

The Spoonbill

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

October 2012
Vol. 61 No. 9

**Bayland Community Center
6400 Bissonnet, Houston**

LEARNING CORNER 6:30 P.M. GENERAL MEETING 7:00 P.M.

FIRST MONDAY IN OCTOBER

FOR A SUPREME EVENING EVENT

OCTOBER 1st

EVENING PROGRAM SPEAKER

TAD FINNELL

“COMPLETING A BIRD-A-DAY YEAR IN TEXAS, 2009”

Tad has birded extensively across the U.S. for the last 40 years. He has lived in Virginia and Oregon, and retired 4 years ago to Lake Jackson.

He is a volunteer with the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, and has participated in Bird-a-Day on two separate occasions.

Stephan Lorenz leading the October
OG field trip to High Island and
Bolivar.....see page 2
in this Spoonbill

Share their journey north to Alaska-
Jennifer Backo, JoAnn Raine, and
Skip Alimoney
beginning on page 5

THE KATY PRAIRIE BASH 2012

Wednesday, October 3, 2012, 7:00 pm

Co-Chairs Ann and Tom Kelsey and Donna and Roger Soape

The Katy Prairie Conservancy (KPC) is throwing itself a party – make that a blowout – to celebrate its 20th birthday. Since 1992, we've conserved land on the west of Houston at a rate of nearly 1000 acres a year. Our fierce and festive birthday party – Born to be Wild – will take place on Wednesday, October 3rd. We hope you will join in the revelry and also lend your support as an event sponsor.

Imagine an area that would fit Hermann Park, Memorial Park, and the entire island of Manhattan, with acreage left over - that is the extent of the 18,000+ acres of prairie we have conserved so far. The Katy Prairie has something for everyone - it's a birdwatchers' and hunters' paradise, a wide open space for hiking and cycling, and productive agricultural land for family farms and ranches.

To make a donation and attend the KPC Bash 2012, go to <https://secure.piryx.com/donate/exehSqAI/Katy-Prairie-Conservancy/bash2012>.

For more information contact us info@katyprairie.org or 713-523-6135. And please visit www.katyprairie.org to learn more about KPC.

Saturday October 20th OG Field Trip High Island and Bolivar

Meeting at Boy Scout Woods 8:30 a.m.

Stephan Lorenz will lead this all-day field trip. The group will gather at Boy Scout Woods to start the day, then will proceed on to Smith Oaks.

From there the group will head to Bolivar and spend the rest of the day shore-birding.

Please bring a lunch and be aware that the group will eat at one of the stops or “on the fly” depending on when people get hungry. No official lunch break is planned.

In addition to lunch and liquids don't forget to bring a hat, sunscreen, and mosquito repellent (the little rascals are likely to be out in full force)

If you have a scope please bring it for the Bolivar portion of the day.

We are so thankful that Stephan has volunteered to lead this trip and look forward to an excellent outing.....

Sandra G. Moore
sgjjm@sbcglobal.net

**Saturday November 17th OG Field Trip schedule:
Freeport & Quintana with Mike Austin**

Outdoor Nature Club
Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary Weekend
October 27 - 28

Join in the fun Halloween activities at LTNS
Bring your witches' hat, broomsticks and vampire teeth.
Don't forget to bring a pumpkin for the annual pumpkin carvin' contest!
(map is available on the website)

PUMP IT UP FOR FALL



Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Brazos Bend SP 9/28/11

Hum Dingers

More than a third of a hummingbird's weight is in its chest muscles.

A hummingbird has 10 primary wing feathers and 10 tail feathers. When the wings flap, the feathers vibrate, and so do the tail feathers, creating a humming sound.

Their energy output is the greatest, per unit of weight, of any warm-blooded animal: using 155,000 calories per day compared to 3,500 for a 170-pound man.

Nature Discovery Center Lunch With the Birds
Bird Walk from Noon to 1:15 every Wednesday thru November 7th
Group meets on the front porch (to look, not lunch)

7112 Newcastle St. Bellaire, Tx. 77401
713-667-6550

HOUSTON

VOLUNTEER
WORK DAYS BEGIN IN OCTOBER:
HIGH ISLAND SATURDAY OCT. 13th
HORSESHOE MARSH THURSDAY OCT. 18th

AUDUBON

1st Monday October 2nd

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

CONTACT: AARON STOLEY

Monday October 8th

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

CONTACT: JIM WINN

Tuesday October 9th

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

Saturday October 13th

**ARMAND BAYOU SURVEY
MONTHLY EVENT
SECOND SATURDAY**

Monday October 15th

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

Thursday October 18th

**BAYTOWN NATURE CENTER
BIRD SURVEY**

NEW !

Saturday October 20th

**WILLOW WATERHOLE SURVEY
MONTHLY EVENT
THIRD SATURDAY
CONTACTS: JOY HESTER / MARK MEYER**

**Check out the Houston Audubon Website
for details on October events**

**Aransas 75th Anniversary Celebration
and
National Wildlife Refuge Week Event
Saturday October 20th
10am to 4pm
Guest Speaker David Sibley**

**FREE FRIDAY FALL FEATHERED FEATURES
KLEB WOODS NATURE CENTER - BIRDING PROGRAMS 9 - 11:00AM
OCTOBER 5: MARY ANNE WEBER, HISTORY OF BIRD CONSERVATION**

Share the Journey !



Houston Birders Fly North To Alaska



Photo's on page 5 by JoAnn Raine

My Trip to Alaska

by Jennifer Backo

In June of this year, I participated in a birding trip to Alaska organized by David Bradford. We met in Anchorage and spent three wonderful weeks birding all over the state from May 31 until June 20.

Our leaders were David Bradford, Brandon Percival and Van Truan. The participants were Skip Almoney, Jennifer Backo, Barbara Hickl, Ed Hickl, Bernice Hotman, Kathy Merritt, Dee Oke, JoAnn Raine, Brian Swanson, Marci Swanson, Myriam Vyles, Jana Whittle, John Whittle, Betsy Winn and Jim Winn.

We traveled over a wide area of the state going to Anchorage, Homer, Seward, Nome, Barrow, Denali National Park and the Denali Highway ending with a loop back to Anchorage.

Anchorage certainly impressed me. It is a city with lots of great birding places and is surrounded by water and beautiful, snow-capped mountains.

While there we birded Hillside Park, Potter Marsh, Ship Creek, Lakes Hood and Spenard, Westchester Lagoon and the Coastal Trail. At the water were many of the shorebirds and ducks that we see in winter around Texas such as Spotted Sandpiper, Solitary Sandpiper and both Yellowlegs. It was nice to see them in their breeding plumage. At Hillside Park were woodland birds associated with higher elevations of the western states such as Boreal Chickadee and Varied Thrush.

I personally enjoyed seeing the Yellow-rumped Warbler in its breeding plumage. While at Potter Marsh the group got it's first look at a moose up close with a calf. Also there were many cool birds like Arctic Tern and Mew Gull.

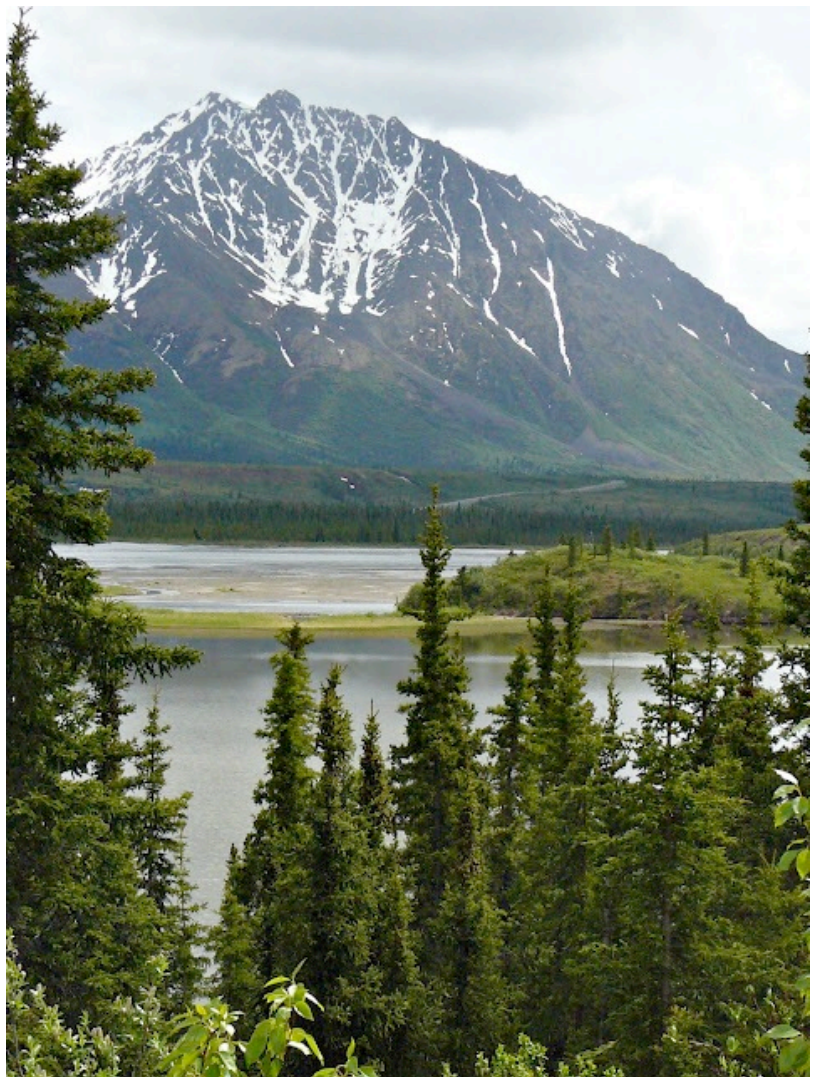


Photo of Anchorage scenery by JoAnn Raine



Arctic Tern
Sterna paradisaea

Photo
of Arctic Tern
by
Skip Alimoney

The following day we left Anchorage and drove down the Kenai Peninsula towards Homer. The scenery of lakes and snow-capped mountains is magnificent! Here, we spotted one of many beautiful Harlequin Ducks seen on the trip. At Tern Lake we found our first Wandering Tattler. This Eurasian species we would also find near Nome. After a day of spotting numerous Bald Eagles, thrushes, flycatchers and other birds, we arrived at our destination, the Land's End Hotel, where we could watch the birds on Kachemak Bay from our hotel rooms. That evening we made one of several trips to Anchor Point where we hoped to find a Bristle-thighed Curlew that had been spotted earlier. The curlew was elusive, but we did find a Bar-tailed Godwit. Also present among the many shorebirds were Bald Eagles on the shore, in the trees and all over.



Northwestern Crow
Corvus caurinus

Bald Eagle
Haliaeetus leucocephalus

Photo
of Bald Eagle and
Northwestern Crow
by
Skip Alimoney

While in Homer we had a fun boat trip out on Kachemak Bay with good looks at many, many Common Murres, plus our only Surfbird and a Yellow-billed Loon. We got great looks at several Horned Puffin, Tufted Puffin, three species of Scoter, Marbled Murrelet, Pigeon Guillemot, Palagic Cormorant and Aleutian Tern.



*Photo of bird island in Kachemak Bay
by JoAnn Raine*



*Photo of Common Murres
by JoAnn Raine*

The next day we birded our way across the Kenai Peninsula to Seward stopping for lunch at one of many beautiful state parks along the way. After our arrival in Seward we spent time watching feeders at a local birder's house. This gave us Common Redpoll, Golden-crowned Sparrow and Pine Grosbeak among many birds that came to the feeders.



*Photo of Common Redpoll
by JoAnn Raine*

Our big adventure while staying in Seward was our day long trip in Resurrection Bay and the Chiswell Islands. On the way to the islands we saw a flock of Ancient Murrelets, more Puffins and Common Murres. On the cliffs of the islands were thousands of nesting birds including lots of Black-legged Kittiwakes. We traveled across the bay to Northwest Glacier where we could hear the ice cracking and crashing into the water around the Harbor Seals lolling on the ice. It was a thrilling day punctuated by sightings of Orca, Fin Whale, Humpback Whale and Sea Otter. We also enjoyed two Parakeet Auklets that we saw swimming by the boat.

*Photo
of Tufted Puffin
by
Skip Alimoney*



After such a wonderful day it was hard to leave for the drive to Anchorage but the next day we would be flying to Nome to look for Eurasian vagrants and those species found along the Bering Sea. Our flight to Nome was in the morning which gave us time to bird during the afternoon. We covered the first 24 miles of the Kougarok Road north from Nome and the Council Road heading east along the coast. Before we left our hotel, the Aurora Inn, we were lucky enough to spot our only Thick-billed Murre in the sea in front of the hotel. Along Kougarok Road we had great looks at breeding plumaged Red-throated and Pacific Loons. I enjoyed watching the buoyant and graceful flight of several Long-tailed Jaegers. We also went to the landfill where we were able to find Glaucous Gull and Slaty-backed Gull among the Ravens, Mew and Glaucous-winged Gulls.

The next day we headed out for a full day along the Kougarok Road and into the Tundra. We got our exercise climbing up a hill covered in large, spongy tussocks of grass to find the Bristle-thighed Curlew which we watched fly by us on the hilltop. That was the closest we got to it! I think that I'll remember that climb more for the beautiful tundra flowers than for the bird. That day was memorable for other sightings too; Arctic Warblers, lots of Lapland Longspurs, beautiful Bluethroats and the several groups of Musk Ox that we encountered along the way. On our drive back to Nome we watched a Rough-legged Hawk and later a Gyrfalcon as they flew back and forth in front of a cliff near the road



*Photo of Lapland Longspur
by JoAnn Raine*



*Photo of Musk Ox
by JoAnn Raine*

Our last day in the Nome area was spent on the Teller Highway where we found more Arctic Warblers in the willow thickets along the road. Other birds in the thickets were Common and Hoary Redpolls, Willow Ptarmigan, Yellow and Wilson's Warblers and Northern Waterthrush. We got great looks at an Eastern Yellow Wagtail, several species of sparrows and more jaegers. We had lunch at Wooley Lagoon where we saw both Pacific and American Golden Plover and enjoyed watching a Red Fox as it loped by. That evening we returned to Safety Lagoon where we watched a Red-necked Stint feeding with Western Sandpipers, Ruddy Turnstones, Bar-tailed Godwits and a Semi-palmated Plover. The following day we flew back to Anchorage and prepared for our trip above the Arctic Circle to Barrow.

Photo of
Willow Ptarmigan
by
Skip Alimoney



Barrow lived up to my expectations: It is a summer landscape of dazzling ice, small ponds, ocean and blue sky. Singing Snow Buntings were a yard bird that competed for our attention with Lapland Longspurs and Hoary Redpolls. Of course, we were in Barrow to find Snowy Owls, all three Eiders, jaegers and shorebirds. We were successful in finding several Snowy Owls but not close enough for good pictures until the third day when we got beautiful views. We found Steller's Eider the day we arrived, King Eider the next day, and finally, Spectacled Eider on our final day. It pays to be persistent! We also found all three jaegers, finally seeing a Pomarine. We also saw our only Sabine's Gull among the many shorebirds in the Barrow vicinity. The little ponds had many Red Phalaropes, Pintail Ducks and Long-tailed Ducks.

After returning for a night in Anchorage we drove north to Denali National Park where we stayed at a nice lodge outside the park. We spent the next day on the bus tour of the park which gave us some distant looks at Mount McKinley. We did get to watch several Grizzly Bears including one bear with two cubs which I'll always remember when I think of Denali. We also saw Caribou, Moose, Dall Sheep and one fox.



Snow Bunting
Plectrophenax nivalis

*Photo of
Snow Bunting
by
Skip Alimoney*



Photo of glacier by JoAnn Raine

After one day in Denali National Park we headed east along the Denali Highway. The scenery was breathtaking; a mix of mountains and tundra. Along the way we stopped many times to get out of the vans to bird along the road. While walking we crossed paths with a curious beaver and saw a porcupine. We got to watch more Arctic Warblers and other birds like the Gray-cheeked Thrush, Rusty Blackbird and Blackpoll Warbler. We finally found Bohemian Waxwings, but Northern Hawk

Owl alluded us on the entire trip. After a night in Paxson at the Tangle River Inn, we began our final day driving back to Anchorage. The scenery on this day was truly memorable! There were mountains in the distance over 16,000 feet high and next to the road we looked at the Matanuska Glacier and river. The scenes made for some beautiful photographs. I was so impressed with the view, I was not anxious to return to Anchorage and the flight home.

I would like to thank our guides; David Bradford who organized the trip, Brandon Percival, a bird spotter without par and Van Truan, a fine birder and driver, for such a memorable trip. Transportation, hotels and meals were all in order which is no small feat to accomplish in the Alaska wilderness. We were blessed with wonderful, sunny weather every day but one in Anchorage. Unfortunately the trip had to end, but it ended very successfully as we all added many new birds to our life lists. I added forty seven species to my North American list which I found very gratifying. I would recommend this trip to any birder who wishes to get a wide picture of Alaska and its birds.

DON'T BE LOONEY AND MISS THE FUN!

**OCTOBER 1ST
OG MEETING**



Photo of Yellow-billed Loon by JoAnn Raine

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/>