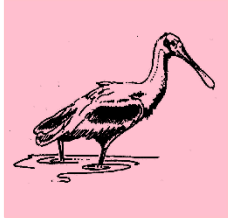


Monthly Meeting January 5, 2015

Bayland Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet St, Houston, TX



6:30 pm [Learning Corner](#): Christmas Bird Count Reports from Members

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

7:30 pm [Program](#): Quest for 1,000 Species by Kendra Kocab

[Field Trip](#): Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR, Jan. 10, 8 am

Report on Quarterly Trip to the Central Coast

Christmas Bird Count Reports

Please share with the Ornithology Group how your count went and any special birds or behaviors of birds that you saw.

Quest for 1,000 Species

By Kendra Kocab

In 2014 Kendra's aunt provided her with airline passes that allowed her to travel for that year. She used them to visit her bucket list of "Places I would most like to bird". This was a once in a lifetime opportunity to travel the world at a young age. She was able to work with local guides and see the birds of the areas she visited. Come out and hear about the adventures and share the photos she has assembled from her world travel.

Kendra has been a naturalist at Kleb Woods County Park for six years. She leads walks, runs children's programs and assists Fred Collins in the multitude of duties at a nature center.

Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR

Saturday, Jan 10, meet at 8 am at the visitor center building at Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR. We will walk the pipit trail and drive the auto loop. You may want to bring walkie-talkies if you have them. Bird until lunch. Dress for the weather. Target species: sparrows, especially LeConte's sparrows, white-tailed hawk, ducks, doubt we will see prairie chickens unless we are lucky--think nice thoughts.(and we'll ask a refuge manager for advice)

Quarterly Trip to the Texas Central Coast (Nov. 21-23)

By Stephan Lorenz

A pair of Whooping Cranes in flight above the glassy waters of Aransas NWR Photo Stephan Lorenz.



Friday November 21st

The morning started with drizzle and fog out over the water. All of us boarded Captain Tommy Moore's Skimmer, hoping for better weather and cranes, and set out into the low fog hanging over Copano Bay. We were not to be disappointed. The water was smooth as glass and we spotted several Common Loons en route. Approaching the vast marshes of Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, it did not take long to see lots of new birds in the lifting fog. Herons, egrets, and ibis were everywhere and we soon spotted the first pair of Whooping Cranes in the distance. For the next two hours we were literally surrounded by Whooping Cranes, seeing close birds flying, up to five in the distance, and a pair with two youngsters. Two pairs allowed us to get fairly close and we enjoyed the magical morning of "Whoopers" calling in near perfect light. The weather had also improved.

We turned our attention to the flocks of waterfowl, which included some close Hooded Mergansers and Buffleheads. Among a roosting gull flock that included Laughing, Ring-billed, and Herring, we found a fine looking Lesser Black-backed Gull. Surprisingly, we saw two

juvenile Franklin's Gulls in the channel also. In the grasslands we saw Long-billed Curlews, hunting American Kestrels, and a distant Northern Harrier. The rain abated and the weather turned out to be just perfect. We birded our way back, seeing some shorebirds along the way. All were happy with the boat trip and we saw an incredible 30 Whooping Cranes in total.

We continued to Goose Island State Park to stop for lunch and do some birding along the waterfront and in the campground. A Ladder-backed Woodpecker put in an appearance while we ate and we scoped a distant Red-tailed Hawk. After lunch we walked through the campground where things were fairly quiet, but two small feeding flocks turned up Orange-crowned, Yellow-rumped, and Black-throated Green warblers. We decided to move to the shoreline where plenty of gulls and terns kept us busy and we added shorebirds in the form of Spotted and Least sandpipers, American Oystercatchers, and a surprise Whimbrel. A quick stop at Big Tree is always fun, but it was quiet in terms of birds. Returning to the hotel in the late afternoon, we reconvened for an early dinner at a local Mexican restaurant and enjoyed humungous plates of delicious fare, including stuffed chicken, steamed fish, and enchiladas.

Saturday November 22nd

It was raining when we left the hotel. Heading south, the first planned stop along Redfish Bay was washed out. We continued to the ferry and crossed to Port Aransas. We briefly stopped at Charlie's Pasture Preserve where we could see hundreds of Redheads flying between the bays. A walk out onto the prairie yielded calling Sedge Wrens. The Port Aransas Birding Center was busy with birds and we spent more than two hours here scanning through flocks of ducks and other birds. The first birds along the boardwalk included a dozen Black-bellied Whistling Ducks, Snowy Egrets, and roosting Black-crowned Night Herons, with a Common Yellowthroat chattering from the reeds and a chipping Marsh Wren, both of which would show well eventually.

Sora Photo Debbie Valdez.

We set to task scanning through the large number of ducks, turning up lots of Redheads, Ruddy Ducks, and Green-winged Teals, with lower numbers of Blue-winged Teal, Northern Pintail, American Wigeon, and Northern Shoveler. Best of all was a single drake Cinnamon Teal, which really popped out from the rest of the crowd. Patient waiting eventually yielded amazing views of a Sora that wandered beyond the dense reeds unconcerned, ignoring the clicking shutters. Next up was not one, but eventually two Least Bitterns, one juvenile and one adult that clambered around the scattered reeds next to the boardwalk for ten minutes, completely out in the open. Best of all, everyone got to see at "least" one of the two bitterns!



We stopped for lunch at Paradise Pond, which was a fortuitous decision since it added several birds to the list, including an obliging Greater Kiskadee, raucous Couch's Kingbird, smooth

Cedar Waxwing, chatty American Robin, and an odd looking Red-breasted Merganser that may have been sick. It was a great place to sit for a while, relax, and watch the birds appear.

It was difficult to tear ourselves away, but we did and moved on to the Port Aransas jetty, where the planned sea watch was drowned among heavy downpours. After checking the radar, we decided to head further south towards Mustang Island State Park, which netted us some nice raptors and new waterfowl along the way. At the park itself, we added close views of White-tailed Hawks and several shorebirds along the beach, including Piping and Snowy plovers. It had been a long and successful day and we headed back towards Rockport in the late afternoon. We ate dinner at a local BBQ joint and learned: stick to BBQ in a BBQ joint!

A juvenile Least Bittern showing well at Port Aransas Birding Center Photo



Sunday November 23rd

The final day of the trip and we started relatively late in the morning to give everybody time to pack up. We headed north towards the land portion of Aransas National Wildlife Refuge and the second stop en route, after I noticed some bird activity along the entrance road, proved successful. A thirty minute stop proved productive with a good showing of flycatchers, which included two Vermillion Flycatchers, up to three late Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, and four Couch's Kingbird (one of which was calling quietly, suspiciously sounding like a Tropical Kingbird, but never gave any clear vocalizations). Sandhill Cranes flew over in good numbers and flocks of blackbirds kept us busy. The Common Ground Dove disappeared too quickly, but Vesper's Sparrows perched in the scope multiple times.

We stopped at the visitor center to check in and birded around the area. The regular winter birds were present with Orange-crowned and Yellow-rumped warblers, Rudy-crowned Kinglet, and new birds included American Goldfinch, American Pipits, and Eastern Bluebirds, all flyovers. We made a brief stop at the first observation platform where plenty of herons, shorebirds, and even a pair of Whooping Cranes were present.

Going further into the refuge we found the wetlands dried up and not surprisingly without birds. The view from the new observation tower was magnificent and a pair of Whooping Carnes was added. Despite the paucity of birds out in the bay, we persisted and found the only Blue-headed Vireo of the trip in nearby oaks, a species that has been scarce in recent winters. We enjoyed a leisurely lunch back at the visitor center, before embarking on the journey home with several planned stops along the way.

The first stop en route was not planned, when large numbers of ducks in the wetlands of the Guadalupe River Wildlife Management Area and a convenient observation platform had us pull over in no time. There were more Redheads, American Coots, Buffleheads, teal, egrets, and herons. We finally added White-faced Ibis to the list and it did not take long for an immature Bald Eagle to fly over. Our group got smaller as people decided to head home, but the stalwarts continued to Magic Ridge, the TOS property near Indianola. It was surprisingly hot for the time of year and the birds were quiet, but we did add some sparrows and shorebirds, most notably a brief Song Sparrow and several Dunlin. Another highlight came in the form of a small snake, which turned out to be a marsh brown snake (*Storeria dekayi limnetes*).

A few of us made one last stop at the Port Lavaca Lighthouse Park where a quick walk along the boardwalk added Clapper Rail and Common Goldeneye to the trip list. Driving north at dusk, we were treated to a spectacle of thousands of Snow, Ross's, Greater White-fronted geese, and Sandhill Cranes in the fallow fields. We recorded more than 130 species during the trip, saw some amazing highlights, and had a great group. What a trip and I hope to see you again soon!

Photo Gallery:



The group up on the tower at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge Photo Joanna Friesen.



Couch's Kingbird Photo Debbie Valdez



Least Bittern Photo Paul Downey



White-tailed Hawk Photo Paul Downey



Tricolored Heron Photo Paul Downey



Whooping Crane pair with two youngsters
Photo Joanna Friesen



Sandhill Cranes Photo Debbie Valdez



The group back on land after the boat trip Photo Stephan Lorenz.

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