



Photo by Harlan Evans

The Spoonbill

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



March 2013
Vol. 62 No. 3

MARCH 4th Ornithology Group Monthly Meeting

**Bayland Community Center
6400 Bissonnett, Houston**

LEARNING CORNER - 6:30 P.M.

**Winnie Burkett
Caring about Birds and Birdwatchers:
Why we should care about Birding Ethics"**

GENERAL MEETING - 7:00 P.M.

MARCH EVENING PROGRAM The Incredible Adventure: Birding in Alaska

Program presenter for our March evening program is Dr. Stanley (Skip) Almoney. Skip is a long-time OG member and we are very pleased to hear about one of his latest field trips - to Alaska this past June 2012.

Originally from York, Pennsylvania, Skip attended Lowell Technological Institute and Lehigh University, and holds a PhD in Nuclear Physics.

He began bird watching in 1993 before being transferred to Indonesia for a year. When he returned to Houston he joined the Ornithology Group of the Outdoor Nature Club and has served as Vice-Chairman and Chairman.

Skip is a certified Texas Master Naturalist and as a member of the Houston Audubon Society, has served on the Board of Directors and worked as a volunteer on workdays at High Island and Bolivar Flats, as a mentor at the Boy Scout Woods rookery, and as a goods salesman at High Island. He worked on Galveston Island Nature Tourism's FeatherFest Committee for several years.

He has led birding trips throughout Texas for OG, Houston Audubon, and FeatherFest. He has birded on all continents!

Christmas Bird Count Results

This year the National Audubon Society is moving to digital delivery of the CBC results rather than printing and mailing the CBC summary report to participants.

If you want to receive information regarding the digital edition of *American Birds* this year
- you must sign up online -
www.audubon.org/citizenscience
by entering your email address.

Be aware that even if your email address is currently in the CBC system, you will only receive *American Birds* if you sign up through our new citizen science network.

IF YOUR GET UP
AND GO -
GOT UP AND WENT

YOU DON'T HAVE TO
GO TOO FAR
TO BIRD FROM
ARMCHAIR OR
CLOSE TO HOME

A FUN WAY TO CHALLENGE YOURSELF AND INCREASE YOUR BIRDING SKILLS

Kendra Kocab suggests her three favorite bird quiz websites:

Birdphotos.com - this is the site that has photos from around the world, so you can choose to be quizzed just on North American birds, or on birds from any other part of the world. You can choose to make the quiz multiple choice or just fill in the blank. On the left side of the homepage is a button that says "quiz".

Sibley Guides - <http://www.sibleyguides.com/2012/02/new-feature-a-bird-identification-quiz/> - these are a nice set of quizzes that focus on individual body parts of birds. It's amazing how many birds you can identify based just on the bill or wing! This is a great site to learn your bird plumage vocabulary as well.

BE READY TO RECORD THE BIRDS YOU SIGHT WITH THE 4 LETTER CODES:

A learning opportunity from Bob Honig

Below are links to lists of standard 4-letter codes. You are encouraged to use the standard ones to avoid potential confusion --

It's great fun learning them; like playing a game, especially for the ones that are exceptions to the rules (e.g., Carolina Wren is CARW, not CAWR because the latter could also apply to Cactus Wren or Canyon Wren).

Also CEWA; following the rule of using the first 2 letters of the first word of the name, and the first 2 of the second word, this could either be Cedar Waxwing or Cerulean Warbler. Thus CEDW and CERU are the codes for those 2 species, respectively.

Together the following should have all the N. American birds (they are pages on the US federal Bird Banding Laboratory web site):

- <http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbl/MANUAL/speclist.cfm> -- contains all the species that are part of the US federal bird banding program
- <http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbl/MANUAL/gallaou.htm> -- for Gallinaceous birds and a few other species that are not part of the US federal bird banding program



Photo by Harlan Evans

Spring migrants are propelled north, for instance, by the southerly winds associated with warm fronts.

In fall, cold fronts spur migration and give south-bound migrants an energy-saving tailwind.

Cold, clear mornings encourage birds to forage on the sunny side of woodland edges.

Windy days prompt waterfowl to gather on the protected, calmer lee side of lakes.

Coastal storms and hurricanes ferry seabirds landward.

Prolonged drought forces waterfowl and wading birds to wander hundreds of miles in search of good aquatic habitat.

Across much of North America birds are migrating every month of the year. Spring Migration begins in January with the arrival of the first purple martins in Florida and ends six months later with the last, nonbreeding Swainson's and broad-winged hawks straggling north in July. What most people think of as "spring and fall migration" is actually just RUSH HOUR. In some times and places, northbound and southbound birds are passing each other in the sky.



Blackburnian Warbler Lafitte's Cove, 5/11/12

Photo by Harlan Evans

GOLDEN-CHEEKED WARBLER WATCH BEGINS IN MARCH

Bird watchers out there; don't forget that our Texas migrant warblers are not always found to the south along the gulf coast. A wonderful time can be had traveling to the marvelous Texas State Parks inland to scope out the special Texas breeder - the Golden-Cheeked Warbler. Favorite parks in the system that are likely spots to find this beauty are Pedernales Falls State Park, Meridian State Park, Inks Lake State Park, and at the Balcones area mentioned in the Spoonbill page 7 Balcones Songbird Festival announcement.

SUPPORT YOUR TEXAS STATE PARKS AND PURCHASE A STATE PARK PASS

www.tpwd.state.tx.us/state-parks/meridian



**SPRING FORWARD MARCH 9TH AND BE "TIME CHANGE ADJUSTED"
BEFORE THE WEEKEND O.G. FIELD TRIP TO FORMOSA TEJANO AND BEYOND!**

March 16th Trip to Jackson County Hot Spots

**Viewing Platform Parking Lot of off TX 172
@ 7:30 AM**

**According to Google Maps data distance between
Houston and La Ward is 109 Miles.
This will take approximately 1 hour 46 mins**

The winter is nearing its end and spring is a few days away. This means birds will be starting to move as spring migration will be in its beginning stages. One of the better lesser birded areas to visit at this time of year is Jackson County. Hot spots we will be visiting in Jackson County include: The Formosa - Tejano Wetlands, Lake Texana, Palmetto Bend Dam, Lavaca/Navidad Estuary, and Bennett Park.

These locations at this time of year can be excellent for viewing lingering wintering species, such as species of waterfowl, sparrows, and migrant shorebird species which are spring migration's opening act. We will also be keeping our eyes and ears out for any of the earlier neotropical migrant songbirds. Some of the migrant songbirds that we have a chance of encountering are the Scissor-tailed flycatcher, Yellow-throated vireo, Red-eyed vireo, Blue-winged warbler, Nashville warbler, Northern parula, Yellow-throated warbler, Black-and-white warbler, Louisiana waterthrush, Kentucky warbler, Hooded warbler, Summer tanager, Scarlet tanager, Indigo bunting, Baltimore oriole and Orchard oriole.

March is a great month to be birding where you can get a good combination of wintering birds and neotropical migrants. The weather this time of year is typically very pleasant. So come out and join us for what should be a pleasurable fun filled nice day of birding were we could easily eclipse the 100 species mark for the day.

The plan is to meet in the parking area with the viewing platform for one of the large ponds on the east side of TX 172 at 7:30 AM.

The coordinates for use in Google Maps are: 28.8005,-96.4604.

To get to this location take US 59 South out of Houston to Ganado and take the TX 172 exit. Go south on TX 172 through Ganado and past FM 616 and La Ward. Once you get past the FM 616 intersection the viewing platform will be approximately 3 miles further down TX 172 on the east side and you should see other cars in the parking area.

Be sure to bring your binoculars, spotting scope, hat, sunscreen, water, camera (if you wish), snacks, and a lunch because we will not be stopping at a place for lunch and will be birding all day.

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

O.G. SPRING QUARTERLY FIELD TRIP

April 25 - April 28, 2013

To the Lower Rio Grande Valley



This year's spring quarterly trip will be to the Lower Rio Grande Valley on April 25 – April 28, 2013. We will be birding locations across the LRGV from west to east from Salineno to South Padre Island looking for as many of the valley specialties as we can find. In addition to the valley specialties we will also be keeping our eyes and ears out for any of the neotropical migrants in the area. I am in the process of lining up a good local expert or two to be our guides during the weekend. The itinerary below is still being developed and is going to be flexible to allow for time to chase down any "Mega" rarity/vagrant from Mexico that gets reported while we are there. For now the itinerary is as follows:

- **April 26:** We will bird locations in Starr and Zapata Counties such as **Salineno, Chapeno, Falcon County Park, Falcon State Park, San Ygnacio** and the **Zapata Library**. The main targets will be muscovy duck, scaled quail, red-billed pigeon, brown jay (if they are being reported), chihuahuan raven, black-tailed gnatcatcher, clay-colored thrush, long-billed thrasher, olive sparrow, white-collared seedeater, pyrrhuloxia, and Audubon's oriole.
- **April 27:** We will bird locations in Hidalgo County such as **Bentsen State Park, Estero Llano Grande, Santa Ana NWR** and **Anzalduas County Park**. Target birds for the day will be least grebe, hook-billed kite (rare), gray hawk, zone-tailed hawk, plain chachalaca, white-tipped dove, green parakeet, red-crowned parrot, groove-billed ani, common pauraque, ringed kingfisher, green kingfisher, northern beardless-tyrannulet, brown-crested flycatcher, great kiskadee, tropical kingbird, Couch's kingbird, rose-throated becard (rare), green jay, clay-colored thrush, long-billed thrasher, tropical parula, olive sparrow, and Altamira oriole.
- **April 28:** We will bird locations in Cameron County primarily focusing on locations on South Padre Island such as the **Convention Center** and the **Valley Landfund Lots**. On our way out to South Padre Island we will bird along **Old Port Isabel Road**. Target birds for the day will be aplomado falcon, yellow-green vireo (rare), Cassin's sparrow and Botteri's Sparrow.

You will not want to miss this trip as it should be a great one. More details will be in the April Spoonbill so stay tuned. If you are interested in this trip please let me know and I will get your name on the list and get more details to you when I get them.

Accommodations & Directions: Coming Soon

Be sure to bring: Binoculars, a warm coat or jacket in case it is cold, rain gear in case it rains, hat, sun block, camera, spotting scope, \$20 for admission fees and \$20 dollar donation to the OG, you can bring extra money for a tip for the guides if you wish, and water.

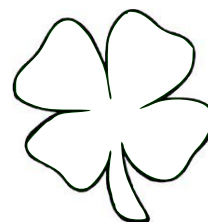
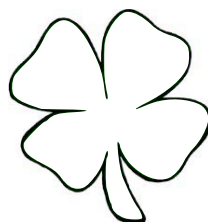
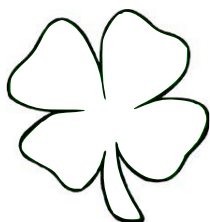
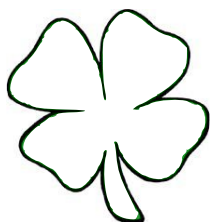
~ Adam Wood, OG Field Trip Coordinator, birdsondabrain@earthlink.net, 713-515-1692

- WHAT'S ON THE MARK - FOR MARCH AND BEYOND

The Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary

MARCH 16th & 17th

Visitors Weekend



NATURE DISCOVER CENTER

Lunch with the Birds:

Our weekly bird walks for spring migration will resume on Wed Feb 27th at noon and run through May 8th.

Spingtime Early Evening Birdwalks:

Our early evening birdwalks will be held on Tuesday evenings starting April 2nd through May 7th from 6 pm until about 7:15 pm.

GALVESTON

FeatherFest

April 12th - 14th

SIGN UP ONLINE NOW

BALCONES SONGBIRD FESTIVAL

Guided bird walks to identify the many species of birds in this region, including the golden-cheeked warbler and black-capped vireo. Free, fun family day on Sunday! Enjoy presentations, fun games and activities for kids.

This event is hosted with the
Friends of Balcones Canyonlands Refuge.
To register, visit www.friendsofbalcones.org



HOUSTON

High Island Open House

Saturday, April 6th

Everyone is invited to join H.A.S.
at the High Island open house with free
admission to all of the sanctuaries, it's a
great way to introduce friends to birding

AUDUBON

Monday March 4th

HOGG SANCTUARY BIRD SURVEY
MONTHLY EVENT
FIRST MONDAY 8:30 A.M.

CONTACT: AARON STOLEY

Saturday March 9th

ARMAND BAYOU SURVEY
MONTHLY EVENT
SECOND SATURDAY 8:00 A.M.

CONTACTS: ANDREW HAMLETT

Saturday March 9th

WOODLAND PARK BIRD WALK
MONTHLY EVENT
SECOND SATURDAY 7:30 A.M.

CONTACT: jason.bonilla@gmail.com

Monday 11th March

HERMANN PARK SURVEY
MONTHLY EVENT
SECOND MONDAY 8:00 A.M.

CONTACT: JIM WINN

Saturday March 16th

WILLOW WATERHOLE SURVEY
MONTHLY EVENT
THIRD SATURDAY 8:00 A.M.

CONTACTS: JOY HESTER / MARK MEYER

Thursday March 21st

BAYTOWN NATURE CENTER
THIRD THURSDAY 8:00 A.M.

CONTACT: STENNIE MEADOURS
AND DAVID HANSON

Check out the Houston Audubon Website for details on March and April events

Birds and Blooms Retreat at Camp Allen
Friday April 5 thru Sunday April 7

Calling all nature & bird lovers— this retreat is for you! Attend expert led sessions, hike scenic trails with experienced guides, Owl and Hawk Demonstrations, Audubon Presentations, Landscaping for Attracting Songbirds, Spring Migration Habits, Birding Identification, and Sunrise Bird Watching.

Per-person rates include hotel accommodations, meals, and programming. Horseback riding, canoeing, archery, and massages are available for an additional fee.

Retreat Rates: Single Occupancy: \$300.00 Double Occupancy: \$200.00

Retreat begins at 5pm Friday and concludes at 2pm Sunday

GOOD NEWS ANNOUNCED

HIGH ISLAND VOLUNTEERS
HAVE BEEN HARD AT WORK

WORKING ON THEIR ACRES
&
PLANNING

RESULTS WILL EQUAL A GREAT
2013 SEASON

YES!!

GUIDES FROM TROPICAL BIRDING WILL BE RETURNING
WITH DELIGHTFUL BIRD WALKS AND I.D. WORKSHOPS

WALKS WILL BEGIN ON -- **FRIDAY MARCH 29...** (no walk the 28th)

WALKS WILL BE ON THE DAYS THURSDAY THRU MONDAY

8 A.M. BOY SCOUT WOODS walk

NOON: SHOREBIRD walk

4 P.M. SMITH OAKS walk

AUDUBON SENIOR FIELD TRIP TO HIGH ISLAND AND BOLIVER IS THURSDAY MARCH 28TH

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 mail the form 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

IF YOU ARE ATTENDING THE MEETINGS THEN YOU SHOULD BE PAYING YOUR DUES !

Ornithology Group Houston Outdoor Nature Club
Minutes of Meeting Monday, February 4, 2013
Bayland Community Center
Number of Attendees: 51



Learning Corner:

Female and Single: Identifying lonely hens! presented by Stephan Lorenz.

In the early Fall, look for eclipse males that have molted and look like females!

1) Decide if the duck is a Diving Duck or a Dabbling Duck. Diving Ducks are plain colored and Dabbling Ducks are mottled!!! (Eider females are the exception. They are mottled.) The Teal are the trickiest to identify of all the female ducks.

Northern Pintail: Look at the long, thin tail.

Wood Duck: Look at the head and the facial pattern.

Northern Shoveler: This is a large fat dabbling duck with a bright orange bill.

Bufflehead: This female has an oval white patch on the cheek.

Ruddy Duck: This is a stiff-tailed duck. Look at its shape. In comparison to the Masked Duck, there are no white patches in the wing.

Masked Duck: The female has white patches in the wing.

The Teal are the trickiest to identify of all the female ducks.

Blue-winged Teal: This Teal has a white area by the bill. It has speckling on the under-tail coverts. There is more spotting on the Blue-winged Teal.

Green-winged Teal: This is the smallest of the three Teal.

Cinnamon Teal: Look at the bill!!!! The bill is more Shoveler shaped. It also lacks a facial pattern. The red eye is only in the male Cinnamon Teal.

Garganey: This duck can show up here. It is about the same size as our Teals. Look for a silver pattern on the wings.

Mottled Duck: The bill of the female has a dirty yellow color.

Mallard: The bill of the female is a brighter yellow. The Mallard has no streaking on the throat; the neck is very clean.

American Black Duck: This duck is more prevalent than we think going by the specimens duck hunters have gotten. The inside of the feathers are dark with thin lighter edges. The male Mallard has a white border in the speculum. The male Mottled Duck has less white in the speculum. The Black Duck has hardly any white in the speculum.

American Wigeon: The Wigeon female has a very steep forehead with an all gray bill.

Gadwall: The female Gadwall has a bicolored bill. The top of the bill is dark and the bottom is yellow.

Redhead: Redheads have a rounded head and a dark bill.

Canvasback: These ducks have a ski-sloped bill.

Lesser Scaup: The head has a peaked crown. The eye color is darker.

Greater Scaup: These females are overall browner than Lesser Scaup. They have a rounded crown. The crown ID only works when the birds are relaxed. The bill is wider than the bill on the Lesser Scaup and the white wing stripe is more extensive and goes to the wing tip.

Ring-necked Duck: There is a “~”; “S” shape on the body. (To me, the photo looked like a sideways “~”.) The female has a light colored line on the bill. It always seems to be smiling.

Red-breasted Merganser: Look for the red eye.

Common Merganser: Look for a dark eye. It is larger and has a more rounded head than the Red-breasted Merganser. The Common Merganser also has a very white, distinct chin patch.

Sightings:

A special presentation was given by Connor Kenney about finding the Eagles in Hermann Park, at first folks really didn't believe him, they assumed he was seeing osprey or vultures, but he knew they were Eagles. He described where the Eagles can likely be found in the park and some of the scenes that he has witnessed the Eagles doing.

ie: catching fish in the ponds, gathering twigs, and swooping Nutria. Connor has taken his class mates to view the Eagle and inspired the school to enjoy nature and bird watching. It was amazing that Connor was so poised while speaking up in front of the OG group... we see another special presenter in the making!

Marcia Brown did a lovely job of interviewing Connor, and invited him to bring his young bird watching friends to other OG Learning Corner events.

Other Sightings:

Purple Martin, Starlings, and Sparrows on the Katy Prairie. Whooping Cranes and Peregrine Falcons at Rockport; Roseate Spoonbills; Ducks, Geese, Vermilion Flycatcher, Peregrine Falcon, and Swainson's Hawk at Anahuac.

Minutes: Contact Marie.

Library: No comments.

Treasurer's Report: Harlan Evans stated that there is \$9,100.00 in the treasury.

Membership: Margret Simmons said that it is **time to pay dues**. She reminded everyone to sign in.

The Spoonbill: Vicki Sims said that the deadline for The Spoonbill is February 12th.

Announcements:

Various announcements are as follows:

The Birder's Checklist is being sold for \$1.00 each or 300 for .60 cents each.

On February 12th, the Botany/Entomology Group will have a lecture about the Beetles of Texas.

The LTNS will have a campout on February 19th and 20th.

Jesse Jones Nature Center will be having NatureFest, March 2, 2013. **The OG needs volunteers to represent them at the festival.**

FeatherFest is from April 11th through April 14th. Attend the festival and man the OG booth there, if you can.

The Whooping Crane Festival is February 21st through the 24th.

Nature Discovery Center is having a Bird Walk this Wednesday at noon.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is February 15, 16, 17, and 18.

Past Field Trips: The OG and the TOS had field trips to Brazos Bend State Park in January. Birds seen included a Red-headed Woodpecker; two Cinnamon Teal (at Elm Lake); a Couch's Kingbird; and a Sora.

Future Field Trips: Meet on February 23rd at TX 255R and TX 63 at the convenience store at 7:30am. We will go to Angelina and Jasper Counties, Sam Rayburn Reservoir, and the Steinhagen Reservoir. Target birds are the Red-cockaded Woodpecker; Brown-headed Nuthatch; and Bachman's Sparrow. We will look for loons, ducks, and a possible Scoter.



Program: February 4, 2013

Picture This:

Digital Details—The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of Online Bird Identification

Presented by Kendra Kocab, the Staff Naturalist at Kleb Woods Nature Preserve.

Photography is a very important tool to identify birds, especially birds out of the usual territory of the bird. She recommends that one could reference Gray's for fine point details in studying the photograph. Kendra cited examples of birds identified using photography and landmarks in the photograph.

A Kingbird in Nova Scotia, and the Perils of Online Bird Identification by Randy F. Lauff and Ian A. McLaren. Only a blurry photo was taken of a bird. When the photo was posted online, there were many various opinions as to what type of bird it was. Finally, the bird was compared to measured branches in the photo. The tertials of the bird were also measured. These details became the factor to identify this bird far out of its usual territory.

David Hanson posted a photo of a "hawk" that he took at Boy Scout Woods, at High Island in Texas on May 4, 2011. This turned out to be a Double-toothed Kite. It was the first time that it was seen in Texas and the United States.

Kendra also gave examples of how photographs can hinder the identification of the birds.

Photos can be seen in distortion, such as the "Pinnochio" Kinglet with a super long bill. It turned out that the bill was superimposed on a pine needle which made it look super long.

One's own bias can influence one's identification of a bird. This is known as the power of persuasion.

There is the Consensus Fallacy in which multiple online opinions are given, but the multitude of opinions can turn out to be wrong.

In order to overcome these problems, one should use many references—field guides; other photos, Peter Pyle's Identification Guide to North American Birds, etc.

Consult several experts to get a consensus and take these with a grain of salt.

Keep an open mind. Practice identifying birds by photos taken from Texbirds and do bird ID Quizzes.

The best camera is the one you have with you!

You can use your phone to take a photo through a scope. You can put the phone on video. You can look through one eye of your binoculars while someone else takes a photo with a phone through the other binocular eye!

Get records of birds with photos!!!

Marie Asscherick/Ornithology Group Secretary

