

# The Spoonbill

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

December 2008  
Vol. 57 No. 10

## Monthly Meeting: Monday, December 1

Bayland Community Center  
6400 Bissonnet, Houston

**Learning Corner -- 6:30 p.m. with Steve Gross**

**7:00 p.m. – General Meeting**

**Program: Important Bird Areas and  
Audubon Texas – presented by Dr. Andrew Kasner**

Please join us in December when Dr. Andrew Kasner discusses “The State of the Birds: Audubon Texas Bird Conservation Programs and the Important Bird Areas Program.”

Dr. Kasner directs the on-the-ground conservation efforts of Audubon Texas, focusing on their Coastal Stewardship Program, Quail and Grassland Birds Initiative, and Important Bird Areas program. In addition, he continues to collaborate on research and management efforts on colonial waterbirds, shorebirds, grassland birds, and endangered species such as Black-capped Vireo and Golden-cheeked Warbler.

Dr. Kasner was born in San Angelo, Texas, and earned a B.S. in Biology in 1995 and an M.S. in Biology in 1999 at Angelo State University. His thesis research focused on the ecology of Least Sandpipers wintering at reservoirs in west-central Texas. In 2000, Dr. Kasner began work on the nesting and foraging ecology of endangered Interior Least Terns on the reclaimed areas of a surface coal mine in east-central Texas. This was the subject of his dissertation at Texas A&M University, where he received a PhD in Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences in 2004. Dr. Kasner was an assistant professor of biology at Lamar University

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## Other Events

### **Christmas Bird Counts:**

Dec. 20: Houston (Baytown)

Dec. 28: Buffalo Bayou

and others... (see page 7)

**Jan. 5: OG Meeting** (Galapagos)

**Jan. 17: Brazos Bend trip**

**Jan. 22-25: Quarterly Trip**  
Matagorda Island, Fennessey  
Ranch, Choke Canyon

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from 2003 through 2006, where he taught ornithology and marine biology. At Lamar, his efforts were focused on waterbirds in southeast Texas. These efforts included monitoring colonial waterbird populations and research on power line collisions.

Throughout his career, Dr. Kasner has tried to focus on the ecology and conservation of birds in human-impacted landscapes. His desire is to reconnect people with the land in order to encourage good land stewardship that benefits birds and other wildlife. Dr. Kasner, his wife Racheal, and their two sons enjoy spending time birding and fishing on Texas bays.

## Message from the Chairman

*First:* Thank you to all of you who supported the organization by buying tickets for the raffle of the John P O'Neill scissortail print. If you've waited until the last minute to do so, the last minute is here. Send your money and ticket/s to Jerry Stanislav. The drawing will be at the December meeting. You need not be present to win.

*Second:* The national wildlife refuges up and down the coast have been hit hard in the last year or so. If you've made your recovery donation directly to a specific refuge, that's great. But if you are still waiting to do something (in addition to hands-on volunteering) please consider purchasing a \$15 "duck stamp". The Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp can be bought at the post office, on line, or at most places that sell hunting and/or fishing licenses.

*Third:* Help with a Christmas Bird Count this winter! Yes, there is a lot going on this time of year and we all are juggling our schedules. You do not have to stay out for the full day. Just bird in the morning if that's all the time you can make. No, you do not have to be an expert birder! Every pair of eyes looking for birds helps. Please join in whatever your skill or experience level. Yes, it might be cold or

## 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.

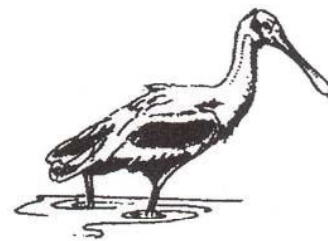
Chair:	Bernice Hotman	713-782-7889
Vice-Chair:	Pam Smolen	832-212-1368
Secretary:	Cindy Douglass	713-644-4803
Treasurer:	Jerry Stanislav	936-271-7772
Clearing House:	David Sarkozi	713-412-4409
Library:	Deborah Valdez	281-879-8668
Membership:	Margret Simmons	713-776-2511
Field Trips:	Adam Wood	713-515-1692
Learning Corner:	Steve Gross	

*The Spoonbill:* Al Shultz 281-829-0970  
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OG website: <http://www.ornithologygroup.org/>

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

*The Spoonbill* wishes all OG members, their families and friends the very best in health and happiness, including excellent birding, in the holiday season. Join in the fun of Christmas Bird Counts! See you in 2009!



windy or generally miserable weather but the great camaraderie warms the heart and makes up for any misery or discomfort. Al has listed the area counts, dates, and contact persons. Check your calendar and give someone a call. Join in!

--Bernice Hotman

## Minutes of Meeting on Monday, November 3, 2008

Ornithology Group of the Houston Outdoor Nature Club

Number of Attendees: 52

1. **Learning Corner:** Steve Gross discussed various ways to become a better birder. He recommended a new book, *Finding Your Wings*, by Burton Guttman. This is a workbook that has quizzes and exercises that involve the reader in learning about identifying birds. It is a great tool for learning.
2. **Fundraiser Raffle:** A John O'Neill print, "Scissor-tailed Flycatchers and Rattlebox," will be raffled off at the December meeting. Tickets are available at \$5 each or 5 for \$20. Blank raffle tickets are printed in the *Spoonbill*.
3. **Sightings:** A Yellow-headed Blackbird, perhaps the first in the area, was seen on the Katy Prairie. Sprague's Pipit and Zone-tailed Hawk were seen at Attwater. A new wetlands developed at Bear Creek Park after Hurricane Ike resulting in numerous egrets and herons. A Solitary Sandpiper and Merlin at Bear Creek Park, Broad-winged Hawks in Bellaire, ten Winter Wrens at White Oak Bayou, and a Western Diamondback at Quintana were also recent sightings.
4. **Minutes of Previous Meeting:** Minutes from the October 6th meeting were approved as printed in the November *Spoonbill*.
5. **Treasurer's Report:** Jerry Stanislav reported that we have \$9,404 in the bank as of the first of the month.
6. **Membership:** Margret Simmons reminded everyone to sign in. Dues for 2009 can now be paid. The cost is \$22, or \$18 if you want *The Spoonbill* by email rather than mail.
7. **Library Report:** Debbie Valdez is in the process of listing all books on the OG website. You will be able to check out books on the website, and Debbie will bring the books you checked out to the monthly meeting for you to pick up.
8. **New Website:** David Sarkozi reported that a new website for OG is being developed which will be much easier to update and more modern and attractive.
9. **Spoonbill:** Al Shultz reported that the Christmas count information from compilers will be in the December newsletter. November 15 is the deadline for submissions.
10. **Hurricane Ike Refuge Clean-up:** David Sarkozi reports that \$11,000 has been raised for Anahuac NWR. The refuge is closed indefinitely. It may reopen around the first of the year. Workdays are posted on Friends of Anahuac. Skip Almoney reported that a workday is scheduled at Horseshoe Marsh on Bolivar on Saturday, Nov. 8. Contact Winnie Burkett at Houston Audubon if interested in helping.
11. **Christmas Bird Counts:** The following counts need help; please contact the compilers if you can help. December 14: Freeport area count, Mary Dodson; December 27, Buffalo Bayou count, Michael Williams and Adam Wood; December 20, Houston count at HL&P Cooling Ponds, Patsy Lawrence; December 20, Brazos Bend count, Bill Godley.
12. **Featherfest:** Skip Almoney reported that Featherfest in Galveston will take place this year in spite of Hurricane Ike. It will take place the first part of April 2009.
13. **Field Trips:** In Adam Wood's absence, Bernice Hotman reported that eight people enjoyed the Beginning Birder Trip to Nelson Farm on the Katy Prairie. Seventeen people attended the quarterly trip to the Concan/Uvalde area. They saw approximately 100 species including all three Kingfishers, Vermilion Flycatcher, Canyon Wren, Olive Sparrow, and Spotted Towhee. A highlight of the trip was the bat cave.
14. **Next Quarterly Trip:** Planning has started for the spring trip to West Texas which will take place April 10-19, 2009. Steve Gross said more details will follow shortly in the *Spoonbill*.
15. **Program:** Pam Smolen introduced Margaret Pickell, Operations Manager at the Wildlife Rehab & Education Wildlife Center in Houston. Margaret had an excellent slide presentation of the 2005 rescue of hundreds of baby Brown Pelicans after Tropical Storm Arlene. Volunteers cleaned oil from the baby Pelicans. They were then banded and released on Breton Island off the coast of Louisiana where they were fed and monitored until they were able to live independently. Margaret also works with school children to educate them about wildlife. She brought three "wildlife ambassadors" which the Center had saved: a Merlin, a gray-phase Screech Owl, and a Great Horned Owl.

-- Cindy Douglass, OG Secretary

## **December Field Trip Announcement: Houston CBC -- December 20, 2008**

The holiday season is upon us once again and you know what that means -- it is time for another fun and exciting round of Christmas Bird Counts. I strongly encourage all of you all to participate in the Christmas Bird Count even if it is only watching your feeder in your back yard. This is a chance for all us to practice citizen science and contribute valuable information to the scientific community that will help in tracking population changes in bird species. The information gathered during the counts will also help determine how bird species populations are doing year to year and to find out if any bird species populations are declining significantly. The more eyes we have out there, the less chance for a bird to go by unnoticed. I further suggest that everybody tries to participate in other Christmas Bird Counts besides Houston's.

The December field trip will be the annual Houston Christmas Bird Count that is sponsored by the Ornithology Group. This year's Houston count will be held on December 20. The count area is entirely east of Houston and includes San Jacinto Battleground, La Porte and Baytown; it is divided into ten areas and each area leader will determine meeting places and times. For more information regarding the Houston Christmas Bird Count and other counts in Texas, please see the list on page 7. For further details, consult Houston Audubon's website at: [www.houstonaudubon.org](http://www.houstonaudubon.org).

~Adam Wood, Field Trip Coordinator [birdsondabrain@earthlink.net](mailto:birdsondabrain@earthlink.net) 713-515-1692

## **Buffalo Bayou CBC – December 28, 2008**

The Buffalo Bayou Christmas Bird Count was first held in 1978 and is now in its 32<sup>nd</sup> year. It was established to document the birds on the west side of Houston, a part of the city containing a variety of habitats for an urban count that is subject to fairly rapid residential and commercial development. On the first count in 1978, 90 species were observed. Last year this count produced 123 species of birds and over the last ten years this count has averaged about 123 species, with a high count of 132 species being hit twice. It is possible to see up to 15 species of sparrows on this count, including the elusive Henslow's and Grasshopper Sparrows. Other special birds seen over the last five years have been: Hooded Merganser, American Bittern, Solitary Sandpiper, American Woodcock, Common Ground-Dove, Black Phoebe, Couch's Kingbird, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Spotted Towhee, Eastern Towhee, Purple Finch and Pine Siskin. This count is one of the most popular in Texas. We would like you to join in the fun and help us surpass the high count of 132 species.

The Buffalo Bayou CBC is centered at the Houston Audubon Society's Edith L. Moore Sanctuary. It extends from Memorial Park on the east to beyond Highway 6 on the west; from the Southwest Freeway at West Belt on the south to FM 529 near Jersey Village on the north. This area includes sizable chunks of excellent habitat: HANC, Art Storey Park, Addicks & Barker Reservoirs, Bear Creek Park, Edith L. Moore Sanctuary and Buffalo Bayou.

This count is open to birders of all skill levels. The 15-mile diameter count circle has been divided into 8 areas: Addicks Reservoir/Bear Creek Park, Little Gems/North Area, Barker Reservoir North Area, Barker Reservoir South Area, Central Corridor Area, HANC/Memorial Park Area, Southwest Area and South/Southeast Area. Each area will be led by an experienced birder who is familiar with that area. The count will run from 6:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. when all participants will assemble at Luby's for the countdown dinner. Dinner is an opportunity to share your days' birding stories with your fellow birders and hear what species each area was able to find as we find out what the total tally for the count will be. A very nice way to wrap up a long day of birding.

For more information on the Buffalo Bayou CBC, please contact organizer Michael Williams at [txbfcbc@houstonarboretum.org](mailto:txbfcbc@houstonarboretum.org) (preferred contact method) or via phone at or 832-723-0653 or Adam Wood at [birdsondabrain@earthlink.net](mailto:birdsondabrain@earthlink.net) or via phone at 713-515-1692.

**Quarterly Trip Announcement:  
Matagorda Island/Fennessey Ranch/Choke Canyon  
January 22-25, 2009**

**Meet at Days Inn – Rockport, January 22, 7:00 p.m.**

**Trip Fee: \$364      Limit: 15 People**

This is going to be a great trip. We will start out by chartering a boat out of Rockport to Matagorda Island on Friday morning. The fee for the boat(s) will be **\$85 per person**. We will be spending the whole day on the Island with a USFWS guide who will be explaining to us about the natural history of the island as well as taking us into areas where we should have fairly close encounters with the endangered Whooping Cranes and Aplomado Falcons. Those two birds will be the focus of our time on the island but we should encounter other good shorebirds, waterfowl and gulls while studying those birds.. The island is only accessible for birding and educational events, so this is an opportunity that you will not want to miss.

The next day we will spend on a full-day tour of the Fennessey Ranch. This private ranch near Bayside, Texas, north of Rockport, supports a great diversity of birdlife due to its array of habitats (inland marsh, riparian woodland, coastal grassland and thorn scrub). We will be visiting all the various habitats that the ranch has to offer looking for wintering passerines (especially sparrows) as well as wintering waterfowl. Least Grebes and even Masked Ducks have been seen on the ranch in recent years. Visitation is by prior arrangement so this is a unique opportunity to bird a very diverse piece of private land. It will cost **\$84 per person** for the full-day private tour of the ranch.

We will spend the final morning of the trip birding Choke Canyon before heading back to Houston. At Choke Canyon we will be birding in yet another different habitat (mesquite and dry chaparral) looking for more western species like Lark Bunting, Verdin, Common Pauraque, Black-throated Sparrow, Grove-billed Ani and Audubon's Oriole. If we are lucky we could encounter a Sage Thrasher. They have been known to turn up in the park in the winters.

This is a very special trip with some special opportunities to learn about the Endangered Whooping Cranes and Aplomado Falcons while observing them from a close distance. As we will be visiting some pieces of land that are not open to the public and contain a variety of habitats, the potential for seeing a large diversity of birds and even a few rare ones is pretty high. The bird list for this trip should be pretty impressive and we should hopefully encounter a rarity or two.

**This trip is now full.** If you are still interested in this trip, please let me know and I will get your name on the waiting list.

**Accommodations & Directions:** We will be staying at the Days Inn in Rockport. I have booked 4 single rooms (**\$59 a night**) and 5 doubles (**\$65 a night**). I will give you the details on how to call in to reserve your room. To get to the Days Inn, take US 59 South from Houston towards Victoria; just before Victoria, exit onto US 77 south towards Corpus Christi. You will be on US 77 for about 14 miles to TX 239. Turn left on TX 239 and go for about 11 mile to where SH 35 joins TX 239. Take a right onto TX 239/SH 35 and stay on this road for about 30 miles until you see it turn into SH 35 BR S. Stay straight to get on SH 35 BR S. East Laurel Street will be about 3 miles ahead and the hotel is right there.

**Be sure to bring:** binoculars, a hat, sunscreen, scope, camera, raingear (in case it rains, we will bird rain or shine), water and snacks if you would like. You will need to bring a lunch for Friday because we will be on Matagorda Island all day and there are no places to pick up a lunch on the island. Saturday lunch will be provided to us by the Fennessey Ranch but you can bring your own lunch if you prefer.

~ Adam Wood, OG Field Trip Coordinator, [birdsondabrain@earthlink.net](mailto:birdsondabrain@earthlink.net), 713-515-1692



## Pledge to the Warren Ranch Birdathon

Just 30 miles from downtown Houston, the Katy Prairie is home to more than 200 species of birds, plus 100 species of mammals, amphibians, and reptiles. The Katy Prairie also provides us with flood control, educational and recreational opportunities, and open space.

You can help protect this important resource by participating in KPC's Warren Ranch Birdathon, a 24-hour bird count in late December during which Bob and Maggie Honig will try to observe as many bird species as possible. When KPC acquired a majority interest in the 6,500-acre Warren Ranch in 2004, it also acquired a large mortgage. The ranch will not be permanently protected until the mortgage has been eliminated. That's where you come in. Every financial pledge made to this year's Warren Ranch Birdathon will help to alleviate some of the mortgage and ensure that the Warren Ranch is protected for the birds (and people) forever.

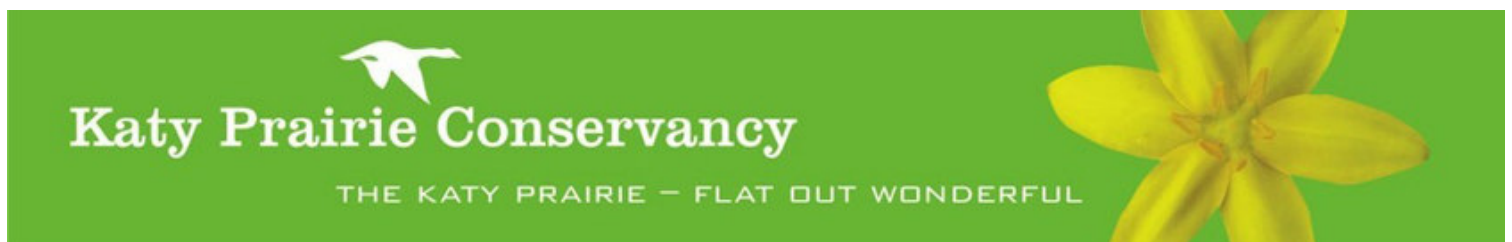
Pledges can be made per species observed on the Warren Ranch by Bob and Maggie Honig, or for a fixed amount. So if you pledge \$3 per species, and Bob and Maggie see 70 species of birds, as they have done on spring Birdathons on the Katy Prairie, that's \$210 dollars toward eliminating KPC's mortgage!

Contributions of all levels are welcome--every dollar counts toward making this year's Birdathon a success. Help KPC by spreading the word about the Warren Ranch Birdathon to as many people as you can--friends and acquaintances, colleagues, civic/homeowner associations, churches, and other organizations with which you may be affiliated. Consider asking your company to make a pledge to KPC's Birdathon or to match the contributions that you and other company employees pledge.

Results of the Birdathon will be posted on the [KPC website](#).

**How do you pledge to make the Warren Ranch Birdathon a success?** If you'd like to pledge a dollar amount per species, either send an email that includes your name, mailing address, and pledge amount to [info@katyprairie.org](mailto:info@katyprairie.org) or give us a call at 713.523.6135. If you'd like to pledge a flat amount online via credit card, just go to <http://www.katyprairie.org/support.html#Birdathon>, click on the button to "Donate using Just Give", and type "Warren Ranch Birdathon" on the *Designated Donation* line.

Please call KPC at 713-523-6135 or email us at [info@katyprairie.org](mailto:info@katyprairie.org) if you need more information.



<b>Christmas Bird Counts, Upper Texas Coastal Area Dec. 2008 – Jan. 2009</b>	
<b>Freeport</b> Mike Austin, mj_eh@comcast.net 281-992-8888	<b>Sunday, December 14, 2008</b>
<b>Matagorda County Mad Island Marsh</b> Brent Ortego, brent.ortego@tpwd.state.tx.us 361-576-0022 ext. 24	<b>Monday, December 15, 2008</b>
<b>Galveston</b> Dwight Peake, dpeake1@comcast.net 409-740-4621	<b>Tuesday, December 16, 2008</b>
<b>San Bernard NWR</b> Ron Weeks, ronweeks@sbcglobal.net (evenings)979-299-0066 Jennifer Wilson, jennifer_wilson@fws.gov (day)979-964-4011	<b>Friday, December 19, 2008</b>
<b>Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR</b> Sumita Prasad, sumita@alumni.utexas.net 832-453-4374	<b>Wednesday, December 17, 2008</b>
<b>Guadalupe River Delta - McFaddin Family Ranches</b> Brent Ortego, brent.ortego@tpwd.state.tx.us 361-576-0022 ext. 24	<b>Thursday, December 18, 2008</b>
<b>Brazos Bend State Park</b> Bill Godley, fribbish@msn.com 281-341-6684	<b>Saturday, December 20, 2008</b>
<b>Houston (Baytown)</b> David Sarkozi, david@sarkozi.net 713-412-4409	<b>Saturday, December 20, 2008</b>
<b>Trinity River</b> Stuart Marcus stuart_marcus@fws.gov 936-336-9786	<b>Friday, December 26, 2008</b>
<b>Armand Bayou Nature Center</b> Martha Hood lazuli007@yahoo.com 281-286-6746	<b>Saturday, December 27, 2008</b>
<b>Spring Creek</b> Al Barr abbarr@comcast.net	<b>Saturday, December 27, 2008</b>
<b>Buffalo Bayou</b> Michael Williams and Adam Wood <a href="http://www.houstonarboretum.org/cbc/txbfintro.htm">http://www.houstonarboretum.org/cbc/txbfintro.htm</a>	<b>Sunday, December 28, 2008</b>
<b>Cypress Creek (Katy Prairie)</b> Fred Collins, fred_collins@hctx.net phone 282-357-5324	<b>Thursday, January 1, 2009</b>
<b>San Jacinto Wilderness</b> David Henderson, dandewild@consolidated.net	<b>Saturday, January 3, 2009</b>

Outdoor Nature Club  
Ornithology Group  
P.O. Box 270894  
Houston TX 77277-0894

***The Spoonbill*** Wants Your Help...

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

[og\\_spoonbill@earthlink.net](mailto: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
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$ 22.00</b>	<b>\$ 34.00</b>

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](mailto:msimmons@compassnet.com)

**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
<b>OG</b>	<b>\$ 10.00</b>	<b>\$ 15.00</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 18.00</b>	<b>\$ 30.00</b>

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