

## **Monthly Meeting December 2, 2013**

**Bayland Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet St, Houston, TX**

6:30 pm Holiday Social

7:00 pm [Ornithology Group](#) (OG) Business Meeting

7:30 pm [Program](#): A bird in Hand by David Sarkozi

Field Trip: No OG field trip; participate in one of the [Christmas bird counts](#).

[Ducks on the Pond | Membership Renewal](#)

### **A Bird in Hand**

By David Sarkozi

David will provide an overview of birding applications for smart phones and tablets.

[↑top↑](#)

### **Christmas Bird Counts**

By Larry Dybala

Every year in December (with a few in January) the Audubon Society has numerous Christmas bird counts. This is a long tradition dating from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when birders tried to get nature enthusiasts to count rather than shoot birds. Each count location encompasses a circle with a diameter of 15 miles. There are several local counts, all listed with contact information, on the Houston Audubon Society website with the direct link at:

<http://www.houstonaudubon.org/default.aspx/MenuItemID/995/MenuGroup/CBC.htm>.

This is a great opportunity to bird in the field and learn from other birders. Both experienced and beginning birders are always welcome. If an old hand, you will enjoy going out and being with other birders and in honing your identification skills. If new to birding, you can learn much from those who have been birding for a while.

Although it is always best to spend the whole day on a count, from morning until the final compilation at the evening dinner, you can usually spend part of a day at the count. Many groups offer free meals sponsored by local groups; in others, you meet at a restaurant. Although optional, it is always fun to consolidate lists at this final meeting and find out what the others on that count have spotted. Questionable bird reports are resolved by a panel of experts based on the notes, photographs, and experience of the birder reporting the unusual bird.

Not only are the counts fun, but they provide valuable information about the state of bird population. Since they have been going in in many areas for as long as 100 years, long-term trends can be determined and sometimes actions can be taken to benefit bird populations.

[↑top↑](#)

## Ducks on the Pond

By Hart Rufe

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Anyone who has ever played baseball knows that “Ducks on the pond” means there are base runners in scoring position. The exhortation by team-mates is a socially acceptable way for them to urge their batter at the plate to “Just hit the damn ball, Stupid, and drive those runs in!” For birders, the phrase can mean anything from a single Mallard female duck in a mud puddle, to a raft of hundreds, even thousands of ducks on a large lake.

In Tierra Verde, at the southern tip of the St Petersburg peninsula, along the Pinellas Bayway on the way out to Fort DeSoto County Park, we have discovered (well, not a Christopher Columbus type discovery, just new to us) a pond with ducks on it, a lot of ducks. In 2010, when we visited



the area in late March the pond was covered with Ruddy Ducks. This year, our visit in February found it covered with Redhead Ducks (*left, female above*) with a few other species sprinkled in.

Why do concentrations of ducks choose one lake or pond over another that seems to be almost identical in nature and character?

Safety and food are probably the main considerations. There were no alligators on the lake and the lake was surrounded by thick vegetation on all sides except where there were large well-kept homes with manicured lawns running down to the lake edges. Surely there is no duck hunting in this area. No people or dogs were anywhere in sight.

We had great difficulty finding a small break in the vegetation in order to photograph the birds. When we did find such a spot, we pulled our car up to it and used the vehicle as a blind, waited for the birds to drift back close to our shore, and took our pictures out of the car window.

As for food, the water depth and quality are critical. Both Ruddy and Redhead ducks dabble and do shallow dives for aquatic plant life as well as mollusks, small shellfish and crustaceans. The water must support an abundance of both at the right depth for easy reach. The Tierra Verde pond obviously met both criteria. Other, seemingly similar ponds probably do not.

Jewel loved the area, and as we drove along the homes bordering the pond, exclaimed, “I could live here.” We found one vacant lot for sale, for which Jewel located the online listing – the \$750,000 price tag for the vacant lot alone convinced us that it was indeed a nice pond for the ducks, and a nice pond for us to visit to see them



**American Wigeon**



**Lesser Scaup**



**Northern Shoveler**

[↑top↑](#)

## **Membership (2014 Membership Renewal)**

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](mailto:msimmons@compassnet.com) or 713-776-2511

**IF YOU ARE ATTENDING THE MEETINGS AND FIELD TRIPS, THEN YOU SHOULD BE PAYING YOUR DUES!**

### **TO START OR RENEW A MEMBERSHIP:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

ONC Annual Dues: \$ 8.00 for individuals; \$ 15.00 for families

OG Annual Dues: \$ 12.00 for individuals; \$ 15.00 for families

**Total: \$ 20.00 for individuals; \$ 30.00 for families**

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

[↑top↑](#)

## **About the Ornithology Group**

**Chair: Nina Rach | 281-433-0651 | NRach@autrevie.com**

**Vice Chair (Programs): | needed**

**Secretary | needed**

**Treasurer: Harlan Evans | 713-797-6468 | harlanj42@sbcglobal.net**

**Clearing House: David Sarkozi | 713-412-4409 | david@sarkozi.net**

**Library: Pam Smolen | pjsmolen@att.net**

**Membership: Margret Simmons | 713-776-2511 | msimmons@compassnet.com**

**Field Trips: Debbie Valdez | 832-794-3314 | xxijumpstreet@sbcglobal.net**

***Spoonbill* Editor: Larry Dybala | 713-923-4040 | oncspoonbill@gmail.com**

***Spoonbill* Outgoing Editor: Vicki Sims: oncspoon@gmail.com**

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

**ONC website: <http://www.outdoornatureclub.org/> [↑top↑](#)**