

The Spoonbill

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

December 2012
Vol. 61 No. 11

**Ornithology Group
Monthly Meeting**

**Monday,
December 3rd**

**Bayland Community Center
6400 Bissonnet, Houston**

**SILENT "AUCTION" NIGHT
CHRISTMAS SOCIAL
- 6:30 P.M.**

GENERAL MEETING - 7:00 P.M.

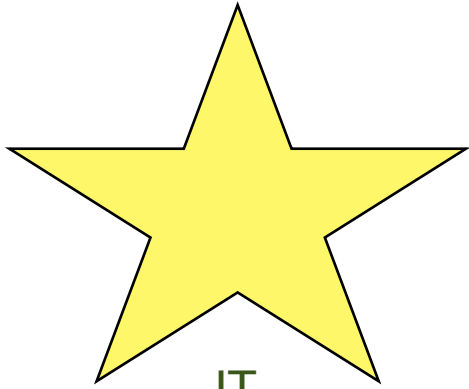
PROGRAM - 7:30 P.M.

DECEMBER EVENING PROGRAM:

Whooping Cranes: Conservation History and Current Status

Dr. Felipe Chavez-Ramirez, is Director of Conservation Programs at the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory in Lake Jackson, TX. He is a member of the Graduate Faculty, School of Natural Resources, University of Nebraska, Lincoln and holds adjunct faculty status at several other universities. He has a Ph.D. and M.Sc degrees in Wildlife Ecology from Texas A&M University, College Station and a BS in Biology and Wildlife Management from Sul Ross State University in Alpine Texas. Work experience includes: Executive Director of the Platte River Whooping Crane Maintenance Trust, Coordinator of the Chihuahua Desert Ecoregion Program for the World Wildlife Fund; Assistant Professor of Avian Ecology at the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute and the Department of Animal and Wildlife Sciences at Texas A&M University- Kingsville; lecturer in Wildlife Sciences in the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences at Texas A&M University. He has lectured at college senior and graduate level courses in topics including: techniques of wildlife management, animal ecology, ecology of arid lands, avian ecology, community and ecosystem function and management, and wildlife habitat ecology. His research has focused on ecology and conservation issues of North American Cranes especially Whooping Crane, Sandhill and Cuban Sandhill Crane. He is a member of the US-Canada Whooping Crane Recovery Team, and a member the World Conservation Union's IUCN's Species Survival Commission (SSC) Crane Specialist Group. He has published more than 40 scientific articles and presented more than 50 talks at invited seminars and professional meetings related to ecology and conservation of birds.

TEXAS CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS REPLACE DECEMBER OG FIELD TRIP



IT
IS THE
TIME OF
THE YEAR
TO SIGN UP
FOR AT LEAST
ONE OF THE GREAT
OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED
TO COUNT
!

Identify that flying object
(not the reindeer & sleigh)
Take a gander at this...

Bird groups have
descriptive monikers.
Geese are a gaggle,
although those in flight are
called a skein.

Snow Geese generally form
larger and looser flocks than
Canada geese and often
assume a shifting U-shape
formation during flight.

Canada Geese:
These form flocks, seldom
exceeding 75 birds, in the iconic
shape of a **V**, with a periodic
shifting "leader".

San Bernard NWR (TXSB): Friday, December 14, 2012
Contact the co-compilers Ron Weeks
(ronweeks@sbcglobal.net or phone evenings
979-299-0066) and Jennifer Wilson
(jennifer_wilson@fws.gov or phone daytime 979-964-4011)
to sign up.

**Armand Bayou Nature Center (TXAY): Saturday,
December 15, 2012**
Please contact Martha Hood at lazuli007@yahoo.com to
register, get signed up for an area and for further details.
Thank you!

Turkey Creek (TXTC): Saturday, December 15, 2012
Contact John Whittle (johnawhittle@aol.com,
409-722-4193) for more information.

Freeport (TXFR): Sunday, December 16, 2012
Contact compiler Mike Austin (mj_eh@comcast.net).

**Matagorda Co. - Mad Island Marsh (TXMM): Monday,
December 17, 2012**
Contact compiler Brent Ortego, brentortego@hotmail.com,
for count assignments.

**Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR (TXAP): Wednesday,
December 19, 2012**
Contact Sumita Prasad at sumita@alumni.utexas.net,
832-453-4374

Beech Creek (TXBE): Saturday, December 22, 2012
Contact John Whittle (johnawhittle@aol.com,
409-722-4193) for more information.

Brazoria (TXBR): Saturday, December 29, 2012
Please contact compiler Tom Taroni (taronitom@gmail.com
or 979-297-5563) for information. **Resources:** [Friends of
Brazoria Wildlife Refuges](#), [Cradle of Texas Chapter](#),
[Brazoria County, of TX Master Naturalists](#).

Orange County (TXOC): Tuesday, January 1, 2013
Contact Ken Sztraky (berrysheepfarm@att.net), telephone
409-385-2835, for more information.

Sea Rim State Park (TXSR): Thursday, January 3, 2013
Please contact us in advance, as most groups go directly to
their assigned areas. Sponsored by [Golden Triangle
Audubon Society](#). Contact John Whittle
(johnawhittle@aol.com, 409-722-4193) for details.

**BE SURE TO CHECK THE HOUSTON
AUDUBON WEB SITE FOR UP TO DATE
INFORMATION ON THE CHRISTMAS COUNTS!**

OG HOLIDAY WISH LIST...

LOOKING FOR YOU TO HELP

Seeking Silent Auction Items

For the December 3rd meeting fun and fund raising social event we need contributions from the OG members...please contact Marcy Brown.

Board Members are providing refreshments - let's all provide the fun!

Participate & make it great.

Seeking Librarian Volunteer

After 4 years of dedicated service as the OG Librarian, Debbie Valdez is ready to close this chapter and move on to other interests. Debbie has kept the OG books circulating, done book sale fund raisers, and just recently she has revised and updated the Library Web site.

Volunteer needed to help us begin a new season.



Seeking Volunteer to help with web page design

The board would love to ring in the new year with an updated version of the Ornithology Group web site as a goal. If you have the creative skills to help with this item on the wish list please ring up Nina Rach or March Brown.

NOVEMBER FIELD TRIP REPORT

The November field trip, originally billed as "Quintana" made a bit of a detour because of some special birds and events today.

We first went to Gulf Coast Birding Observatory's monthly bird banding demonstration, although our main aim was a chance to see some of the more unusual hummingbirds recently reported there. Everyone enjoyed good views of the Buff-bellied Hummingbird & more intimate views of a female Rufous Hummingbird at the banding table. We also saw Yellow-rumped Warblers and Swamp, Field, and Chipping Sparrows banded. After we pulled ourselves away from the banding, we strolled around the beautiful grounds enjoying the wonderful weather.

Then, it was off to Sea Center Texas in Lake Jackson to try for the long-staying Least Grebe on the off chance that the Long-tailed Duck which had disappeared the day before had returned. Alas, neither would co-operate but we managed close up views of many shorebirds including side-by-side Lesser & Greater Yellowlegs and an exceptionally late Pectoral Sandpiper.

The big lake along the levee just before the Intercoastal Waterway bridge into Quintana held a large assortment of ducks, Horned & Eared Grebes.

After lunch we drove to the jetty & watched the gull & tern on the beach including one first year gull that neither Adam Wood nor I were sure of the identification. Some gulls are best left unidentified, anyway!

The species total for the trip was exactly 100.

Mike Austin

Ruddy Ducks photographed by Harlan Evans

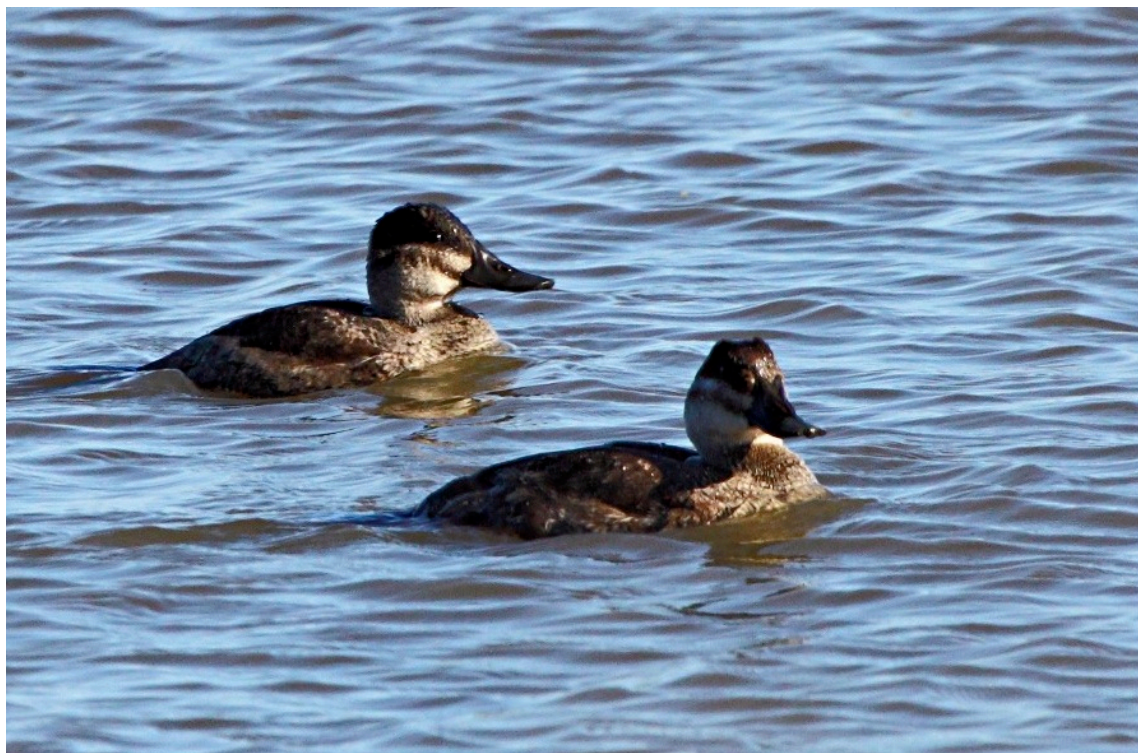
NOVEMBER NOTE AUDUBON EVENT

**WEDNESDAY
NOVEMBER 28**

**BIRDERS
THE CENTRAL PARK EFFECT**

**UNITED WAY CENTER
50 WAUGH DRIVE**

**7:00p.m. - SOCIAL
7:30p.m. - EVENT**



IMPORTANT NOTICE SENT FROM JOANN RAINE:

BIRDERS HEADING TO THE NEW MEXICO SANDIA'S TO VIEW THE ROSY-FINCHES NEED TO BE PREPARED WITH THEIR COLD WEATHER GEAR...

Albuquerque, New Mexico: Sandia Crest House Rosy-Finches

There will be some changes at the Sandia Crest House that anyone planning to visit this winter may want to know.

Raymond VanBuskirk talked to Gene Romero (Crest House Manager) this morning. He has had a serious blood clot recently. He is doing well but will not be in any condition to work at the crest this winter.

The Crest House WILL be closed this winter from December 1st through the end of February!

They have been struggling financially (especially in the winter) for several years due to the recession and because it is very expensive to maintain the heating and maintenance bills of the building during winter conditions. Gene has been an incredible host and supporter of the Rosy-Finches but having to work as hard as he does in such a difficult location has been challenging and, considering his recent medical situation, working at the crest would be dangerous for him this year.

We (The Sandia Rosy-Finch team) DO plan on maintaining the feeders, as well as the banding project, this winter. The feeders will be moved to their previous location below the building (or somewhere nearby) sometime this week. The crew will sort out a plan to keep the feeders filled on a regular basis. Obviously the banding situation will be different (and likely much colder) but we will still be out there on Sundays. I will post a banding schedule here and on the Facebook page.

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Sandia-Rosy-Finch-Project/490170997667447?ref=hl>before the end of the week.

In summary, we are thankful that Gene is okay and for all his continued support of these amazing birds. The Sandia Rosy-Finches have been an icon of Albuquerque birding for over a decade now and we are thankful for the all the support from volunteers, visitors, and the Crest House staff during that time. We are very sad to hear that the Crest House will be closed, and things will surely be different this year, but the birds will still be there, the banders will still be there, and the birders will still be there too!

I repeat:
THE FEEDERS, BANDERS,
AND FINCHES WILL STILL BE THERE THIS YEAR!!!!

The first birds were seen this morning!!!

The first day of banding is scheduled Sunday (the 18th).

See you at the Crest!
Michael Hilchey

*Black Rosy-Finch
photograph by
Charlie Thomas*



NOTES FOR THE NEW YEAR

**Jan 7, 2013 --
OG Monthly Meeting**

**Susan Heath, GCBO,
"American Oystercatcher
Stewardship in Texas"**

**Jan. 19, 2013 --
Scheduled OG Field Trip**

**Brazos Bend State Park
& Davis Estates
Bill Godley trip leader**

2013 MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

2013 Dues: ONC/OG dues are paid yearly on a calendar basis beginning January 1st. Life Members of ONC still need to pay yearly OG dues used to help pay for Spoonbill expenses, speakers and their travel, OG donations to other organizations, and other OG expenses. Pay by check at the next OG meeting or use the form on page 8 to submit updated information for the ONC Yearbook and database along with your check.

If you have questions about your membership status, contact Margret Simmons at msimmons@compassnet.com or 713-776-2511

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:	<u>\$ 12.00</u>	<u>\$ 15.00</u>
<i>Dues Total:</i>	\$ 20.00	\$ 30.00

**CHECK BOX ONLY
IF UNABLE TO VIEW
THE NEWSLETTER
ONLINE**

☐

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

Ornithology Group Houston Outdoor Nature Club
Minutes of Meeting Monday,
November 5, 2012
Bayland Community Center
Number of Attendees: 42

Learning Corner: Winter Shorebirds was presented by **Stephan Lorenz**.

Sanderling runs back and forth. It has lots of white; a plain back; an indeterminate bill (not short and not long); a dark shoulder patch with white wrapping around; and a **COMPLETE LACK OF A HIND TOE**. It is made for speed.

Dunlin is a plain gray bird. It has faint speckling on the breast and a distinct curve at the end of the bill. It could look like a Western Sandpiper with a really long bill. In flight, it has a dark rump and a white stripe in the wings.

Semipalmated Sandpipers leave Texas in the winter.

Western Sandpiper is in Texas in the winter. **A Western Sandpiper** is smaller than a **Dunlin**. Look for **palmaria** in the feet. The webbing is like snowshoes on wet mud! (**Red-necked Stints** do not have webbing)

Least Sandpiper is really brown with yellow-greenish legs and a small, fine-tipped bill. A **Western Sandpiper** is much larger.

Willet is a plain gray bird with dark stout bill and legs. **A Western Willet** is taller with a longer bill. **Red Knot** is identified by its shape. It has a chunky body with an indeterminate strong bill.

Long-billed and Short-billed Dowitchers are both on the Texas Coast in winter. **Long-billed Dowitchers** have a long straight bill; yellow legs; a stout body; and are plain gray. It **prefers fresh water and is often found inland**. A **Long-billed Dowitcher** has stronger barring on the flanks; Straighter bill and thinner at the end; Chest has an even gray appearance. Overall it is darker on the crown, breast area, and flanks. It looks pot-bellied. Its call is “**kick, kick, kick, kick, kick**”. The flock is **NOISY WHEN THEY FEED**.

Short-billed Dowitchers prefer salt water, but can be found in fresh water. It has a **kink at the last third of its bill**. The eye is higher on its head and the loreal angle is steeper. (Check Cin Ty Lee’s web site.) It has a whitish throat and not much barring in the flanks. The white bars are just as wide as the dark bars in the tail. It has a **BENT BILL**. It has a lower “do, do” call and the flock is **SILENT WHEN THEY FEED**.

In summary, Stephan said to **KNOW THE CALL!** You will have 100% ID if you know the calls.

Sightings: Bald Eagle (Baytown); Ruddy Ducks (San Jacinto Monument); Yellow-rumped Warblers (Bear Creek Park); Snowy Plovers (El Jardin Beach); Greater Pewee (Bear Creek Park); Sparrows; Northern Pintails; Gadwalls; Northern Shovelers; and Ruddy Ducks (Brazoria NWR). Five Bald Eagles and one Golden Eagle (Smith Point); a Magnificent Frigatebird came down and caught a fish (Boliver Ferry area). Bald Eagle and a Red-breasted Nuthatch (Sheldon Lake State Park).

Minutes: No comments.

Library: Debbie Valdez has updated the library and wants someone else to do the library.

Treasurer’s Report: Harlan Evans stated that the balance is \$8,768 and we still have to pay for the last Spoonbill.

Membership: Margret Simmons said to “Sign in, please.” Dues are due January 1st of next year. JoAnn Raine is taking a needed break from Membership duties as she recovers from her total knee procedure.

The Spoonbill: Vicki Sims stated that the deadline is November 10th. She does the printed version and then she does the online version. December will be the last printed version of the Spoonbill.

Marcy Brown announced that the printed Spoonbill will be mailed only to those people who have no internet connection. Marcy also stated that one should make sure that Margret Simmons has your up-to-date information, if you are not getting on-line announcements.

Announcements: There will be no Learning Corner in December. Instead, there will be a Silent Auction and Christmas Social with snacks provided by the board members. Members are asked to get in touch with one of the board members if they have an item they would like to donate to the silent auction.

Felipe Chavez-Ramirez, of the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, will speak about ***Whooping Cranes***.

On November 28, 2012, Houston Audubon will have a Countdown to Christmas Bird Counts at the United Way Center from 7-9pm.

Submissions are welcomed for the Field Trip Resources Book. Submit information about where to bird, hotels, etc.

There is an OG Contact sign-up sheet, if people want to go birding together. Mark Magruder mentioned that he would like a ride if anyone is going birding.

Odie Asscherick mentioned that nobody will be at the Waugh Drive Bridge to give Bat presentations from Dec 2012 until March 1, 2013.

Past Field Trips: Stephan Lorenz led a field trip to High Island, Rollover Pass, Boliver Flats and Laffite's Cove. Stephan stated that High Island was fairly quiet. They did see a Magnolia Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, and a Red-breasted Nuthatch. At Rollover Pass and Boliver, 50% of the Gulls were Franklin's Gulls and 50% were Laughing Gulls. They also saw a Red Knot and a Snowy Plover. A Magnificent Frigatebird was seen from the ferry. A Red-naped Sapsucker was seen at Laffite's Cove.

Future Field Trips: On November 17, 2012, a field trip to Quintana and Freeport will be led by **Mike Austin**. Meet at 8am at the Neotropic Bird Sanctuary. Bring a lunch and bug spray! If you have a 2-way Radio, bring it for communication between vehicles. The plan is to also go to Bryan Beach and West Galveston Island or Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge.

Program: Birding Jamaica, One Island, 28 Endemic Birds was presented by **Stephan Lorenz**. Jamaica has the highest count of endemics for a small island. Both Northern and Bahama Mockingbirds are on the same island. It is easy to travel and one should hire a local driver.

Some endemics that can be seen are the Red-billed Streamertail (Hummingbird); White-eyed Thrush (very secretive); Puerto Rican and Jamaican Todys.

Sites to Bird:

Hellshire Hills: This is the only place to find the Bahama Mockingbird in Jamaica.

Marshall's Pen Great House near Mandeville: This is an old coffee plantation. It is a Bed & Breakfast now. Twenty endemics can be seen here including Jamaican Owl; Greater Antillean Grackle; Rufous-tailed Flycatcher; Jamaican Vireo; Arrow-headed Warbler; Loggerhead Kingbird; Jamaican Mango; Vervain Hummingbird (Jamaica & Hispanola); Jamaican Becard; Yellow-shouldered Grassquit; Orangequit; Jamaican Euphonia; Jamaican Woodpecker; Zenaida Doves and Northern Potoo.

Royal Palm Preserve might be shut down now. This Preserve is where Stephan saw West Indian Whistling Duck; Greater Antillean Grackle; Royal Palms; Jamaican Oriole; Sad Flycatcher (it has a melancholy call); and Jamaican Spindalis.

Blue Mountains go up to 6,000 feet. The Jamaican Blackbird (probably a Black Oriole, since it feeds like an Oriole) is an Epiphyte Specialist that feeds on Bromeliads. Blue Mountain Vireo has an oversized bill. Ring-tailed Pigeon can be seen here.

Windsor Cockpit Country has lots of sinkholes and caves. Here one can find the Jamaican Crow; Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo; Jamaican Lizard Cuckoo; the Yellow-billed Parrot and the Black-billed Parrot.

On the East Coast of Jamaica, one sees only locals there. White-tailed Tropicbirds nest in this location. One can see the blue lagoon from the movie, Blue Lagoon.

While in Jamaica, Stephan helped do a study as to how long it takes a migrant to return to its original territory. The results of the study showed that migrant American Redstarts returned to their territory within seven hours. It took two weeks for the resident Tody to find its way back to its original territory.

Stephan recommended the following book:
Birds of the West Indies by Herbert Raffaele.

Marie Asscherick/Ornithology Group Secretary

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:	Marcy Brown	713-664-5206	marcydbrown@gmail.com
Vice-Chair:	Nina Rach	281-433-0651	NRach@autreVie.com
Vice-Chair Asst:	Stennie Meadors		stenmead@aol.com
Secretary:	Marie Asscherick	832-721-8140	birdswelove4ever@aol.com
Treasurer:	Harlan Evans	713-797-6468	harlanj42@sbcglobal.net
Clearing House:	David Sarkozi	713-412-4409	david@sarkozi.net
Library:	Debbie Valdez	832-794-3314	xxijumpstreet@sbcglobal.net
Membership:	Margret Simmons	713-776-2511	msimmons@compassnet.com
Membership CoChair:	JoAnn Raine	832-567-7310	rainejoann@gmail.com
Field Trips:	Adam Woods	713-515-1692	birdsondabrain@earthlink.net
The Spoonbill:	Vicki Sims	713-779-7609	oncspoon@gmail.com

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

**THE DECEMBER NEWSLETTER WILL BE THE LAST PRINTED SPOONBILL.
PLEASE NOTIFY THE SPOONBILL EDITOR IF YOU KNOW OF ANYONE NOT ON THE
LISTSERV TO RECEIVE EMAILS OR NOT ABLE TO VIEW THE NEWSLETTER ONLINE.**

**MERRY CHRISTMAS
TO ALL**



**AND TO ALL
A
GOOD BIRD**