

The Spoonbill

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

January 2006
Vol. 55 No. 1

January Meeting

Monday, January 9, 2006 -- 7:00 p.m.

Bayland Community Center
6400 Bissonnet, Houston

6:30 -- Learning Corner with David Bradford
Houston's Wintering Sparrows (Part 2)

Program with Martin Hagne:
Bird Specialties and Rarities of the Valley

The Lower Rio Grande Valley is one of the most, if not the most, diverse natural areas in the United States. The many bio-regions create habitats that allow a vast array of wildlife to prosper. The variety of avian life in the Valley is higher than in all but two complete states. Tonight we will briefly explore the reasons why such avian diversity exists in these four counties, and then delve into the rich beauty of the specialty birds and rarities of the area.

Martin Hagne was born and raised on the Swedish west coast. His grandfather instilled in him a love for nature at an early age as they spent their summer days fishing along the islands. Coastal birds were numerous, along with seals, foxes and other wildlife. Martin moved to the United States and the Rio Grande Valley of Texas in 1979. His wildlife interests were great, initially focusing on hunting trips, but not much was ever harvested. He found the Valley's native landscape unique and quite beautiful, and slowly turned that focus towards wildlife viewing and conservation concerns.

Martin has been an active birder for many years, but "birding" did not become a serious love until the winter of 1994. Spotting an Aplomado Falcon and a Golden Eagle at different times during that winter in Willacy County sealed his fate as an avid birder. He is currently serving as the Executive Director of the Valley Nature Center in Weslaco, Texas, where he has been working for the past five years. He compiles two Christmas Birds Counts, and leads birding and nature field trips.

Other Events

January 13-15: TOS Winter Meeting
Hosts: OG and Katy Prairie Conservancy

January 21: monthly OG field trip
NE Texas with **Charles Easley**

January 26-29: quarterly OG field trip
to the **Lower Rio Grande Valley**

February 6: monthly OG meeting,
Jesse Fagan on Warblers

February 18: monthly OG field trip
to **Anahuac** with David Sarkozi

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Minutes of the December 5, 2005 Meeting
Bayland Community Center
Attendance: 60

1. **Learning Corner:** David Bradford spoke on "Sparrows of West Harris County." These sparrows winter in this area so there is no singing. However, the Savannah, Vesper, Song, Lincoln's, Harris's, Swamp, White-throated, White-crowned, and Field Sparrows all respond to pishing. Identification is difficult, but knowing habitat, facial markings, behavior, size, stripes, and color is most helpful.

2. Chairman Michael Williams opened the meeting at 7:10pm with **bird sightings:** Brown-headed Nuthatches, Henslow's Sparrows, Rusty Blackbirds were seen. A small OG group saw Eared Trogan, Rufous-backed Wood Rail, and 208 other species in western Mexico, and a Yellow Warbler was seen in the Galapagos. Two Rufous Hummers are wintering in Richmond. A Whooping Crane is in the Valley with Sandhill Cranes. Le Conte's Sparrows are at Addicks Dam, and Woodcocks are on Clay Road and in Little Thicket. Timbergrove Park will be retained as a park by city of Houston. Michael reminded everyone of the coming Christmas Bird Counts and distributed a list of all counts in the local area.

3. **Minutes** of November meeting were approved.

4. **Membership:** Margret stated that dues are now due. *The Spoonbill* is now online on the OG website.

5. **Newsletter** information is due on December 10.

6. Mary Dodson handed out **Conservation Corner** notes. With our State Parks being in danger of disappearing we need to contact our representatives to let them know how we think. The Endangered Species Act is again being modified to downgrade its protection; this must be addressed immediately.

7. **Field Trips:** Adam stated the Katy Prairie trip turned out great after finding lost participants! 80 species were seen and nice weather prevailed. There is now a message board on the OG website about field trips and bird sightings. Pictures of previous trips are also on the website. The Valley trip in January is filled, but Adam wants to find a second leader so that those on the waiting list can go. Mid-week trip will be to Timbergrove Park with Skip; directions are in *The Spoonbill*. Kathy reminded everyone to send in their registration for the TOS meeting in January. You may register online. There is no monthly trip in December; all are encouraged to find one or more Christmas Counts to attend. A shorebird survey of the entire Texas coast will be held January 21. FeatherFest in March-April still needs a liaison.

8. **Treasury:** We are OK.

9. **Program:** Bernice Hotman welcomed and introduced two guests this evening: Dr. Daniel Brooks of the Houston Museum of Natural Science, and Jeffrey Brown of Corpus Christi Museum of Science. Both were here to listen to our guest speaker, Dr. Keith Arnold, presently a visiting professor at Texas A&M University and a member of the Texas Bird Records Committee. His informal talk this evening was on the committee's history and workings with some recent records involved. The committee was started in 1972 at the request of the TOS. He emphasized that pictures or at least song recordings are needed in helping to identify rare birds. We should submit our findings even if others are doing so. Rejections of submissions should not be viewed with dismay. His photos were the highlight of his presentation as all tried to identify the birds. There are between 50-75 records of rare birds in Texas.

10. **Refreshments** were provided by Wanda Smith.

11. Meeting adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

--Shirley Mondshine

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.

Chair:	Michael Williams	713-228-9064
Vice-Chair:	Bernice Hotman	713-782-7889
Secretary:	Shirley & Raymond Mondshine	713-774-1413
Treasurer:	Jim Winn	713-464-8057
Clearing House:	David Sarkozi	713-412-4409
Library:	Andy Scott	281-537-9690
Membership:	Margret Simmons	713-776-2511

Spoonbill: Al Shultz 281-829-0970
Email: og_spoonbill@earthlink.net

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

January Field Trip

Saturday, January 21 (Monthly Trip): Charles Easley is going to lead us around NE Texas in search of Smith's and Lapland Longspurs and other NE Texas specialties. This should be a very good trip, although it may be cold. This will be another all-day trip and we will meet at the Katy Prairie Conservancy headquarters (3015 Richmond, just west of Kirby) at 5:00 a.m. sharp. If you are not there by 5, you will get left behind. At this point I am not sure where we will be going first or whether we will be meeting Charles Easley up at the first birding spot or whether he will meet us at the KPC headquarters. So please watch your email and the message board in the Field Trips section of the OG website for further details on this trip. Make sure to bring your own lunch if you plan on staying for the whole day. Also, make sure to bring warm clothes because I am sure it is going to be cold. Also, bring binoculars, spotting scope, camera, water, and snacks. One final note: if you wish to carpool to the KPC and on to the first birding site, please post a message to the message board on the OG website stating that you are willing to drive or need a ride to the KPC, and be sure to list your contact info and address.

--Adam Wood, OG Field Trip Coordinator

713-515-1692

Birdman_570@yahoo.com

Midweek Birding Trip with Skip Almoney: **January 11 at Sims Bayou**

The January 2006 midweek birding trip will be on January 11, 2006, at Sims Bayou Urban Nature Center. This property has recently been acquired by the Houston Audubon Society and is now their Educational and Outreach Center. It is a peaceful, miniature farm only two blocks from I-45 and has the potential for some great birding. The leader for this trip will be Skip Almoney. He will be at the designated meeting point at 8:00 a.m. and the trip will not last beyond 12 noon. Our birding will include the gardens and small yard area, the wooded banks of a Sims Bayou tributary, and along the water from the dock. We can expect to see most resident songbirds, probably woodpeckers and if we are lucky maybe some Wood Ducks. To reach HAS's Sims Bayou Urban Nature Center take I-45 South from downtown Houston, Exit 38B-Howard/Bellfort. Go left under the freeway, take the feeder northbound (left), turn right on River Drive and follow the winding drive for about 1/2 mile. The nature Center will be on your right. There is small parking lot in front of the center, but you may have to park on one of the adjoining streets.

OG Mid-Week Birding Trips

January 2006	Sims Bayou Nature Center
February 2006	Russ Pittman Park
March 2006	Addicks Reservoir
April 2006	Herman Brown Park
May 2006	Hermann Park

Quarterly Field Trip to the Lower Rio Grande Valley January 26-29, 2006

David Poteet has graciously volunteered to lead this trip. He has been birding in this region for many years and has a wealth of knowledge about where to find good birds in the Valley. We will be visiting some areas where there are very few opportunities to bird. We should be able to find all the valley specialties as well as some rarities. The focus of this trip will be on the valley specialties and rarities, and we should be able to find them all. If you have a bird that you particularly want to see, please let us know and we will try to accommodate your request. You do not want to miss this trip.

There will be a \$25.00 registration fee for this trip. Please make one check out to Adam Wood for \$15 and the other for \$10 to the Ornithology Group. You may bring the \$10 donation to the OG on the day of the trip if you wish.

This trip is limited to 15 people on a first-come, first-serve basis. Currently this trip is full but I am keeping a waiting list. I am also looking into acquiring a second guide for the trip, but this will only work if there are enough people on the waiting list to warrant a second guide. So if you still are interested in going on this trip, let me know. I do ask that you don't send me your registration fee unless you are absolutely sure you will be going on the trip. If I don't receive your \$15 registration fee a week before the trip (that is, by January 20), you will forfeit your spot on the trip and I will take the next person on the waiting list.

Please send payments to:

Adam Wood
2525 Old Farm Road Apt. 1823
Houston, Tx. 77063

The Host Hotel for the meeting is:

Best Western Palm Aire Hotel & Suites
415 S. International Blvd. at Exp. 83
Weslaco, Tx. 78599
(956) 969-2411

Be sure to mention "Ornithology Group" to get the \$56 group rate. Breakfast Buffet included on Friday morning at 6 a.m.; 7 a.m. on weekends. Courtyard Restaurant is open 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. There are 12 rooms currently blocked out.

Directions: From Harlingen: exit marker "Mile 2 West" just before getting to Weslaco and go on the feeder road to International Blvd. and turn right (south) to the Hotel.

From McAllen: Exit "Airport Drive" and travel on the feeder road to International Blvd. and turn right to the Hotel.

~Adam Wood, Field Trip Coordinator, birdman.570@yahoo.com, 713-515-1692

Katy Prairie Field Trip Report

Steve Gross led 25 participants for a great day of birding on the Katy Prairie on November 19, 2005. Temperature was cool but not too cold and there was no wind -- perfect birding conditions although skies were overcast. We started at 6:00 a.m. to try and pick up some owls before first light. All we managed was a semi-decent look at one Short-eared Owl. After first light we were treated to a huge flock of Snow Geese (with Ross's Geese mixed in) that almost stretched from one horizon to the other and was three layers deep. We estimated that there were about 50,000 geese in all, with about a 50/50 split of white and blue phase. We found it to be a rather high percentage of blue phase Snow Geese. Other highlights included: Barred Owl, Barn Owl, Dark-eyed Junco, a lingering Dickcissel, four Harris's Sparrows, Krider's Red-tailed Hawk, Bald Eagle, and a Vermillion Flycatcher. We wrapped the day up at 6 p.m. back at the Short-eared Owl spot, hoping for a better look than we got in the morning. We totaled about 81 bird species for the day. I want to thank everybody who came out on this field trip. I was surprised by the number of people who attended this trip and hope to see similar numbers on future trips.

- Adam Wood

Membership Renewal Time for 2006

It's time to renew your membership in ONC and OG for the new year of 2006. Most people pay dues yearly on a calendar basis for ONC and OG. The year printed on the top of the ONC *Nature Notes* mailing label above your name is the calendar year when your membership expires. So if 2005 is printed on the top of your last issue of the *Nature Notes*, it's time to pay your yearly dues for the coming year.

Printing and mailing *The Spoonbill* each month is a big expense of the Ornithology Group. The cost of printing and mailing *The Spoonbill* has continued to escalate, and these costs alone consume more than half of the OG membership dues.

A new option has been added this year to allow membership in OG at a reduced rate of \$10 a year instead of the regular \$14 rate if you elect to not receive a hard-copy of *The Spoonbill* by mail. *The Spoonbill* is now available on the OG website, or you can sign up with the Spoonbill Editor to receive your copy monthly by email. Because of slow mail delivery, some people do not receive their Spoonbill in a timely fashion and may elect to discontinue their mailed copy of *The Spoonbill*. Or you may just want to help OG save money to allow us to pursue other projects. Whatever the reason, anyone can choose the new \$10 rate if you are willing to forgo the printed *Spoonbill*.

If you haven't already renewed your ONC-OG membership for 2006, please pay at the next OG meeting, or mail your check with the membership form on the back of the *Spoonbill*. We look forward to another great birding year!

-- Margret Simmons (ONC-OG Membership Officer)

Outdoor Nature Club - Ornithology Group
Approved Budget June 1, 2005 - May 31, 2006

Beginning Balance

\$7,872.72

	2005 Actual	2006 Budget
<i>Income</i>		
Dues	3,184.00	3,184.00
Sales of Checklists	231.55	150.00
Facilities	100.00	100.00
Interest	55.60	--
Contributions	16.00	1.00
Special Events:		
Book Sale	456.00	
Co-Host of TOS meeting	--	1,300.00
Quarterly \$10 field trip fee	526.50	600.00
Total Income	\$4,569.65	\$5,335.00

Expenses

Spoonbill	2,184.83	2,185.00
Speakers	450.00	1,400.00
Facilities	100.00	100.00
Library	--	200.00
Bank charges	20.00	--
Supplies	149.09	149.00
Donations to others	500.00	500.00
Special Event		
Book Sale	260.72	--
Co-Host of TOS meeting	--	300.00
Postage	272.68	273.00
Featherfest	252.25	175.00
Power Point Projector	1,085.50	--
Total Expenses	\$5,275.07	\$5,282.00

Budget surplus(deficit)

(705.42)

53.00

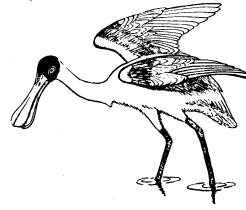
Ending Balance

\$7,925.72

--Submitted by Jim Winn, OG Treasurer

From The Spoonbill's Past

Compiled by Skip Almoney



THE
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Fifty Years Ago

October 23 Field Trip to Cypress Hockley Area (Noel Perley)

Perfect weather and a late starting time (11:00 a.m.) were undoubtedly responsible for the big turn-out for this trip - 30 persons in 12 cars. Our leader, Miss Carrie Holcomb, and her party (Leota Stilwell, and David and Carol Watson) were somewhat delayed while en route to our starting point (Hockley) but for good reason, viz. two Western kingbirds! The two birds were seen along Westheimer Road (near Rogers Road) northeast of Alief, and turned out to be the day's most unusual sightings.

■ ■ ■

We headed back to Hockley at about 2:15 p.m and thence southward via Katy-Hockley Road over Cypress Creek: and then east to the Longenbaugh Ranch. At this point, Mrs. H. J. Longenbaugh and company (Mrs. F. N. Evans and Mrs. John A. Kitzmann) took over as hosts and guides. We proceeded along a dirt road which skirted a dike for as long as our curiosity would permit and then we stopped the cars and scrambled up the levee to "see what was on the other side". We weren't disappointed by what we beheld -- ducks, geese and shorebirds by the thousands. Pintails filled the sky and all four kinds of geese greeted us with their "call-of-the-wild" honking. Baldpates, Mallards, shovelers, fulvous tree ducks and both teals were identified, along with avocets and one American bittern.

[The Longenbaugh Ranch will soon be the largest development in the West Harris County area. -SRA]

In Memoriam ...

Probably the oldest living member of the OG died on Sept. 27, 2005, in California, at age 98 yrs, 11 months: Louise Hoffman. Jean and I, as novice birders, met Louise, and her husband Henry Hoffman, on our first Spring Count, in April, 1960. I don't know how long they had been birding prior to that time. Yes, back in the 'old days' we had 'Spring Counts,' during migration, in the same count-circle that we did the Christmas Counts! Louise and Henry were active members of the OG until they moved to California, about the mid 1970's, where they continued birding. Henry, who was OG Chairman in the '60s, died some years ago. We had the opportunity and good fortune to visit Louise two years ago in Lemon Grove, California. At 97, she was living alone in a retirement village, and was bright, lucid, active, cheerful, lots of fun.....and still looking at birds around her cottage!

We can think of only a few 'old-timers' left who would remember Louise, but we thought this information might be of interest to the group.

--Bill and Jean Harwell

The Spoonbill
hopes to publish the
Clearing House for
November 2005 in
the next issue
(February 2006).

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:

Outdoor Nature Club
PO Box 270894
Houston TX 77277-0894

Membership questions? Contact Margret Simmons
phone 713-776-2511
msimmons@compassnet.com

New in 2006:
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

Electronic Spoonbill by email

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og_spoonbill@earthlink.net or
msimmons@compassnet.com