



The Spoonbill

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

May 2007
Vol. 56 No. 5

May Meeting

Monday, May 7, 2007 -- 7:00 p.m.

Bayland Community Center
6400 Bissonnet, Houston

6:30 -- Learning Corner with Adam Wood:
More Birds of Southeastern Arizona

Business meeting: Election of Officers

Program: Birding in Southeastern Arizona,
with Steve Gross

Already active in the outdoors as a fly fisherman and photographer, Steve Gross's love for birding bloomed when he moved back to Texas after living in Pennsylvania, Idaho, and Montana. Steve has birded extensively in Texas, Idaho (where his team set a Big Day record), and Arizona, and has birded in Florida, California, and Alaska. He has done survey work on endangered Golden-cheeked Warblers and Black-capped Vireos and conducts other surveys throughout Texas. Steve completed the Cornell Lab of Ornithology Home Study Course in Bird Biology and is the author of the electronic book (unpublished) "A Young Birder's Guide to Texas."

Arizona presents wonderful opportunities for the naturalist. The "sky islands", isolated mountain ranges whose elevations reveal animal and plant species usually separated by differences in latitude, provide the setting. Bird species utilizing habitats ranging from Chihuahuan and Sonoran desert to the Canadian Zone are accessible by the discriminating birder. Starting each morning at low elevation, one can stay comfortable all day by birding the altitude with the greatest bird activity. This arid region also provides relief from the desert heat each day, a welcome change from a Houston summer.

Tonight we will follow the itinerary followed in 2006 by the Victor Emanuel Nature Tours trip to Southeast Arizona, discussing the locations and the bird species expected on the OG trip this summer, July 22-29.

Nominations for OG Officers:

Chair:	Bernice Hotman
Vice-Chair:	Pam Smolen
Secretary:	Cindy Douglass
Treasurer:	Jim Winn
Membership Chair:	Margret Simmons
Field Trip Coordinator:	Adam Wood

To be elected by membership on May 7

Other Events

May 10-13: West Texas Trip with Mike Overton and Tony Gallucci.

May 19: Kayking in Galveston Bay with Artist Boat Inc.

May 26: W.G. Jones State Forest and Breeding Warblers in Sam Houston National Forest with Steve Gross

➤ **The next issue of *The Spoonbill*** (August 2007) will be published in late July following our usual summer break. Until then, Good Birding!

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Minutes of the April 2, 2007 Meeting

Bayland Community Center

Attendance: 58

1. **Learning Corner:** David Bradford talked about the birds and birding hotspots of southeastern Arizona, where OG will be taking a trip this July. He talked about what to expect as far as birds and other wildlife, as well as weather and other practical matters.
2. **Sightings:** Michael Williams opened the meeting at about 7:05 p.m. with bird sightings. Sightings included many migrants at Lafitte's Cove and Dos Vacas Muertas, including Warbling Vireo and Blackburnian Warbler at Dos Vacas; a Great Kiskadee in Al Shultz's yard near Katy; Black-bellied Whistling Ducks in Layton Guinn's yard near Lake Houston; Worm-eating, Canada and other warblers at High Island; Swainson's Warbler at Russ Pitman Park; and Hooded and Yellow-throated warblers at Quintana Sanctuary. The Burrowing Owl continues to be seen at Fort Travis.
3. **Minutes** of the March meeting were accepted as printed in the Spoonbill.
4. **Membership:** Margret Simmons reminded us to sign in so we have an accurate attendance count.
5. **Elections:** Michael said the slate of officer nominees will be in the next *Spoonbill*, with election and installation to occur at the May meeting.
6. **Environmental:** We were reminded to contact or meet with our legislators to support full funding for state parks. Many legislators wrongly assume that all their constituents would rather see a tax cut than more spending on parks.
7. **Birdathon:** Pam Smolen, Mary Dodson and Liz Zivley each encouraged everyone to team up and register, or to sign up for one of the ready-made guided teams.
8. **Featherfest** was a success. There were about 350 to 400 registered participants. Skip Almoney thanked the liaisons.
9. **Spoonbill:** Most members got it on time. Al asked for submissions early for the next issue, if possible.
10. **Field Trips:** Skip was the only one on the mid-week trip (Jesse Jones Park), but those trips aren't expected to have a lot of participation anyway. Adam Wood said the Bolivar/Texas City Dike trip was good, with Burrowing Owl, Whimbrel, Northern Gannet and eight Red Knots. Upcoming trips include Herman Brown Park (mid-week trip on April 11); the spring migration trip to Sabine Woods, McFadden NWR, and the Willows at Sea Rim State Park (April 22; note change in date); and West Texas (May 10 to 13) for Golden-cheeked Warbler, Black-capped Vireo, and others. Also, on May 19, a kayaking trip on Galveston Bay is available through Artist Boat. The more people sign up, the cheaper it will be and the more likely we can have a private trip, with more kayaking time.
11. A **new member** was recognized and welcomed, as was a couple visiting from England.
12. **Program:** Bernice Hotman introduced Bob Ohmart, a Kansas native and longtime OG member who has birded throughout North America. Bob gave a presentation about his several trips to Alaska, including Gambel, Nome, Anchorage, Dutch Harbor, the Pribilofs, and Attu. He brought a terrific slideshow and many entertaining stories and insights, with interesting asides about the area's geography and history.

Meeting adjourned about 8:30 p.m.

--John Schneider

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
Field Trips:	Adam Wood	713-515-1692

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

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

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

May Field Trip: Galveston Bay Kayaking with Artist Boat

May 19, 2007, 3:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Drum Bay – Follett's Island

Limit: 26 people -- Fee: \$25 - \$50 depending on number of participants

We are going kayaking in Galveston Bay for this month's field trip. Artist Boat Inc. will be the company supplying the kayaks and interpreter. This is the same company that sponsors the kayaking trips for FeatherFest. The FeatherFest kayaking trips are some of the most popular trips and all the participants have a wonderful time. On this trip we will be able to get within 3 feet of most of the birds, providing for some great up-close and personal experiences with the birds and some great photo ops. The trip will last for 4 hours and will include a safety and paddling demo for those who have never kayaked before. May 19 is scheduled as part of their community calendar, but they are willing to provide a private trip for up to 26 people at a total cost of \$650. The more people we get on this trip, the less money per person it will cost for the private trip. They will require the money a week in advance. If we would rather not pay, we will have to be willing to go with public participants and possibly spend some time water-coloring and less time paddling for birds. I will announce the meeting location and time as the date of the trip draws nearer. So throw on your swimsuit and come out ready to have fun, get a little wet on what could be a warm day, and have some great up-close experiences with birds. If you are interested in attending this trip please let me know.

Trip Itinerary: Karla Klay, of Artist Boat, will be your interpreter for the day; phone (713) 569-0722.

3:00 Registration and check in

3:15 – 3:30 Introductions, paddling demonstration, safety rules, and overview of wetlands.

3:30 – 4:30 Paddle, stopping at points of interest and bird watching - Identification

4:30 – 5:45 Eat dinner/snack and discuss habitat.

5:45 – 6:30 Watercolor demonstration and creation of paintings of the habitat and wildlife.

6:30 – 7:00 Paddle back to original destination.

DIRECTIONS: From Houston: Take I-45 South to Galveston. Exit and take a right on 61st Street. Take a right at Seawall. Seawall will become 3005. Take 3005 towards the West End and over the San Luis Pass Bridge (\$2.00 toll per vehicle). Travel 7.2 miles west beyond the San Luis Pass Bridge. Look for three electrical poles with boxes on them standing very close together on the Gulf side (left) of the road. On your right (bay side) there will be a highway sign 257L Brazoria County on a dirt road. Turn right on that road. Look for a trailer full of yellow kayaks. You've made it!

WHAT TO BRING: Water and a dinner/snack. A hat, bug spray and sunscreen. A change of clothes, towels, and shoes. Binoculars if you want. The signed waiver and medical history. Do not bring anything that cannot get wet or that would be ruined if it fell into the water. For example: camera, cell phone, remote keys, etc. Please do not bring coolers that can hold more than a six-pack of coke as there is little storage space on the kayaks.

WHAT TO WEAR: Something that is comfortable when wet, such as a swimsuit or swim trunks. Regular shorts or pants (no jeans) that can get wet and muddy. A shirt/T-shirt that can get wet and muddy. Shoes that will stay on your feet in mud, like tennis shoes, that can get wet and muddy. Towel for drying off upon return. A jacket if it is cool.

WHAT TO BE PREPARED FOR: Getting wet and muddy. You will get wet and your shoes will get muddy. Learning how to paddle a kayak. Learning about wetlands, human impacts, critters, habitat restoration, and history. Learning how to watercolor and how to create art based on the environment. A safe day of fun on the water, observing the beauty of park.

~ Adam Wood, OG Field Trip Coordinator, birdman_570@yahoo.com, 713-515-1692

Spring Quarterly Trip Announcement: West Texas

May 10-13, 2007

Palacio del Frio Living Room

Thursday May 10th, 9:00 p.m.

This spring's quarterly field trip will be to Kerr Wildlife Management Area, Kickapoo State Park (or Park Chalk Bluff if we cannot get into Kickapoo State Park), Lost Maples and Cook's Slough. Mike Overton and Tony Gallucci (Saturday and Sunday) will be our leaders for this trip. Mike has led many birding trips for groups to these places, and Tony has helped out groups at Kerr WMA and Lost Maples. The main targets for this trip are the Golden-cheeked Warbler and Black-capped Vireo. These birds can be seen at all the places we are going to visit (with the exception of Cook's Slough), so the probability is very good that we will see and get good looks at both these birds throughout the course of the trip. Bring your cameras, because we should have some good photo opportunities with at least the Golden-cheeked Warbler. While we are looking for the prized vireo and warbler, we will also be on the lookout for other west Texas specialties, such as Zone-tailed Hawk, Lazuli Bunting, Wild Turkey, Common Poorwill, Bell's, Gray (rare) and Hutton's Vireos, Bushtit, Verdin, Cassin's, Brewer's (rare) and Clay-colored Sparrows, Bullock's and Scott's Orioles, and Yellow-headed Blackbird. This is going to be a great trip in some beautiful country, the Texas Hill Country, so you will not want to miss it. If you are interested in going, please let me know and I will get your name on the list.

Accommodations: I have reserved two cabins in Concan, Texas. One sleeps 16 and the other sleeps 12 for \$775 a night. The larger cabin has five bedrooms with 10 beds and 3.5 baths and has a swimming pool (bring your swim suit if you feel like a relaxing soak after a full day of birding) and a full kitchen (bring what ever drinks and food you like, but remember that there are other people bringing food and drinks as well, so don't go overboard). The other has three bedrooms with six beds and three bathrooms. It also has a full kitchen and dining room.

Directions: Take I-10 west out of Houston to San Antonio. In San Antonio, look for US 90 West to Sabinal. Merge onto US 90 West from I-10 and take US 90 west all the way to Sabinal. In Sabinal, look for Texas 127/FM 187 North. Turn right on Hwy. 127/187 at the only red light. Go through the city of Sabinal -- after approximately 2 miles the highway forks. Veer left on Hwy.127. Go approximately 20 miles. Just before Hwy.127 hits Hwy.83, turn right on River Road (first paved road to the right after crossing the Frio River). Once on River Road, follow it around to Mountain Valley Drive. Take a right on Mountain Valley Drive and proceed through the gate. The Palacio del Frio will be on your left across from Wisteria Way. If you get lost and need help finding the cabin, you can stop in at the Frio Country Store or call 1-888-926-6226 for help. Please be sure to be there by 9:00 p.m. on May 10. I am planing to have a meeting with everybody to discuss how the trip is going to run and collect money for the guides' fee at that time. If you cannot make it by then, please let me know.

Be sure to bring binoculars, spotting scope, camera to take pics of the Golden-cheeks, rain gear in case it rains, hat, sunscreen, water, snacks for during the day, and lunch for Friday and Saturday. If you wish to bring breakfast and dinner food as well as drinks, feel free to because the cabin has a big freezer/fridge, an oven and stove.

Breeding Warblers of East Texas

May 26, 2007

W.G. Jones State Forest Office Parking Lot

5:45 a.m. Chuck-Will's-Widow Crew, otherwise 7:00 a.m.

Steve Gross has graciously volunteered to lead all those who are interested around W.G. Jones State Forest and then along his breeding bird survey route through the Sam Houston National Forest in search of breeding warblers as well as other breeding bird species. We will start at W.G. Jones State Forest in search of Chuck-will's-Widows, Brown-headed Nuthatches, and Red-cockaded Woodpeckers then head over to Steve's breeding bird survey route in Sam Houston National Forest in search of Prairie, Hooded and Swainson's Warblers, Northern Parula, Yellow-breasted Chats, Acadian Flycatcher, White-eyed and Red-eyed Vireos. The highlight of this trip will be the Prairie Warbler, of which we should encounter several along this route. This should be a real good trip with great looks at some of the breeding warblers, especially the Prairie Warbler, one of the harder warblers to see during spring and fall migration.

For those who want to search for Chuck-will's-Widows, we will meet in the Jones State Forest Office Parking Lot at 5:45 a.m. For those not interested in hunting for Chuck-will's-Widows, will meet in the same location but at 7:00 a.m. To get to Jones State Forest Office Parking Lot, take IH-45 North out of Houston to FM 1488 and go west (left on FM 1488). The office parking lot will be on your left between Peoples Road and SH 242. Start looking for it right after you pass Peoples Road.

Be sure to bring: Binoculars, spotting scope, camera, water, hat, sunscreen, and snacks if you wish. You will not need to bring a lunch we will be stopping at the Waverly House for lunch around 1 p.m.

~ Adam Wood, OG Field Trip Coordinator, birdman_570@yahoo.com, 713-515-1692

**Hermann Park
Mid-Week Field Trip
May 2007**

The May 2007 midweek birding trip will be on May 9, 2007 and we will be returning to Hermann Park. 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. We will be birding several habitats including open oaks, a small prairie, Brays Bayou and a wooded forest. The meeting place will be the parking lot in the Bayou Parkland portion of Hermann Park. This parking area is on the west side of Alameda Road between Holcombe Boulevard and South Macgregor Way. Look for the Bayou Parkland Pavilion adjoining the parking area.

Field Trip Report

Bolivar Peninsula Bird Survey and Anahuac NWR Trip Report

Eight participants assisted Tom Kihn with the Bolivar Bird Survey from 8:00 to 11:30 on March 17, 2007. It was an absolutely beautiful day to be out birding -- crystal clear skies and a little brisk but not too cold. Unfortunately, it was not good weather for seeing migrants but it was good weather for migrating birds, which is ultimately what we want. Groups of two to four birded various areas of Bolivar Peninsula from the Ferry landing to Rettilon Road and saw 104 birds for the survey. Highlights for the survey were the Burrowing Owl at Fort Travis that has been there since January, eight Red Knots including one molting into alternate (breeding) plumage, a couple of American Golden Plovers and a Whimbrel at Bolivar Flats, Prothonotary Wablers, Palm Warblers, Yellow-throated Warbler and Black and White Warbler. After eating lunch at La Playita Mexican Restaurant we all went back to see the Burrowing Owl to give the folks who didn't bird that area during the survey a chance to see it. After watching the owl for a little bit we split up with some people heading to the North Jetty and others to the Flats. We all met back up at the East Bay unit of Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge since the ferry line was terrible.

We spent the afternoon birding the East Bay unit of Anahuac NWR and Shoveler Pond in the main area of Anahuac NWR. It was pretty slow in the afternoon with nothing of note being seen. I was hoping for better birding in the afternoon, but at least it was a nice day and we did manage to get over 100 birds between the groups for the survey. One encouraging note is that a number of the rice fields along FM 1985 and in Anahuac NWR have been flooded and there is a lot of good habitat for migrant shorebirds when they start showing up in numbers.

Below is a list of birds seen by the various groups during the survey.

Location: Bolivar - Port Bolivar area

Observation date: 3/17/07

Participants: Adam Wood, Bryan Tarbox, Bill Tarbox, Pam Smolen, Alex Lin-Moore, Andy (no last name provided), Mary Dodson, Peg McNealy, Gwen Robberson, Patsy Lawrence, Stennie Meadows, Harlan Evans, Khara Strum, Bill Palmer, John Kirschner, Lisa Bell, Rachel Schiesser, Tom Kihn (compiler).

Mottled Duck 16	American Avocet 2530	Barn Swallow 32
Blue-winged Teal 37	Greater Yellowlegs 3	Carolina Wren 1
Northern Shoveler 1	Lesser Yellowlegs 10	House Wren 1
Green-winged Teal 1	Willet 96	Ruby-crowned Kinglet 15
Lesser Scaup 325	Spotted Sandpiper 3	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher 2
Red-breasted Merganser 39	Whimbrel 1	Hermit Thrush 1
Pied-billed Grebe 3	Long-billed Curlew 21	American Robin 2
Northern Gannet 1	Marbled Godwit 77	Gray Catbird 1
American White Pelican 257	Ruddy Turnstone 10	Northern Mockingbird 26
Brown Pelican 120	Red Knot 8	Brown Thrasher 1
Neotropic Cormorant 19	Sanderling 51	European Starling 128
Double-crested Cormorant 26	Semipalmated Sandpiper 5	Orange-crowned Warbler 4
Great Blue Heron 5	Western Sandpiper 10	Yellow-rumped Warbler 65
Great Egret 9	Least Sandpiper 57	Yellow-throated Warbler 1
Snowy Egret 20	Dunlin 57	Palm Warbler 2
Little Blue Heron 1	Short-billed Dowitcher 85	Prothonotary Warbler 2
Tricolored Heron 2	Long-billed Dowitcher 23	Common Yellowthroat 3
Reddish Egret 3	Wilson's Snipe 2	Chipping Sparrow 1
White Ibis 2	Laughing Gull 345	Savannah Sparrow 37
White-faced Ibis 2	Ring-billed Gull 47	Song Sparrow 8
Roseate Spoonbill 26	Herring Gull 29	Lincoln's Sparrow 1
Turkey Vulture 13	Royal Tern 50	Swamp Sparrow 6
Osprey 1	Common Tern 4	White-throated Sparrow 7
White-tailed Kite 3	Forster's Tern 205	Northern Cardinal 15
Northern Harrier 5	Black Skimmer 225	Red-winged Blackbird 110
Red-tailed Hawk 2	Rock Pigeon 3	Eastern Meadowlark 8
American Kestrel 2	Eurasian Collared-Dove 14	Common Grackle 48
Clapper Rail 2	White-winged Dove 5	Great-tailed Grackle 64
American Coot 72	Mourning Dove 19	House Sparrow 61
Black-bellied Plover 104	Inca Dove 2	Also seen:
American Golden-Plover 5	Burrowing Owl 1	hummingbird species 1,
Snowy Plover 10	Belted Kingfisher 1	empid species 1.
Wilson's Plover 6	Downy Woodpecker 1	Number of species: 104
Semipalmated Plover 5	Eastern Phoebe 4	
Piping Plover 10	Loggerhead Shrike 11	
Killdeer 3	Blue Jay 1	
Black-necked Stilt 13	Horned Lark 1	
	Purple Martin 2	

If you missed this month's Bolivar bird survey, don't despair -- the surveys are conducted every third Saturday of each month. A few points about the survey that I neglected to mention in the announcement were that this survey was started and continues due to the efforts of the Houston Audubon Society, specifically Stennie Meadours, and it is to the Houston Audubon Bolivar Land Fund that people can send donations to help protect more land on Bolivar Peninsula. I strongly recommend that everybody try to help out with this survey because it is part of what helped allow Houston Audubon to receive a 99-year lease from the Texas General Land Office to protect this unique and special habitat as well as Horseshoe Marsh and the other sanctuaries that Houston Audubon has on Bolivar Peninsula. In addition, this survey is important because it is helping to document what species are using the peninsula that maybe impacted by a project like building a bridge across from Galveston to Bolivar.

--Adam Wood

One hundred seventy years ago...

An observer at Galveston Bay on April 25, 1837, wrote: “A heavy gale blew all night.... Thousands of birds, arrested by the storm in their migration northward, are seen hovering around our vessels and hiding in the grass, and some are struggling in the water, completely exhausted.”

The writer, John James Audubon, had just arrived by boat from Louisiana, and spent the next few weeks around the upper Texas coast. In the newly independent Republic of Texas, much of his visit was made with the protection and escort of the Texas Navy; skirmishes with Mexican forces on land and sea were frequent.

Audubon’s journal entries make an interesting comparison to the modern experience. Below are a few excerpts, from the book *Naturalists of the Frontier*, by Samuel Wood Geiser. Some of the birds and habitats are similar to those of today, but some are strikingly different and difficult even to imagine.

–Al Shultz

Friday, May 5 – Hunted birds over the interior of Galveston Island today. While I was watching some Marsh Hawks that were breeding in the neighborhood, I was much surprised to find a large flock of Skimmers alighted, and apparently asleep, on a dry grassy part of the interior of the island. These birds usually rest much nearer to the shore. On returning, however, I found that the tide was much higher than usual, in consequence of the recent severe gales, and had covered all the sand banks on which at other times I had observed them resting by day. In spite of the coldness of the season, I found broods of the Spotted Sandpiper, or Tattler, already well grown.

Monday, May 8 – Today we hoisted anchor, bound for Houston; after grounding a few times, we reached Red Fish Bar, distant twelve miles, where we found several American schooners and one brig. It blew hard all night, and we were uncomfortable.

Tuesday, May 9 – We left Red Fish Bar... Soon we came up to the new-born town of New Washington, owned mostly by Swartmout, the collector of customs of New York. We passed several plantations; and the general appearance of the country was more pleasing than otherwise. About noon, we entered Buffalo Bayou, at the mouth of the San Jacinto River, and opposite the famous battleground of the same name. Proceeding smoothly up the bayou, we saw abundance of game, and after traveling some twenty miles stopped at the house of a Mr. Batterson. This bayou is usually sluggish, deep, and bordered on both sides with a strip of woods not exceeding a mile in depth.... It was here today that I found the Ivory-Billed Woodpecker in abundance, and secured several specimens... It rained and lightened, and we passed the night at Mr. Batterson’s.

Tuesday, May 16 – Departed for New Washington, where we crossed San Jacinto Bay.... The next day dropped down to Galveston. On the way down the bayou, I noticed with great surprise how well adapted the Texas prairies were to the habits of the Black-Throated Bunting [Dickcissel]. These birds were extremely numerous in every open piece of ground covered by tufts of tall grass. Before we left the country I made particular note that the American Widgeon were all paired.

Outdoor Nature Club
Ornithology Group
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The Spoonbill Wants Your Help...

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

og_spoonbill@earthlink.net

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
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