Clark with photographs by his wife, Kathy Adams Clark. Gary writes the weekly Nature column for Saturday's Houston Chronicle. He is a professor at Lone Star College. He has been Vice President and Dean at the College, but has returned to teaching, which he prefers to administration.

Gary and Kathy toured Cuba December 2014 – January 2015.

In October 1492 Columbus described Cuba as “The most beautiful land I have ever seen”, a sentiment with which Gary agrees. He found the Cubans he met as pleasant and nice to talk to. The infrastructure was mostly dilapidated, with few new buildings. The hotels in which they stayed were old, and, in some cases, beautiful old buildings. Unfortunately, they were not well maintained with both faucets and WCs which did not work in some places.

In some places, the habitat was being destroyed for agriculture. Hopefully this will not continue in the future.

Cuba is 770 miles long (for comparison Houston to El Paso is 800 miles) and 119 wide, and 90 miles from Key West. There are three rivers flowing north and three flowing south. The mountain range Sierra Maestra rises to 5,000 feet. The climate is hot and humid.

There are 385 bird species reported, 70% of which are migrants, many of which come to the U.S.A. There are 25 – 27 endemics, one of which is the smallest bird in the world, the Bee Hummingbird. The only endemics they failed to see were Cuban Parakeet, Cuban Kite and Greater Antillan Nightjar.

Their driver was Jose, and their “guide” was Edel the son of one of the governmental Ministers

After landing in Havana, they drove to Parque Nacional La Guira. There they visited the redoubt of Che Guevara. The endemic birds seen were the Cuban Green Woodpecker, the Cuban Solitaire and the Yellow-headed Warbler.

Then a long drive to the Bay of Pigs which has a tourist resort and accommodation in cabins. The beach, Playa Giron, is surrounded with farmland and swampy forest and marshes. There were plans to drain this area for agriculture. In this area they saw the Bee Hummingbird, the Blue-headed Quail Dove, which was very skittish, the Cuban Pygmy Owl, Bare-legged Owl (formerly Cuban Screech Owl), Cuban Tody and Fernandina’s Flicker.

On the western side of the Bay of Pigs is the Parque Nacional Cienga de Zapata, which is the second largest marsh in the western hemisphere. Here, they saw the Zapata Rail, Zapata Wren and Zapata Sparrow.

On to Camaguey, where they saw a Cuban Trogon on a ranch. The route there was on modern roads which were largely devoid of motorized vehicles. Much of the transportation was by horse and cart. People pay to hitch on cars, buses and trucks. They stand roadside with money in their hands to hail any passing vehicle.

The next stop on the trip was at Caya Coco, a beautiful resort which was Chinese owned and run. An abandoned airport and estate were in this area, as well as marshes. Endemics seen included Greater Antillan Grackle, Cuban Bullfinch and Oriente Warbler.

They then spent time in Havana before flying home.

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Minutes of October 1, 2018 Meeting

by Jean Greenhalgh

The October 2018 meeting of OG was held on October 1, 2018 at the Bayland Park Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet, at 7:00 pm. 21 members were present.

As there was no Learning Corner, the meeting started at 7:00.

Nina Rach chaired the meeting.

A request was made for Learning Corner presenters.

There is a GoFundMe website for replacing the Christmas Oasis water tank.

TOS weekender trip registration has changed. There are now 3 days to register, followed by a lottery drawing.

Recent Texas rare birds included a Piratic Flycatcher at South Llano SP, a Red-billed Hornbill at Warren Ranch Road and Jack Road intersection on the Katy Prairie (probably an exotic escapee).

Forthcoming birding events are listed on the OG website at <http://ornithologygroup.com/Events/>.

The main program was **Birding Then and Now, Part 2** presented by Fred Collins and Bob Honig, with the subtitle Here then, not now and Here now, not then. Fred and Bob are considering writing an article, derived from these talks, for the Texas Ornithological Society's Texas Birds Annual publication.

Part 1 was presented in February covering the changes in the birds as well as the places birded in Houston and Chambers County. Part 2 covers the changes in places birded in Galveston, Harris, Fort Bend and Waller counties.

Pat Sullivan and Katrina Ladwig's booklet on Good Birding Trips, published by OG in 1968, was the basis for birding locations 50 years ago. Bob displayed aerial photos taken from Google Maps now and in the 60's, and earlier, side by side to show land use differences. The changes in both land use and accessibility were fascinating.

Fred had personal information and anecdotes about most of the birding sites from the 1950's to the present day.

In 1968 the only birding locations mentioned on Galveston Island were East Beach and Kemper Park. The shape of East Beach has changed because of natural deposits of silt and vegetation growth. An area NE of the jetty was called Big Reef and had big nesting colonies, but mangroves have grown in that area since then covering the nesting area.

Kemper Park hasn't changed but the socio-economic situation of the area has changed and birders no longer feel comfortable there. It is good for warblers. Many years ago, Fred saw 20 Cerulean Warblers there on his first OG field trip.

All the following birding places are new. The 99th Street Golf Course is next to the airport. It has been good for curlews, pipits and warblers.

Lafitte's Cove came into being in 1992. When George Mitchell developed the area he had to commit to keeping 50% of the area as natural habitat. Before then it was mostly unprotected sand bars which were washed over during storms and hurricanes. Development protected the area and the current habitat came into being.

Galveston State Park opened in 1975. The area was acquired in 1969. It was prairie but mostly overgrazed cow pasture. It was good Eskimo Curlew habitat, which was no longer being seen by

1969. Now trees and shrubs make it a poorer shorebird and prairie species habitat but better for warblers.

Jim Stevenson's house. This area was previously prairie on which ranchers piled oyster shells 20 feet high and built a corral where cattle were penned during hurricanes. The resulting manure, mixed with oyster shells, improved the soil. Jim bought the land and planted live oaks and salt cedars, while Hercules Club seeded naturally. This is now one of the best migrant traps.

Dos Vacas Muertas Sanctuary was donated in 2001 to the Houston Audubon Society. This was also originally a cow pasture. It has a pond and a drip, and the fence line trees have grown up making it a good habitat with an eBird list of 250 species.

San Luis Pass has changed. There used to only be sand and visibility was 100 - 200 yards to the water, but grass and brush have grown up and it is much further to the water.

The area north of Galveston was covered next encompassing Alvin, Friendswood and Pearland to West Galveston Bay. Much of the area was prairie with open grazing in the 1920's up until the 50's when the space program led to development of the area. Thousands of Greater Prairie Chickens lived in the areas around Ellington Field south to Texas City. In 1915 Fred's grandfather was on a cattle drive and Prairie Chickens were shot to eat as a change from beef. Spaceland airport used to be in this area and the chickens boomed on the runway.

Also in this area, J D Woodhams's Attwater Ranch at TX Hwy 146 and FM 1266 had 600 Prairie Chickens which the ranchers fed, using 100 lb of grain a week.

The Texas Nature Conservancy's Texas City Prairie Preserve was established in 1995 but the Prairie Chickens are no longer there. There is a captive breeding facility at NASA and the new hatches each year are sent to Attwater National Wildlife Refuge as well as to private ranch areas in Goliad County to help preserve the species.

Henslow's sparrow used to live in a field near Hobby Airport. 60 were counted there on August 11, 1984.

Fort Bend County. Hale Ranch was acquired by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in 1976-77 and opened in 1984 as Brazos Bend State Park. OG had field trips there, led by David Dolphin and Ted Eubanks, before it opened to the public.

In the 1950's, before it became known as the Katy Prairie, the area was called Peggy Smith's Rice Fields. In the 1970's there were 70,000 acres of rice fields, now there are 7,000 acres. In the 1950's snow geese, which has previously wintered in the coastal marshes, moved to these rice fields but they now mainly winter in the rice fields in Arkansas. The area has seen, and is still seeing, a lot of development.

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ONC website: <http://www.outdoornatureclub.org/>

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