



The Spoonbill

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

August 2012
Vol. 61 No. 7

**Bayland Community Center
6400 Bissonnet, Houston**

GENERAL MEETING - 7:00 P.M.

PROGRAM:

by

Fred Collins

Director: Kleb Woods Nature Sanctuary

**Monthly Meeting
Monday, August 6**

**Join us for the
first monthly meeting
following our summer break!**

Birdin' Texas:

Is August the best month to bird in Texas?

Yes its hot, but the birding can be equally hot. I'll tell you some tales of birding Texas in August and try to inspire you to venture forth into the 100 degree sunshine in the salt cedars of Quintana, the mosquitoes of High Island or the hotter than blazes highways of west Texas.

Fred Collins is a life member of Texas Ornithological Society and the Southwestern Association of Naturalists, he's a long time member of the American Ornithologist Union, the Wilson Society, Cooper's Ornithological Society and Association of Field Ornithologist. Fred has been active with the Houston Audubon Society since 1972; served as president (1982-85) and currently serves on their advisory board. He's also a member of the Katy Prairie Conservancy advisory board. He's a former Director of the Nature Discovery Center from 1994-2002. Since 2002 he's been employed by Harris County Commissioner Steve Radack and has developed Kleb Woods Nature Center and Heritage Farm as well as the Historic Park, Cypress Top. Fred also works as a consultant wildlife biologist and lives on 100 acres of the Katy prairie with his wife in their now empty nest with 4 dogs, 9 horses, an uncountable flock of free ranging chickens, and about 80 parrots. Well maybe the nest isn't exactly empty. But he and his wife's two sons have long since fledged.

Mission Statement of the Ornithology Group:

**To promote the study and appreciation of wild birds and
encourage their conservation.**

HOUSTON COMMUNITY CALL TO ACTION

Help Save the College Park Prairie

The College Park Prairie in Deer Park is a wonderful, unique and intact 53-acre native prairie remnant that many organizations and folks in the greater Houston area are attempting to save.

This prairie remnant is complete with original prairie potholes and pimple mounds. Just in the last 6 months or so over 240 species of native plants have been found there indicating that it is an extremely diverse. It is probably the last high-quality prairie left in the Houston area. The site has many now rare plants that used to be found on the prairies around the greater Houston area but are now gone.



photo by Don Verser

Why should we birders care? Wintering Le Conte's, Henslow's and Grasshopper Sparrows were found there last winter and Loggerhead Shrikes and Eastern Meadowlarks along with others nested there this year.

Check out this short u-tube video with Jaime Gonzalez of the Katy Prairie Conservancy and Flo Hanna of Houston Audubon to learn more about this amazing College Park Prairie:

http://www.youtube.com/embed/BrWuDicXMpQ?feature=player_embedded

The property's owner is willing to give individuals and conservation groups in the Houston area a chance to purchase this property before he finalizes plans to develop it. You can visit the site <http://SAVEcollegeParkPrairie.ning.com> to learn more about what you can do to help.

Mary Ann Beauchamin

WELCOME BACK TO A WONDERFUL SEASON

FLY TO YOUR CALENDARS
TO FILL IN THESE DATES

Nina Rach has been busy getting ready for the next season of OG speakers. Here is the line-up of exciting speakers which we can look forward to in the approaching months. We look forward to seeing you back at the meetings and to bringing you great presenters for both the Programs and Learning Corner.

Sept 10, 2012 – **Prof. Clay Green**, Texas State Univ., San Marcos
“**Egret plumage variation**”

Oct 1, 2012 - **Tad Finnell**
“**Completing a Bird-a-Day Year in Texas, 2009**”

Nov 5, 2012 – **Greg Green**, Ducks Unlimited
“**Winter Waterfowl trends in Texas**”

Dec 3, 2012 – **Felipe Chavez-Ramirez, PhD**, Dir. of Conservation Programs,
Gulf Coast Bird Observatory,
“**Cranes**”

Jan 7, 2013 – **Susan Heath**, GCBO,
“**American Oystercatcher Stewardship in Texas**”

Feb 4, 2013 – **Kendra Kocab**, Staff Naturalist, Kleb Woods Nature Sanctuary
“**Picture This: Digital details.**” [about the struggles of online bird identification.]



photo by Harlan Evans

Green Heron, Brazos Bend, 6/21/12

FILL UP ON FALL BIRDING



photo by Harlan Evans

Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Brazos Bend, 5/25/12



photo by Harlan Evans

Little Blue Heron, Brazos Bend, 6/1/12

**Please join SWIFTS OVER HOUSTON for our
2012 Swift Night Out Events at the following locations:**

Aug 21st:

**Pershing Middle School, 7000 Braes Blvd., Houston, TX 77025
Whole Foods Market, 4004 Bellaire Blvd, Houston, TX 77025**

Aug 24th:

**Nature Discovery Center,
7112 Newcastle Street, Bellaire, TX 77401**

Sept. 14th:

Lakeview Elementary, 314 Lakeview Dr., Sugarland, TX 77498

Summer is a great time for urban birding!

by Pam Smolen

Yes, I really said that!

I look forward to the spectacular sight of thousands of Purple Martins descending to their roost site during July evenings. It's fun to see Night-Herons in the neighborhoods. I enjoy the peent call of Common Nighthawks. Evening brings the call of Killdeers.

Summer also brings Chimney Swifts back to our skies. This year we are monitoring the Pershing Middle School, Whole Foods, and Lakeview Elementary School roost sites weekly. The old Jeff Davis Hospital, now Elder Street Artist Lofts, is the site of our newest roost. Vicki Vroble leads this weekly count. Chimneys at St. Paul's United Methodist Church, Emanu El Synagogue, the former National Armory, and the rice dryers at Beltway 8 and I-10 West are being monitored regularly. Swift numbers at these roost sites increased at the beginning of July as young swifts fledged.

This year we have been gathering detailed information during the swift counts. We are monitoring weather conditions such as wind speed, temperature, cloud cover and rain. We are also counting in two ten minute intervals before civil twilight and one ten minute interval after civil twilight. At Whole Foods and Pershing the majority of the Swifts enter ten minutes prior to civil twilight. At Lakeview the majority enter in the ten minutes after civil twilight. On rainy and cloudy days more entered ten to twenty minutes before civil twilight.

Please join us at one of our weekly counts or discover a new site—an online report form is on the HAS website. You can also adopt a site of your own.

Existing sites are located at the following locations:

St. Paul's United Methodist Church, 5501 Main @ Binz
Congregation Emanu El, 1500 Sunset, Houston, TX 77005
Buffalo Soldiers Museum, Caroline @ St. Thomas
Old Jeff Davis Hospital
Lanier Middle School
Wharton Elementary School

For more information, check the following website: www.chimneyswifts.org.

Migration!

It is that time of year – the time to observe one of nature's spectacles: Migration! That's right, migration. What usually comes to mind when we think of migration is that wonderful time that the coast explodes with the color and song of our spring migrants – the warblers, tanagers, vireos and orioles. That is when we head to Sabine, High Island or Galveston Island to catch the masses coming through in a race to their nesting areas in North America. Well, the birds have to go back, too.

Fall migration is a great time to catch a glimpse of the birds once again. Most of us are familiar with the fall hawk migration, and make annual pilgrimages to Smith Point or Corpus Christi hawk watch sites during the fall. As well, we are becoming more familiar with the August and September influx of purple martins and chimney swifts. But there is much more to see! As early as late July, you can start to see many migrating shorebirds, and passerines like the black-and-white warblers show up. In August we have the return of the ruby-throated hummingbirds, some of our flycatchers, swallows, gnatcatchers, and a few more warblers. During September the warblers show up in earnest along with vireos, blue grosbeaks, indigo buntings, Baltimore orioles and more. Though not always as colorful as when they are in spring breeding plumage, the migrants are a joy to watch as they travel back through.

The OG's A Birder's Checklist of the Upper Texas Coast can give you a good idea of when these birds show up in our area. Also, check out the weekly bird walks at the Nature Discovery Center's fall migration "Lunch With the Birds." It's a great time to be out birding!

Marcy Brown



photo by Harlan Evans

Black-throated Blue Warbler Lafitte's Cove 5/4/12

Monday August 6th

**HOGG SANCTUARY BIRD SURVEY
MONTHLY EVENT
8 A.M. FIRST MONDAY**

CONTACT: AARON STOLEY

Saturday August 11th

**ARMAND BAYOU SURVEY
MONTHLY EVENT
SECOND SATURDAY**

Monday August 13th

**HERMANN PARK SURVEY
MONTHLY EVENT
7:30 A.M. SECOND MONDAY**

CONTACT: JIM WINN

Tuesday August 14th

**WEST 11TH STREET PARK SURVEY
LEADER: MARY DODSON**

Saturday August 18th

**WILLOW WATERHOLE SURVEY
MONTHLY EVENT
THIRD SATURDAY**

Monday August 20th

**JESSE H. JONES PARK
THIRD MONDAY BIRD WALK**

**Check out the Houston Audubon Website
for details on August survey events**

FEATHERS AND FINS

National Wildlife, a magazine published by the **National Wildlife Federation**, put out an excellent **April/May 2012** issue. Cover to cover it held interesting articles. One in particular ruffled my feathers as a bird watcher, sounding the alert to an upcoming study and need for support to back change.

While studying Tiger Sharks in the Gulf of Mexico biologists at Alabama's Dauphin Island Sea Lab noted that the sharks have a diet of songbirds as well as fish. Probing the question of how land birds end up in the water as food for sharks the **American Bird Conservancy** suspects the gulf's 6000 oil and gas platform lights are attracting migrating birds at night, that the birds circle the platforms, then confused and exhausted drop into the gulf.

Will a federal study of the problem and solutions such as changes in platform lighting come about as a result of the study of these Tiger Sharks?

Check out the article on page 10 of the **National Wildlife** magazine, in the section **news of the wild**, **IS THE OIL INDUSTRY FEEDING SHARKS?**



As a notable Hot Spot of migration Dauphin Island attracts large numbers of bird watchers to their Audubon sites along the island.

A bridge stretches across the Mississippi Sound to the island, have fun birding the island sites, then from the island you can connect to a ferry over to Fort Morgan for more gulf birding.

It's a great place to plan a migration "hot spot" visit.

SPoonBILL LOOKING FORWARD TO CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE GROUP

...I'M CERTAIN THERE ARE SOME EXCITING STORIES AND PHOTO'S FROM PERCOLATING OUT THERE!

THE OG SPOONBILL OWES A TREMENDOUS DEBT OF GRATITUDE TO THE WONDERFUL PEOPLE WHO HAVE CONTRIBUTED THEIR TIME, WRITING TALENTS, PHOTOGRAPHY SKILLS, EDITORIAL SAVY, SUPPORT AND TUTORING, WHICH HAVE HELPED ME CREATE THE NEWSLETTERS

MY DEEPEST APPRECIATION:

TO JOANN RAINE AND STEPHAN LORENZ FOR THEIR WONDERFUL ARTICLES. TO HARLAN, WHO PUT SUCH FUN IN DOING THE WEB VERSION BY SENDING ME WONDERFUL PHOTOS. TO AL SHULTZ, JOANNA FRIESEN, MARY FITZGERALD, & RYAN UBIAS, proofreading support.

Ornithology Group Houston Outdoor Nature Club
Minutes of Meeting Monday, May 07, 2012
Bayland Community Center
Number of Attendees: 65

Learning Corner: *Drought on the Katy Prairie* was presented by *Bob Honig*. Cassin's Sparrows showed up as a result of the drought. There were 40 males in one small area. They are normally found in a much dryer habitat. The US Drought Monitor, Archives Maps show that 99% of Texas was in severe drought. Ponds dried and fish died. By June 2011, all the ponds were drying up. Warren Lake dried up. (It has water now). A Yellow-billed Cuckoo, desperate for water, showed up to drink. For 74 weeks, from December 7, 2010 until May 1, 2011, over 75% of Texas has been abnormally dry or drier.

Observations: Bobwhites seemed to do okay. Herons and Egrets were not to be found. Winter Sparrows increased and there were more Western Species. There were Lark Buntings, Spotted Towhees & Green-tailed Towhees. Harris's Sparrows significantly outnumbered the White-crowned Sparrows. There was a Sage Thrasher, a Ladder-backed Woodpecker and NO Downy Woodpeckers. Vesper Sparrows outnumbered Savannah Sparrows many times. There were decreases in Swamp Sparrows, LeConte's Sparrows and Sedge Wrens. Lincoln's Sparrows disappeared. Painted Bunting did not nest last year, but are back again this year. Blue Grosbeak was absent. The Summer Butterfly count of 2011 was down to only 5 species. (There were 22 species in 2010.)

Drought-caused changes in habitat and wildlife: There were fewer winter berries; grasses died-off; trees died-off; water bodies dried up; insect diversity and abundance were reduced; exotics knocked back in some cases allowing natives to flourish.

Now: With a wet spring, the pond is overflowing. King Rails are not nesting. There are less Egrets and Herons due to lack of fish in the ponds. Temperature predictions: Chances are, we will have above normal temperatures. West Texas is still having a hard time. Migrants are not stopping there.

Sightings: Hooded Warbler; Dickcissel; Rose-breasted Grosbeak; Nutmeg Mannikin; Cliff and Barn Swallows; Cape May Warbler @ Quintana & Lafitte's Cove; Western Tanager; Bobolinks & baby Ruddy Ducks at Port Aransas; Magnificent Frigatebirds; Scarlet Tanager; Scissor-tailed Flycatcher; Black Tern; Laughing Gulls. At High Island: Scarlet Tanager; Baltimore Oriole; Yellow Warbler; Tanagers. Black-throated Blue at Don's Drip and Quintana.

Minutes: See Marie.

Library: Please return checked out library books.

Treasurer's Report: \$8,018. There are two uncleared checks; which will result in \$400.00 less money in the treasury.

Membership: Please sign in. Pay dues now if you haven't.

The Spoonbill: No printed Spoonbill came out. Let Vicki know if you don't get email and she will send a printed copy.

Announcements: There is a possible demise of ONC. The legal form of the group may change. Send thoughts by email to Marcy Brown. There is a Butterfly and Birding Festival in Marathon, Texas in July with Kenn Kaufman as the speaker.

Past Field Trips: Big Bend: The Davis Mountain Preserve burned. Mt. Livermore burned where the Dusky-capped Flycatcher lived. The Scarlet Tanager was seen in multiple places. Nine Colima Warblers were seen on a 12.5 mile hike. It is a record year for Colima Warblers. One Painted Redstart was seen. Cassin's Sparrows were not seen at all. Also seen were Black-throated Sparrow; Western and Clark's Grebes; One Verdin; lots of Blue-gray Gnatcatchers; a Blue-winged Warbler; Blue-throated Hummingbirds; six or seven Hepatic Tanagers; Graces Warblers; a Black Bear; more Eastern than Western Migrants were seen. About 25% of the Pinyon Pines are struggling as a result of the drought.

Future Field Trips: May 19th/Katy Prairie. Meet at 7am @ Paul Rushing Park on the West Side near the Sports Complex. Print out the release form and bring it with you on the day of the trip.

Program: *Patterns and Trends of Invasive Birds of Texas* was presented by *Daniel*

M. Brooks of the Houston Museum of Natural Science. He is doing a Citizen Science Project on introduced birds in Texas. He has collected reports from June 2008 to the present.

Reports on introduced birds are as follows:

Red-vented Bulbul (150) Bulbuls landed in the Ship Channel. They are located in the Heights, North Montrose, and Greenspoint. It's call is: "Chur urp"

Monk Parakeet (35) Galveston

Nutmeg Mannikin (200) Introduced populations from Puerto Rico. They like wheat like fields.

Orange Bishop (35) From Addicks Reservoir to Sugarland

Mute Swan (20)

Egyptian Goose (50)

Greg Page reported the following Invasive Birds at Bear Creek Park:

Nutmeg Mannikin

Orange Bishop

Orange-cheeked Waxbill

Pin-tailed Whydah

Zebra Finch

Reports show that Red-vented Bulbuls consume 20 species of plants; 8 species of berries; 5 species of flowers; 4 species of buds. There are 11 reports of insectivore. They frequent utility lines. 96% of reports are in people's yards. White Oak Bayou Park has had three reports. Bulbuls are reported to have perched in 37 species of plants. The most frequently used plants are fig, crepe myrtle, bamboo, and tallow. Their mean perch height is 6.5 meters. They really like utility lines, water, baths, and fountains. Two Blue Jays and one Mockingbird have been reported to have chased the Red-vented Bulbul.

To report Invasive Birds the following information should be observed and noted:

What species?

List your name and email.

Where did you see it?

When did you see it?

What was the habitat or type of tree?

How large was the flock?

What was the bird's behavior?

Was there any breeding behavior?

What was the time of observation?

Photos are valuable to support data.

In order to find photos of the invasive birds and the data sheet on which to record the invasive birds and data about the birds, you can google: Invasive Passerine Study or type in www.hmns.org/files/invasivebirds.doc

Email the data sheet to dbrooks@hmns.org or send by post to:

Dr. Dan Brooks,

Curator of Vertebrate Zoology,

Houston Museum of Natural Science,

1 Hermann Circle Dr.

Houston, TX 77030-1799

Marie Asscherick/Ornithology Group Secretary

BE A FAN OF FALL BIRDING



American Redstart (female), Lafitte's Cove, 5/9/12

photo by Harlan Evans

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.

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

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