

Monthly Meeting April 6, 2020 CANCELLED
Bayland Community Center
6400 Bissonnet St, Houston, TX

6:30 pm Learning Corner CANCELLED

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

7:15 pm [Program](#): CANCELLED

[Field Trip](#): Boat Charter to Matagorda Island, Saturday, April 26, 7:30 am, led by Janey Woodley and John Berner POSSIBLY TO BE CANCELLED

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All events have been cancelled for the month of April (field trip will likely be cancelled) because of the Corona Virus lockdown. May events will also likely be cancelled; look for updates in the May newsletter.

Letter from the Chair

Greetings, during this uncertain time!

For many, birding during this year's Spring migration may be more limited than normal, but most of our parks are still open and the birds will still be flying through. Walking, hiking (and birding) are all permissible outdoor activities under Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo's stay-at-home order.

Our Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary in San Jacinto County will remain open to members (if you need the gate code, just contact me).

Fortunately, we did have several marvelous OG field trips in the past month, including David Sarkozi's Leap Day trip to the private NRG cooling ponds and two public parks in Chambers County, Robbin Mallett's March 7 trip to Cullinan Park in Fort Bend County, and our March 14-

15 weekender with Ron Weeks to Welder Wildlife Foundation, the coast, and Lake Corpus Christi State Park in San Patricio County. Thank you to all who worked on pulling these trips together. I am glad we had cooperative weather and so many people were able to participate!

There is yet one field trip scheduled – Janey Woodley’s Matagorda Island chartered boat trip to Matagorda Island on Sunday, April 26. Ten people have signed up, and we are going to wait and see how the health crisis plays out in the next few weeks before making a decision about whether to go forward with it or not. There are no more ferries to the island, and the open-air boat ride from Port O’Connor to the island is about 20 minutes. Each boat can seat six guests. Please contact Janey if you want to discuss, at jwoodley711@gmail.com. We’ll send out more info about the status in another few weeks.

Events

Needless to say, almost every birding event in the area has been cancelled as we are all encouraged to avoid gathering in crowds. Bayland Community Center is closed, and the April 6 Ornithology Group meeting is cancelled; we will reschedule David Bradford for a meeting later this year. If Bayland remains closed, then we may try to set up an online broadcast of Adam Wood’s program, "The Quest to See 700 Species in the Lower 48," in lieu of meeting together on May 4.

We are also scheduled to hold the annual Outdoor Nature Club meeting in conjunction with OG’s May 4 meeting and **two ONC board positions will be up for election**: Executive Director of Sanctuaries (currently Sergio Henao) and **Secretary/Treasurer** (currently Connie Blakely). Connie would like to step down and we could really use someone to step up and help with this.

Moving forward... Do you enjoy our field trips and meetings? Please consider sharing YOUR talents by planning a field trip, arranging speakers for meetings, leading a Learning Corner or preparing a talk, writing for The Spoonbill, bringing snacks to a meeting, or helping with creative advertising. There’s a lot to do, and we will be a more successful club if everyone helps a bit.

Nina Rach, OG Chair

Field Trip Charter to Matagorda Island, Sunday, April 26, 7:30am, Leaving from Port O'Connor POSSIBLY TO BE CANCELLED

Led by Janey Woodley and John Berner

Matagorda Island offers fabulous spring migration birding! There are roads, runways, mowed trails and brushy areas that can be hiked around the harbor near the old U.S. Air Force base, closed in 1975. According to eBird, 277 species have been recorded at the Matagorda Island SP (CTC 034) hot spot. In April 2019, birders recorded 100+ species there daily, with a wide diversity of shorebirds and migrant songbirds.

The TPWD no longer runs a public ferry, so access is limited and we are chartering a boat to cross to the island (8-9 miles, 20 minutes), at a cost of ~\$30/person roundtrip. RSVP to Janey oodley at jwoodley711@gmail.com. She will provide information about where to meet.

Additional trip info: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1493219157514290/>

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San Patricio County Trip Summary

By Ron Weeks

On March 14th & 15th, 10 birders visited San Patricio County (north and east of Corpus Christi), as part of the latest OG field trip. The trip began with a visit to the Welder Wildlife Foundation near Sinton. This 7800-acre preserve has a staff of nine people that maintain this area, which is largely made up of mesquite brushland. Welder Education & Volunteer Program Coordinator, Angie Arredondo, guided us to Big Lake, a large bulrush-filled wetland not far from the Aransas River, to start our day. Here, we added many waders including Roseate Spoonbills, egrets and herons along with a few waterfowl, highlighted by a male Cinnamon Teal. Other exciting birds including a male Yellow-headed Blackbird and an adult Bald Eagle that flew across the lake and perched for us!

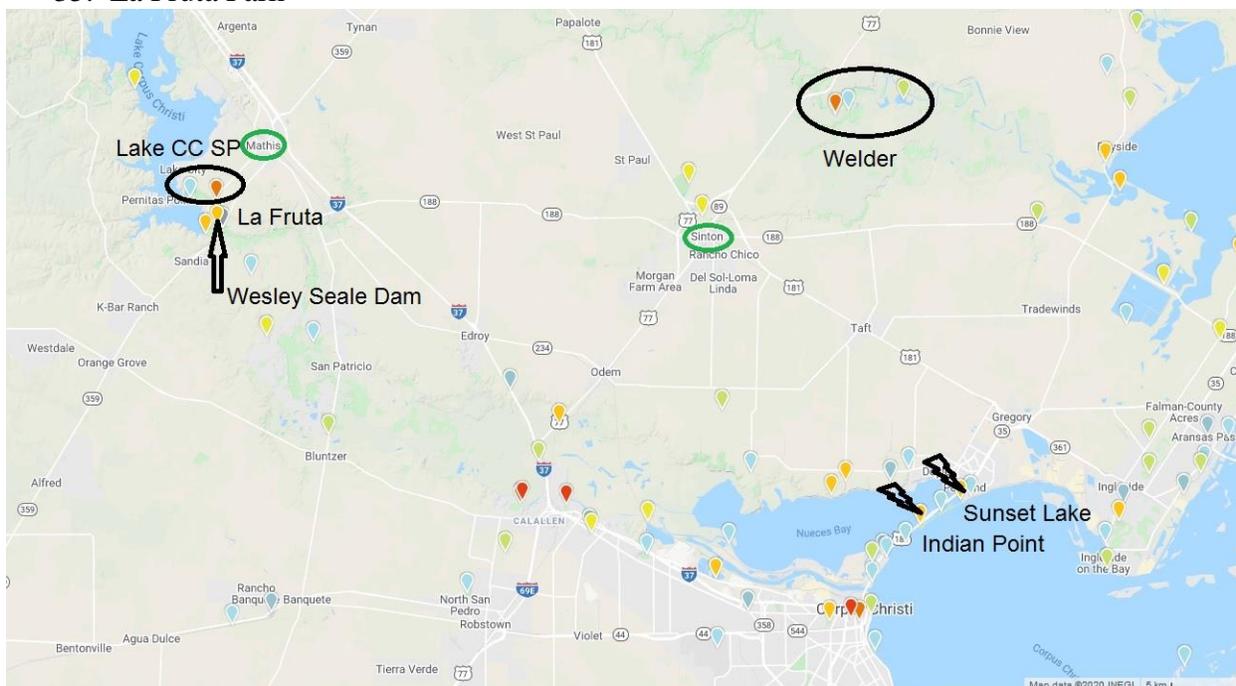


After taking in the impressive museum and wildlife collections at Welder, we moved to the coast, birding Indian Point and Sunset Lake in Portland. This area added both pelicans and many other saltwater species including some early arriving Sandwich and Least Terns. The highlight was scanning the flats at Sunset Lake where we enjoyed leisurely scope views of all four of the small ringed plovers – Piping, Snowy, Semipalmated, and Wilson's.

We started Sunday morning at Lake Corpus Christi State Park near Mathis. Several of us who camped were serenaded most of the night by Common Pauriques at the Bird's Nest camping area on a bluff that overlooks the lake. We started the next morning doing a lake watch that included both cormorants, egrets, herons, and two Caspian Terns on the far shore of the lake. The feeders and bird blind area near our campsites was ablaze with color as we watched singing

Audubon's Orioles, Green Jays, and oodles of Northern Cardinals visit. The doves also put on a show, as we got point-blank views of White-tipped, Common Ground, Inca, White-winged, and Mourning. Others in the feeder area included a male Black-and-white Warbler and Olive Sparrows. Later in the morning, we moved down below the dam to a sanctuary owned by the City of Corpus Christi, where we spied a male Hooded Warbler among the regular residents. In all, we tallied over 130 species for the weekend.

1. Welder Wildlife Foundation
2. Lake Corpus Christi State Park (CTC 080)
5. Sunset Lake (Portland)
6. Wesley Seale Dam and City of C.C. Wildlife Sanctuary (CTC 079)
7. Indian Point
12. Welder Wildlife foundation- HQ
17. Welder Wildlife Foundation—Big Lake
21. Lake CC SP—Bird's Nest Shelter Area
29. Welder Wildlife Foundation—Hackberry Mott
35. La Fruta Park



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NRG Cooling Ponds Field Trip Report

By Nina Rach

It was a refreshing 50 deg at the 6:47am sunrise on Leap Day, Saturday, February 29, and even the hint of a rainbow as I headed east on I-10. Eighteen of us met field trip leaders David Sarkozi and John Berner at 7:30am at McCollum Park, in Beach City (east of Baytown). A few early folks birded the park (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S65283796>), before we left half the cars behind and carpooled about a mile to the NRG property. The weather was beautiful and a light breeze kept stray mosquitos away.

We spent about six hours getting a terrific overview of the Cedar Bayou Generating Ponds, also known as the NRG cooling ponds, the reservoir for the Cedar Bayou power plant [Google Maps calls it Dutton Lake]. This is restricted, private property and we are very grateful that David was able to arrange permission for our visit.

We saw about 65 species at NRG, including at least 3500 individual waterfowl; the majority (2500) were American Coots, but also Gadwall, Canvasback, Lesser Scaup (Lisa & Zhi Li also saw Greater Scaup), Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Hooded & Red-breasted Mergansers, and Ruddy Ducks. There was a single Virginia Rail and Common Gallinule, and several Sora, various sandpipers on the pocket beaches along upper Galveston Bay, Ring-billed Gulls and a Herring Gull, Caspian Terns, and Common Loons (at a distance). Most of the expected egrets, herons, and wrens were there, along with Pipits, Savannah and Swamp Sparrows. One of the highlights was watching a Bald Eagle pursue and harass an Osprey carrying a fish. Group list: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S65280532>.



When we returned to McCollum Park, the group took a quick walk and saw 11 species, including lingering Pine Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and Chipping Sparrows (<https://ebird.org/tx/checklist/S65289552>). I stayed a bit longer and saw 24 species (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S65282923>), notably a Blue-headed Vireo and an Eastern Phoebe.



About half the group went on with David to bird at Wallisville Lake Project-- Hugo Point Park, 1:30-2:15pm, and saw 14 species (<https://ebird.org/tx/checklist/S65289568>), including a Sora, Osprey, and Bald Eagle.

A Big Thank You! to David Sarkozi for pulling this trip together. I think everyone would love to return and I hope we'll be able to arrange that.

Participants: David Sarkozi, John Berner, Nina Rach, Chris Steinke, Larry Dybala, Karen Goodger, Ellen Tarbox, Bill Tarbox, Barbara Stern, Patricia McIntosh, Lynn Foster, Lisa Li, Zhi Li, John Bartos, Cindy Bartos, Janet Neath, Cathy Hay, Michelle Rometry, and JR Ridgway.

Aerial photo of NRG Cooling Ponds

Photo of Bald Eagle pursuing Osprey by Richard Boettler

Photo of Blue-headed Vireo & blue-gray Gnatcatcher at McCollum Park, by Nina Rach

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A Pre-Pandemic Bird Hike at Cullinan Park

By Robbin Mallett, *Cullinan Park Conservancy Board*

When I led the Ornithology Field Trip at Cullinan Park on Saturday, March 7, I could not have imagined the changes that would completely transform our world before the end of the month. I'm so glad we were able to introduce so many people to the park before the coronavirus pandemic emerged. Although the restrooms are closed and social distancing rules apply, the park and trails remain open for use, and I know it is serving as a wonderful escape into nature for many.



It was a cool day when we met in the parking lot at Cullinan to check out the 754-acre property that has been experiencing a renewal in the past few years. In 2015, an Inter-local Agreement was hammered out between the City of Houston, Houston Parks Board, City of Sugar Land and the Cullinan Park Conservancy. In January 2016, the City of Sugar Land annexed the 754-acre Park, and now the City provides police patrol and park maintenance services. Phase 1 Improvements completed include a new restroom, .33 mile accessible concrete trail and lake overlook, new benches, donor recognition, understory clearing and more. Planning for Phase 2

improvements is underway which will include two additional miles of trail, additional parking and a nature-oriented LEAP Area (Learn, Explore & Play) for children.

We had a great turnout with 30 people joining in. Fortunately, I had recruited two highly skilled birders to help lead the hike. Thank you to Mark Scheuerman, our Fort Bend County eBird reviewer and Albert Ribes (aka the King of Cullinan) for sharing your knowledge of both birds and Cullinan. We began our park exploration at the boardwalk and observation tower to look for aquatic birds & ducks on White Lake and its shore-hugging wetlands. The Wood Ducks were a highlight and we heard Virginia Rail and Sora calling. We also saw blue-winged teal, ring-necked ducks, pied-billed grebes, a belted kingfisher and more. We then decided to split into two groups to take to the trails. Mark and Robbin took a group on the new accessible trail around White Lake and then checked out a few spots along Oyster Creek. Albert led a large group along Oyster Creek and all over and surprised some past park visitors who told me they saw parts of the park they'd never discovered before. It was a fun day, and even though it was too early for Spring migrants, as a group we saw 63 species (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S65547049>) and made sure to point out all the best spots to check once migration is in full swing.

Thank you to everyone who joined us on March 7th and, for those who weren't able to attend, check out this link for a 1-minute video produced by KHOU-Channel 11 about birding at Cullinan:

<https://www.cullinanparkconservancy.org/news/11/cullinan-park-in-sugar-land-is-a-birder%27s-paradise>

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Local Patch Challenge!

By David Sarkozi

I think it's time for another Texas Local Patch Challenge. We had one in 2016, where the goal was how many species could you find in your local patch. We defined a local patch as a 7.5-mile radius circle centered on your home (same as a CBC circle). It's a great way to discover fun birding locations close to home.

In 2016, I set up a FB group, now updated, for this interested in the challenge at

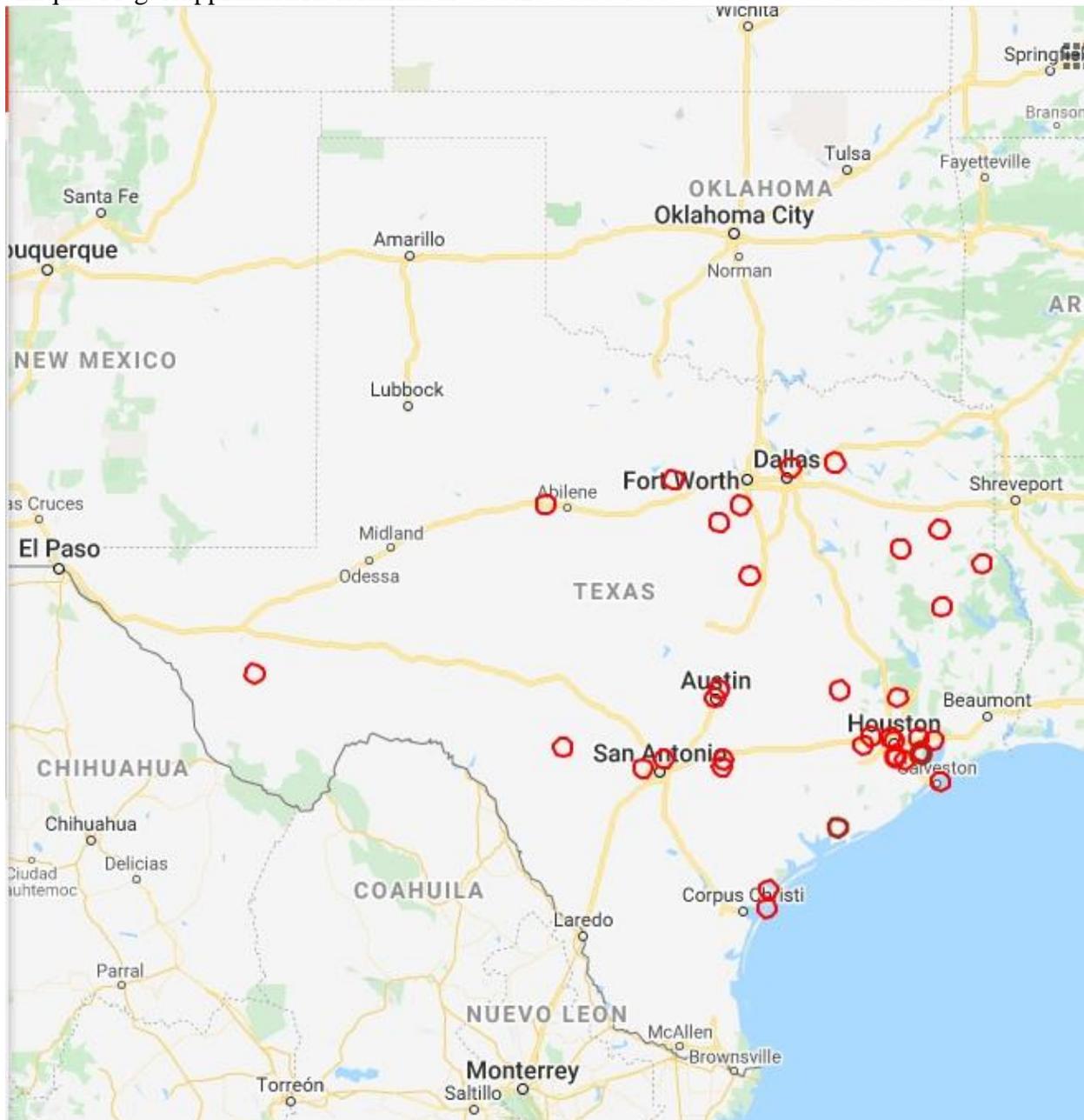
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/texaslocalpatchchallenge/>

There, we share some of our fun discoveries and explain different ways to draw a circle, so that you can use a Google Map to determine what's in your patch.

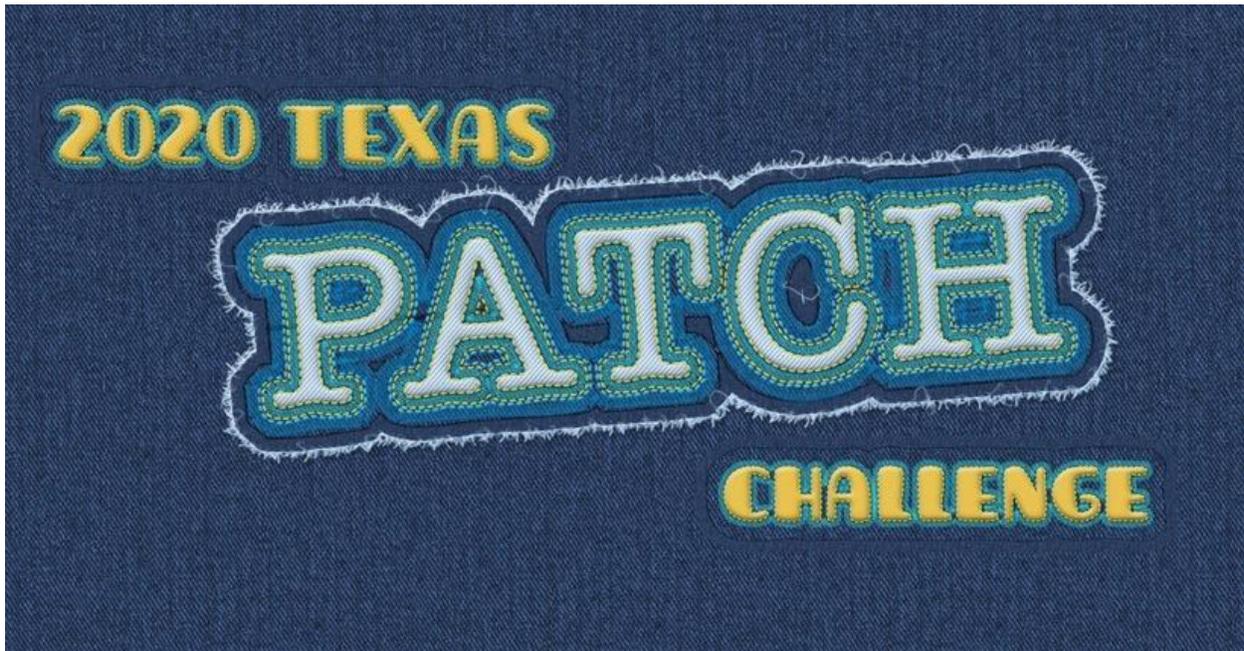
Also - eBird has feature called Patch Totals (accessed using the Explore tab). It's great for portraying the public and personal hotspots that are in your patch--and eBird does all the work keeping the totals for you.

Stay safe, stay close to home, and have some fun, eBird says I'm already at 85 species in my local patch for 2020. What's your total?

The Texas patch circle map can be found at
<https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1Ov-JzEqECYNgvrfnppRsbifOHvIKuiHu&ll=30.429083594055076%2C-99.0435905&z=6>



If you want your local patch circle displayed on the Texas, map you can do it two ways: send David a KMZ file of your circle generated by Google Earth, OR send him the KMZ file via a direct message and don't share here it on FaceBook. If you can't do that, send him either your address or the coordinates of your center and he will generate it for you (kudos for volunteering!) You can also share the address or coordinates via a direct message. David@Sarkozi.net



2020 Patch Challenge logo designed by Fay Trippet Ratta

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News from the Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary

by Nina Rach

There were Open Visitor's Days at the LTNS on the fourth Saturdays, January 25 and Feb 22. Sergio Henao led a Sanctuary Committee meeting onsite Feb 22, and that was also a tree-clearing day around our main buildings. A Big Thank You to our industrious crew: Bobby Hatfield, Chris Steinke, and Mark Day, for working all afternoon to remove trees and branches and cleaning off the roof of the education building.

Birds seen at LTNS on Jan 25 include: Mourning Dove, Turkey Vulture, Barred Owl, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, Blue-headed Vireo, Blue Jay, American Crow, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Carolina Wren, Eastern Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, American Robin, Cedar Waxwing, American Goldfinch, Pine Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and Northern Cardinal.



Birds seen at LTNS on Feb 22 include: Black Vulture, Red-tailed Hawk, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, Eastern Phoebe, American Crow, Carolina Chickadee, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, American Robin, Orange-crowned Warbler, Pine Warbler, and Yellow-rumped Warbler.

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Locked Down with a Purple Martin Colony

By Larry Dybala



The one bright spot with staying home is watching my purple martin colony most of the day. The pandemic coincides with spring migration. I have about 20 martins, now mostly males, that come in every evening around 7 pm, first flying around the colony for a half hour and then dive bombing with a screech into their house or gourd. In the morning they wake about 6:30 am and silently leave, one at a time, collecting high in the sky around their colony. They congregate multiple times during the day on and in their houses and gourds

to socialize and fight.

I usually watch them from a deck in the back of the house, about 15 feet away from the nearest house and gourd rack. I am just a little below eye level because the deck was built about a half story high. It gives me a great close-up view. Sometimes too close. Today I saw a Coopers hawk snatch one of my male Martins from 15 away for the second time this year.

At other times, I sit in the lot behind my house and watch the birds circle (the deck has a cover). It is fun to see the count slowly increasing as more Martins start joining the colony by circling with current members (especially after witnessing a loss to a hawk . I also get a chance to see other birds circling overhead, such as Red-Tailed Hawks (usually in pairs) and once a Bald Eagle. Black-bellied Whistling Ducks fly overhead in the evening, abandoning a cemetery pond where they have spend the day. Of course, Coopers Hawks are often seen being mobbed and trying to catch the Martins. Usually they do not succeed unless they are very stealthful.



I keep my colony free of all pests. One of my houses has two house sparrow traps that are always set. The hole is smaller than a Martin can get into, so I do not have to worry about trapping them. All of my large house compartments and gourds have starling-resistant entrances. The one house that has round holes has the small six-inch square compartments that starlings do not like. I also have bird netting snake traps under each pole. I always wondered how I would remove a snake trapped in the netting. The idea for the trap is that the snake's scales get caught in the netting and he gets stuck. This happened about three weeks ago. I pulled a rat snake from the back and used a paper cutter to cut each cell of the net that was close to his body. As I approached the head, I put on gloves just in case. At the end of the process he was so still I thought he might be dead, as I had to squeeze him through the netting with a lot of force. But he was just playing dead; he squirmed in the bucket I threw him in. I took him across a busy street in a wooded area next to a golf course. Hope he got a non-bird meal after this ordeal.

Two other pests I have to deal with are a black cat (Ebby) that my wife collected and keeps outdoors and a dog (Patch) that I collected last year (a young rescue dog that followed me home at a place we have in Arkansas twice and stayed around for a couple of days). Ebby sits under the colony and waits for the males to fight and force one another to the ground, and then pounces. We put him in the house last year, but I thought the dog would keep him away. No such luck; so he is indoors again. The dog will bark at the birds and chase them, but he is too clumsy to get them. However, last year we did have a problem with her collecting (and dispatching) Martins that fledged prematurely. We segregated her to a side yard during that period (and will do that again this year) after several losses and had no problems.



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Ornithology Group Officers

Chair: Nina Rach | 281-433-0651 | Nina.Rach@yahoo.com

Vice Chair (Programs): Volunteer needed

Secretary | Jean Greenhalgh | JeanBrit01@yahoo.com

Treasurer: Harlan Evans | 713-797-6468 | harlanj42@sbcglobal.net

Clearing House: David Sarkozi | 713-412-4409 | david@sarkozi.net

Swifts: Pam Smolen | pjsmolen@att.net

Membership: Michael Honel | 713-432-1985 | michaelhonel@sbcglobal.net

Field Trips: Volunteer needed

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Ornithology Group Outdoor Nature Club Representative: Tira Overstreet
713-202-3568 | Oddbird47@comcast.net

OG website: <http://www.ornithologygroup.org/>

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

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