



The Spoonbill

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

March 2009
Vol. 58 No. 3

Monthly Meeting: Monday, March 2

Bayland Community Center
6400 Bissonnet, Houston

Learning Corner -- 6:30 p.m. with Steve Gross
Topic: Early Nesting in Southern TX

7:00 p.m. – General Meeting

Program: Tropical Bird Communities
by John Arvin

John Arvin has been studying the birds of South Texas since childhood. He had a 25-year career leading birding tours throughout the Western Hemisphere, with a heavy emphasis on Latin America where he has traveled through most of the countries studying birds. Since 1996 he has spent four to six months each year working as a seasonal naturalist in Manu National Park and Biosphere Reserve in Peru. Recently he worked for the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department as an avian biologist in the Lower Rio Grande Valley before joining the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory in early 2005, where he serves as Research Coordinator. In this capacity John heads up the annual Smith Point Hawkwatch, and has developed two large-scale programs, the Texas Ivory-billed Woodpecker Survey, and the Avian International Monitoring Network.

Join us in March as we escape to the canopy of a tropical rain forest and peel a few layers off the complexities of a tropical bird community. John will discuss how a tropical forest can support several times the diversity of birds as can temperate forests.

Other Events

Mar. 7: Monthly trip
Texas City Prairie Preserve

Mar. 7: Jones State Park Nature Festival

Apr. 2-5: Galveston FeatherFest
www.galvestonfeatherfest.org

Apr. 10-19: Quarterly trip
Panhandle, W. TX Mountains
(Burr Williams & Steve Gross)

Apr. 11: Gulf Coast Bird Observatory
Passerine Banding and Surroundings
(Cecilia Riley)

May 30: Kayaking Christmas Bay
(Artist Boat)

Inside this issue:

About the OG	2
February Meeting Minutes	2
Paying Up	3
OG Nominations	3
March Field Trip	4
Katy Prairie Update	4
Spring Quarterly Field Trip	5
Birdathon & Featherfest	6
CBC Reports	7
Membership Form	8

Ornithology Group

Minutes of Meeting on Monday, February 2, 2009

Number of Attendees: 53

1. **Learning Corner:** Steve Gross discussed Online Birding. There are many excellent websites related to birding, and Steve passed out a list, broken down by organizations, birding data, bird identification, bird song, and Texas birding.
2. **Sightings:** Bernice Hotman opened the meeting with a request for sightings. The following were mentioned: Brown Creeper at Taylor Park, Henslow's Sparrow and Virginia Rail at Attwater, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, north of town, Ovenbird at Cullinan Park, 11 Black-bellied Whistling-ducks in someone's yard, 70 Rusty Blackbirds at Bear Creek, Field Sparrow and Harris's Sparrow at Paul Rushing Park, and 3 Osprey in a dry lake bed in Brazoria.
3. **Jones Park Nature Festival:** Bernice requested help at the OG table on March 7. Free boat rides are part of the festival.
4. **Tree Planting at Anahuac:** Help is needed on March 7 starting at 9 a.m.
5. **Minutes of Previous Meeting:** Minutes from the January 5 meeting were approved as printed in *The Spoonbill*.
6. **Treasurer's Report:** Jerry Stanislav reported that we have approximately \$9,600 in the bank. Bernice announced that a donation from OG to an organization will be recommended by the Board.
7. **Membership:** Margret Simmons reminded everyone to sign in and pay dues.
8. **Library:** Let Debbie Valdez know if you want her to order a specific book.
9. **Spoonbill:** The deadline for the next *Spoonbill* is February 15.
10. **Future Field Trips:** Adam Wood reported that our next monthly field trip will be to the Baytown Nature Center on February 21. There is a \$3 admission charge to the center. The plan is to continue birding in the afternoon at the San Jacinto battleground. The spring quarterly trip (April 10-19) to the Texas Panhandle, Guadalupe and Davis Mountains is full. The cost is approximately \$650 with \$230 for a single supplement. Let Adam know if you want to be on the waiting list.
11. **Past Field Trips:** The Brazos Bend State Park trip on January 17 was a great success with 82 species seen. The bird of the day was a Tropical Parula. Other highlights were a Black-throated Green Warbler, 2 Rusty Blackbirds, and 50 Canvasbacks.

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
Email: ogspoonbill@sbcglobal.net

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

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

The quarterly trip to Matagorda Island-Fennessey Ranch-Choke Canyon from January 22-25 had numerous highlights, including 14 Whooping Cranes, 2 Aplomado Falcons, brief looks at a Pine Flycatcher, a nesting pair of Bald Eagles, Greater Scaup, 70 Northern Gannet, 1 Masked Booby, Great Kiskadee, Green Jay, Yellow Warbler, Olive Sparrow, and Pyrrhuloxia. The Katy Prairie Sparrow Trip on February 1 produced 11 common sparrows, and a very brief look at a Spotted Towhee and Fox Sparrow which made 13 sparrows for the day.

12. **Program:** Pam Smolen introduced Lynn Barber who just completed an American Birding Association (ABA) Big Year in 2008. The ABA area is the continental U.S., Canada, and the surrounding waters. Lynn shared her adventures as well as her outstanding slides of the birds she saw. She went to a total of 25 states and 3 provinces and saw 723 total species. Some other interesting statistics: 416 species seen in Texas, 503 species photographed, 65,456 miles driven, 36 new ABA birds, and 15 lifers. When asked what the highlights were, she replied "the Spotted Owls and White-tailed Ptarmigan".

-- Cindy Douglass, OG Secretary

Paying Up

“If you go, you owe” was an axiom for living with which I was reared. My parents had weekly card games at their friends’ homes and entertained those same friends at our home on a regular basis.

As far as I am concerned the axiom is relevant for birders. If you bird at a state park, you pay the admission fee. If you go to some national wildlife refuges (Santa Ana or Laguna Atascosa for instance), you also pay an admission fee. Anahuac, Brazoria, Attwater, and San Bernard National Wildlife Refuges, however, do not charge an admission fee. Do you buy an annual duck stamp (available at the post office or sporting goods store) to help support the refuge system? Fifteen dollars is not a lot to pay to do your part in helping establish and maintain these federal properties.

Do you circle through Anahuac NWR at least once during spring migration? Well, on Saturday, March 7, Anahuac is having a tree and shrub planting day. The 1200 plants are ready to be planted but volunteers are needed to get them into the ground at The Willows, the Levee Trail, and the Jackson Woodlot. The group will gather at the Visitor Information Station at 9 a.m. Bring water and lunch if you are able to stay that long.

Have you been to help with any of the sanctuary cleanups along the coast? There have been service opportunities at Sabine and Hook Woods, Bolivar Peninsula, High Island, and Quintana. The next scheduled High Island workday is March 14 from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.. Lunch is provided and it’s okay if you arrive a little late or have to leave a little early.

Spring migration is close at hand and I know you all will be out there chasing the birds as they come through our area. Their biology drives their flight but birders can do their part to assist this amazing feat by helping, as you are able, when and wherever possible with habitat restoration and maintenance.

Along this same line, I want to express my thanks to those who have agreed to serve as officers for your organization for the next year or two, and my appreciation to those of you who have renewed your membership. There is no need for officers if there is no membership. If you go to our meetings, field trips, website, *Spoonbill*, you owe your membership dues. Thanks for taking care of that promptly.

--Bernice Hotman, OG Chairman

Report of the Nominating Committee

The nominating committee of the Houston Ornithology Group, consisting of Adam Wood, Betsy Winn and Frank Farese, convened at the house of Betsy Winn at 7:30 p.m. on Sunday, January 11, 2009, to nominate officers for the positions of Vice Chair / Programs Coordinator and Secretary. Adam Wood chaired the committee. **Pam Smolen**, the current Vice Chair / Programs Coordinator, was called to verify that she would accept the nomination to serve as Chair of the Ornithology Group, and she accepted. Nominations of **John Schneider** for Programs Chair and **Lenore Alfredson** for Secretary were submitted to the Board of Directors of the Ornithology Group. The Board unanimously approved this slate on February 3, 2009, and the Board now presents it to the General Membership for their consideration in advance of the April elections. *—Adam Wood, Nominating Committee Chairman*

March 7, 2009 Trip to Texas City Prairie Preserve

Texas City Prairie Preserve
8 a.m.

This month's trip will be a general birding tour of the Texas City Prairie Preserve. On past trips we have done the prairie-chicken booming tour, but this time we will be foregoing the booming to see more of the preserve and get a better sense of what is on it. The Texas City Prairie Preserve features rare coastal prairie habitat and is one of the last remaining sites that supports wild Attwater's Prairie-Chickens. At the turn of the century, there were approximately 1 million Attwater's Prairie-Chickens along the Texas coast. However, loss of coastal prairie habitat over the years devastated the population, and less than 50 remain in the wild today, making the bird one of the most endangered in North America. In addition to habitat for the prairie chicken, the property provides a home for wintering and migrating grassland songbirds. The preserve also contains excellent wetlands that support migratory and year-round populations of waterfowl, shorebirds and wading birds, including nesting colonies of least terns and black skimmers. Other birds sighted here include Brown Pelican, White-faced Ibis, Black Rail, Peregrine Falcon, White-tailed Hawk, Reddish Egret, Forster's tern and American Oystercatcher.

A Nature Conservancy guide will take us out to onto the preserve. We will also have the opportunity to learn about the preserve and their efforts to help save the prairie chicken. The likelihood of encountering a prairie chicken during our visit to the preserve is slim. However, if we do encounter one while out on the preserve, it will be from a lot closer than the blind and we will have a much better look at it.

Directions: We will meet at the main building at 8 a.m. To get there from Houston, go south on I-45 to FM 1764, then go east to highway 146. Go under highway 146 and turn left. Go approximately 1.9 miles north and the entrance gate will be on your right after crossing Moses Bayou. The main building is 1.4 mile down the gravel road.

Be sure to bring: Binoculars, a spotting scope (the Nature Conservancy will provide two to share), a warm coat or jacket in case it is cold, hat, sun block, camera, water, and a lunch.

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

Katy Prairie Update

Katy Prairie Conservancy announces several upcoming events of interest:

- Feb. 28 at Field Office: New Volunteer Orientation (10 a.m.-12)
Stewardship Saturday: native plant nursery (12-2 p.m.)
- Mar. 1 at Warren Ranch: Open Trails (1-5 p.m.)
- Mar. 6, 13, 20, 27 at Field Office: Open Trails (10 a.m.-2 p.m)
- Mar. 13 at Field Office: Owl Prowl (5:30-9:30 p.m.)
- Mar. 14 at Mary Manor: Prairie Discovery Tour
- Mar. 28 at Field Office: PrairieConnections interpretation class for volunteers

For more information, see www.katyprairie.org or phone Jaime Gonzalez at 713-523-6135.

Bob and Maggie Honig's Christmas Birdathon was a great success, tallying 95 species and raising much-needed funds for KPC's financial obligations on Warren Ranch. Although the winter has been dry and waterfowl have been harder to find than in some years, the prairie is always a great place to spend time and discover something interesting and amazing. -Al Shultz

Spring Quarterly Trip: April 10-19, 2009

Panhandle, Guadalupe and Davis Mountains

Leaders: Adam Wood and Steve Gross

Fee: \$750 (Single Supplement \$400) with a \$200 Deposit by 3/1/2009; Limit 14 People
Meet: Lobby of Holiday Inn Express (on I-40) in Amarillo, April 10, 2009, 9:00 p.m.

We will start the trip off in the Panhandle, where we will spend our time birding in locations such as Buffalo Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge, and Palo Duro Canyon State Park in search of lingering winter residents, early spring migrants and regular residents of the plains. Then, on our way down to the Guadalupe Mountains, we will take an early morning Lesser Prairie-Chicken booming tour on a ranch near Kenna, New Mexico.

Buffalo Lake NWR, located in Randall County in the Texas Panhandle, contains some of the best remaining shortgrass prairie in the United States, including 175 acres designated a National Natural Landmark. Shortgrass prairie ecosystems were historically maintained by annual grazing of migrating American bison. With the bison gone, this ecosystem is maintained by grazing cattle. The refuge is made up of 7,644 acres of shortgrass prairie, riparian, marsh, woodland and cropland habitats. Riparian areas, consisting of trees and grasses adjacent to the dry lake bed, provide habitat used by neotropical migratory birds, deer, and numerous other wildlife species. The refuge is located in the Central Flyway, a route traveled annually by numerous species of waterfowl and other birds, moving between tropical wintering and U.S. nesting areas. Over 300 species have been recorded on the refuge.

The rest of the trip will be spent birding in the Guadalupe and Davis Mountains in search of some west Texas specialties, higher elevation montane species and spring migrants. For those familiar with the Guadalupe Mountains, we will be spending time birding Dog Canyon, Pine Springs, Devils Hall and Frijole Ranch. While in the Davis Mountains we will spend time birding the Davis Mountains Loop, Davis Mountains State Park, the River Bottom above Fort Davis, LE Wood Picnic and Marfa Grasslands. We may even get to bird in the Davis Mountain Preserve. Our very own Steve Gross, who has done extensive birding in this region, will be our guide for the rest of the trip and he will be trying to find us such goodies as Northern Goshawk (rare), Gambel's Quail (rare), "Mexican" Spotted Owl (rare), Blue-throated Hummingbird, Magnificent Hummingbird, Lucifer Hummingbird, Painted Redstart (rare), and Buff-breasted Flycatcher (rare). To whet your appetite, birds we should encounter are Golden Eagle, Zone-tailed Hawk, Scaled Quail, Montezuma Quail, Common Poorwill, Whip-poor-will, Cassin's Vireo, Gray Vireo, Pygmy Nuthatch, Sage Thrasher, Crissal Thrasher, Virginia's Warbler, Townsend's Warbler, Grace's Warbler, Black-chinned Sparrow, Cassin's Sparrow, Lazuli Bunting, and Green-tailed Towhee. On our way back to Houston we will make stops at Lake Balmorea for Clark's and Western Grebe, and at South Llano River State Park to break up the long drive back. This is going to be an outstanding trip to some beautiful country that you will not want to miss.

Note: This trip will be limited to 14 people and to reserve your spot on the trip a **non-refundable deposit of \$200** is due by March 1, 2009. The remainder of the fee (**\$550**) is due by **April 1, 2009**. If you wish to stay in a single room during the trip, the **single supplement will be \$400**. The payment will pay for your rooms and guide fees for the trip. Please make sure to bring money for food and fuel as those costs are not included in the fee for the trip. Please make your checks payable to Adam Wood and send them to me at 136 Stoney Creek Dr., Houston, TX 77024. Steve and I are planning to drive from Houston to Midland. Participants are welcome to fly and then rent a car, but it is advisable that you drive because we will be carpooling during the trip and will not be renting a large van due to insurance issues. If you are interested in going on this trip, please let me know.

~ Adam Wood, OG Field Trip Coordinator birdsondabrain@earthlink.net 713-515-1692

Other Announcements

Birdathon 2009: March 28 - April 30

Houston Audubon Society's favorite volunteer fundraising event, Birdathon, is back and better than ever! Once again, adult and youth teams of all skill levels will gather pledges from family, friends, and local businesses. Then, based on the number of different bird species observed over any 24-hour period between March 28 and April 30, 2009, the teams will compete for exciting prizes across a variety of categories.

Last year, Birdathon raised more than \$56,000 to advance Houston Audubon's mission of promoting the conservation and appreciation of birds and wildlife habitat. This year HAS has set its sights even higher...to raise \$60,000 and put more than 30 teams in the field! To accomplish this goal will certainly need your help.

For information about teams, prizes, sponsorship and more, see www.houstonaudubon.org or phone Robin Leonard at 713-932-1639.

7th Annual

Galveston FeatherFest

April 2 – 5, 2009

Galveston Island, Texas

Visit one of the nation's top birding locations during spring migration! Join experienced and novice outdoor lovers to see some 200 species of birds and upper Texas coastal habitats restored or recovering from Hurricane Ike.

Cape May Bird Observatory Director Peter Dunne heads a team of expert naturalists leading beach and bay excursions, field trips, workshops, and kayak and photography expeditions.

Live birds of prey exhibits and popular socials make this nature festival like no other!

For Further Information

Email: NatureTourismGalv@juno.com
Phone: 409.392.0841 or 1-888-425-4753
Fax: 409.737.2264
Mail: Galveston FeatherFest,
P.O. Box 1468,
Galveston, TX 77553-1468

FeatherFest is a project of the Galveston
Island Nature Tourism Council

More Reports from the 2008-2009 Christmas Bird Counts in Southeast Texas

San Bernard NWR

On December 19, 2008, the 24th annual San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge Christmas Bird Count found an unofficial total of 188 species. New for the count were Kelp Gull (same individual that has been seen in Quintana area), Yellow-bellied/Western Flycatcher and Great Crested Flycatcher. Those species seen for just the second time on the count were Solitary Sandpiper, Blue Grosbeak and Bronzed Cowbird. Other goodies included Least Grebe, Nashville and Black-throated Green Warblers, two Northern Waterthrushes, two Harris's Sparrows, two Western Meadowlarks, two Pine Siskins and a Bronzed Cowbird. Although numbers were generally low, new record highs were tallied for Turkey Vulture (421), Tree Swallows (379) and House Sparrow (101). Bird that were seen most of the time but missed this year included Cinnamon Teal, Canvasback, Common Loon, Eared Grebe, Common Tern and Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow. The highlight of the evening was the seafood gumbo and Italian pasta dishes at the countdown dinner. Ron Bisbee, Marty Cornell, Ed Barrios and Barbara Burkhardt teamed up to make it a special affair. Thanks go to ConocoPhillips for sponsoring the dinner. --Ron Weeks

San Jacinto Wilderness

Now in its second year, and spread across three counties, this unique inland circle is situated where Big Thicket meets Coastal Prairie. A broad and complex ecotone, it's laced through and through with wild rivers and bottomlands, as well as extensive farms and subdivisions. On this count, kayakers course down the most scenic rivers in the region, while other bands of birders tour subdivisions by car. A huge wilderness park is its linchpin, and large private ranches offer a birding and hiking adventure that can be the equal of anywhere in the UTC. Welcome to the San Jacinto Wilderness.

3 January 2009: Rain was in the forecast - 90% chance. The likelihood of becoming soaked permeated the conversation as 25 birders gathered at a parking lot in Kingwood and then split into six groups; one to cover the rural north, another to cover the central exurbs, a third to canvass the country clubs to the south, a fourth to take on the ranches of Liberty County, a fifth to kayak down the San Jacinto, and finally one to spread across all 5000 acres of Lake Houston Park. We were on a

mission – to make triple digits -- and we figured we didn't have much time.

Ten hours later, after spending a spectacular, rain-free day of birding, we went over our list as we hunkered down over some Tex-Mex cuisine. Each group did a wonderful job getting some unique species. Here in brief is a list of each group's highlights...

Lake Houston Park Trekkers - Covering the park in pickups and golf carts, the LHP crew got many birds including everyone's favorites – the Henslow's Sparrow and LeConte's Sparrow!

Iron Ducks Kayakers - This group truly embodies what this count is all about - wilderness bird censusing - and takes it to a whole new level! White-breasted Nuthatch, Osprey, Spotted Sandpiper, Northern Flicker, and Brown Creeper were the stars on their list from the East Fork, Caney Creek, and Peach Creek.

Country Club Cribbs - a new group, this band took in the wooded and watery fringes of IdleLoch and The Commons at Lake Houston, getting Mottled Duck and Neotropic Cormorant as well as many sparrows.

Dayton Prairie Muckers – this band of hardy souls scoped out the fields and water impoundments between Luce Bayou and Dayton. Thanks to the generosity of two landowners in the area, the group has open access to thousands of acres of their pastures, fallow fields, hedgerows, irrigation ditches, reservoirs and forest edges, so they were able to get very up close and personal with American Bittern, Sandhill Cranes, Green-winged Teal, Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Canvasback, Ruddy Duck, Merlin, Common Moorhen, Common Snipe, Red-headed Woodpeckers, Vermilion Flycatcher, Marsh Wren, American Pipit, Field Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, and Brewer's Blackbird.

Northern Exposure – Taking in Splendora and its environs this group got Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Canada Goose, Mallard, and Cedar Waxwing among others.

NW Arc Roadies – Road-birding on the west side of US 59, the Roadies found White Ibis, Cooper's Hawk, Barred Owl, an *Empidonax* flycatcher, and believe it or not, was the only group to grab a Great-tailed Grackle!

All told, over 13800 birds of 108 species were observed. We look forward to having you join us on 2 January 2010!

--David Henderson, dandewild@consolidated.net.

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

ogspoonbill@sbcglobal.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

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

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