

Monthly Meeting January 4, 2016

Bayland Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet St, Houston, TX



6:30 pm [Learning Corner](#): Couch Birding – This is Not a Field Guide by Marcy Brown

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

7:30 pm [Program](#): Christmas Bird Counts by OG Members

[Field Trip](#): Galveston Island, led by Alice Ann Odonel, January 24, 8am

[Red-Eyed – White Eyed](#) | [Texas Birding Events](#)

Couch Birding – This is not a Field Guide

By Marcy Brown

Wish you could get out birding, but it's just too cold, too hot, too wet, too windy, too dark, too sunny, or you're just too lazy on that day? We will discuss the many books about birds, birding and birders that can keep you engaged in your favorite pass-time without having to brave the elements. If you have a favorite, bring it along and share it with us!

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Christmas Bird Counts

By OG Members

The program will be reports from the members about the Christmas bird counts that they participated in. Let us know where you counted and what surprise birds you saw.

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Galveston Island Field Trip, January 24

Led by Alice Ann Odonel

We will meet at 8 am at Moody Gardens in the northwest parking lot by the paddle wheeler.

Alice Ann Odonel, President of Galveston Audubon and our favorite local guide is planning to take us to special spots. Our focus will be west side of the Island. Ducks will be a focus, as well numerous shorebirds that we will see along the route.

Pack a lunch, dress warm, and bring sunscreen and insect repellent. If you are running late, make sure to give Jean Booth a call at 832 816 1060. She would like to know in advance if you are planning to participate.

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Red-Eyed – White-Eyed

By by Hart Rufe

First published August 1, 2015, reprinted with permission.



This Eastern Towhee is of the red-eyed clan, unlike his white-eyed cousin, below right.

A red-eye is a flight that one takes late at night to arrive at a distant destination early the next morning; or red eyes can appear in some photos of persons when flash is used; or it's an alcoholic drink that if imbibed sufficiently produces red eyes; or red eyes sometimes occur when one gets insufficient sleep after imbibing too much red-eye. Conversely, White-eyes is a family of birds in Africa and Asia that don't actually have white eyes, but do have a large



white ring around their eyes, but there are no members of this family in North America. However, every graduate of elementary school remembers the Bunker Hill cry, “Don’t fire until you see the whites of their eyes!” Of course, the patriots were assuming the British soldiers had not stayed up late the previous night drinking too much red-eye, as they later did at Trenton that Christmas eve when Washington crossed the Delaware. (All right, before you send me your corrections, I remember they were Hessian mercenaries in Trenton.)

But when it comes to native birds in North America there is only one species of each with the name modifier “Red-eyed” or “White-eyed” and they are both Vireos. And both the Red-eyed Vireo, *below right*, and White-eyed Vireo, *below left*, breed widely across eastern North America, with the Red-eyed wintering in South America, and the White-eyed wintering in the southern states, Mexico and the Caribbean. White-eyed Vireos are easy to find in Florida in the winter. Both species are named for the actual color of their eyes, and not for the color of a ring around their eyes.



However, Eastern Towhees can be found with both red eyes and white eyes, depending on where you find them. In the greatest part of their range, throughout most of the United States and Canada east of the Mississippi, Eastern Towhees have red eyes. But in parts of the Southeast, and particularly Florida, Eastern Towhees have white eyes.

When it comes to naming species of birds, and all other biological organisms for that matter, there has long been a swinging of the pendulum back and forth between the “lumpers” and the “splitters.” Ever since the time of Charles Darwin scientists have struggled with the definition of what characteristics qualify as a separate species. “Lumpers” held that species that were able to interbreed, even though differences could be observed, should be lumped into one species. “Splitters” argued that if differences are obvious, then separate species status should be awarded. One frequently used example featured the difference between Yellow-shafted Flickers and Red-shafted Flickers. While the two species differences were obvious in their feathers, and the males had different color “mustaches” - black in the Yellow-shafted, and red in the Red-shafted, the two species interbred and created “intergrades” in the narrow areas where their two ranges overlapped. “Splitters” reigned supreme for years and the two were separate species, even though “Lumpers” maintained that they were one and the same species, only with “phase” or “morph” or “sub-species” differences. However, “Lumpers” ultimately prevailed, and the two are now known as the Northern Flicker.



Same thing happened with Towhees. Prior to 1957 there were three similar species of Towhees: the Red-eyed Towhee; the White-eyed Towhee; and the Spotted Towhee, *male and juvenile left*,

whose range is western United States and Canada. In 1957 the three were lumped into one species: the Rufous-sided Towhee. However, with the development of DNA analysis, the whole argument of “lumpers” versus “splitters” became pretty well moot as scientists were able to conclusively determine which versions were truly deserving of full species status. Consequently, in the early 1990’s the Rufous-sided Towhee was finally split into the Spotted Towhee, and the Eastern Towhee, which includes both the red-eyed and white-eyed versions. That’s where we stand today, but who knows what new biological technology will come down the road in the future and cause further “splitting,” or further “lumping” for that matter.

Ah, but the bird’s eye color does not change regardless of what it is doing. It is we humans who have the ability to change the whites of our eyes to red, albeit usually unintentionally, by drinking too much or sleeping too little, not to mention allergies. And red eyes in birds are quite attractive; in humans, not so much.

For more on “lumpers” and “splitters,” see www.backyardnature.net/namelump.htm; and archosaurmusings.wordpress.com/2008/12/22/lumpers-and-splitters/. Perhaps the best discussion on the topic that I have seen is in Scott Weidensaul’s excellent book on bird migration, *Living on the Wind*, at pages 166 – 168.





Eastern Towhees, female, with red (left) and white eyes

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Upcoming Texas Birding events

Compiled by Nina Rach, updated 27 Nov 2015

[please send corrections and additions to NRach@AutreVie.com]

Dec 24 – Thurs – Buffalo Lake CBC (TXBL) – in the Panhandle! compiler Joe Cepeda
at jcepeda@mail.wtamu.edu

Dec 25 – Fri – Hueco Tanks CBC (TXHT) - Richard Hermosillo at
Richard.V.Hermosillo@xcelenergy.com.

Dec 26 – Sat – Comstock CBC (TXCO)

Dec 27 – Sun – Buffalo Bayou CBC (TXBF) – west Houston

Dec 27 – Sun – Palmetto State Park CBC (TXPM)

Dec 27 – Sun – Laredo CBC (TXLD) - Compiler Glenda Barrera, 956-286-5876.

Dec 27 – Sun – Del Rio CBC (TXDR)

Dec 28 – Mon – Old River CBC (TXOR)

Dec 28 – Mon – Beech Creek CBC (TXBE)

Dec 28 – Mon – Rockport CBC (TXRO)

Dec 28 – Mon – Chisos Mountains CBC (TXCM)

Dec 29 – Tues – Gibbons Creek CBC

Dec 29 – Tues – Laguna Atascosa CBC (TXLA)

Dec 29 – Tues – Big Bend CBC (TXBG)

Dec 30 – Wed – Trinity River CBC (TXTN) – northern Liberty County. Compiler is Stuart Marcus at 936-336-9786 or stuart_marcus@fws.gov

Dec 30 – Wed – Boerne CBC (TXBO)

Dec 30 – Wed – Weslaco CBC (TXWS)

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Jan 1 – Fri – Cypress Creek CBC – Katy Prairie. Contact klebwoods@pct3.com

Jan 1 – Fri – Orange County CBC (TXOC)

Jan 1 – Fri – Bastrop-Buescher State Park CBC (TXBB) – Compilers Laurie Foss and Sheila Hargis, bastroptxcbc@gmail.com

Jan 1 – Fri – Anzalduas-Bentsen CBC (TXAZ) – Rio Grande Valley - Compiler Melissa Chadwick, Melissa.Chadwick@tpwd.texas.gov, tel 956-584-9156.

Jan 2 – Sat - Brazoria-Columbia Bottomlands CBC (TXBR) - includes Bar-X Ranch, Columbia Lakes, Hudson Woods unit of SBNWR, Brazoria Reservoir, Harris Reservoir, and southern Nash Ranch. Compiler: Tom Taroni at 979-297-5563 or taronitom@gmail.com.

Jan 2 – Sat – Burnet County CBC (TXBN)

Jan 2 – Sat – Harlingen CBC (TX HG) – Rio Grande Valley, Compiler Norma Friedrich, acaskiskadee@yahoo.com, 956-428-2603.

Jan 2 – Sat – Kingsville CBC (TXKI) - Co-Compilers: Jim Sinclair, sinclairjim@yahoo.com and Barbara Rapstein, barbraps@rocketmail.com .

Jan 2 – Sat – Waco CBC (TXWA)

Jan 2 – Sat – West Kerr County CBC (TXWK) - contact Bill Lindemann, at billin2@beecreek.net

Jan 3 – Sun – Sea Rim State Park CBC (TXSR)

Jan 3 – Sun – New Braunfels CBC (TXNB)

Jan 4 – Mon – OG monthly meeting, Bayland Community Center, Reports from the Christmas Bird Counts!

Jan 5 – Tues – Kerrville CBC (TXKV) - compiler Richard Redmond, ewigeon64@Hughes.net, 830-460-1243

Jan 14 – Thurs – 7pm Houston Audubon speaker, Becky Gillette, Pagosa Springs, Colorado: ‘Breeding Bird Surveys in Colorado’s Sagebrush Steppe’ at United Way Center, 50 Waugh.

Jan 14-17 – Texas Ornithological Society Winter Meeting, McKinney, Collin Co., north of Dallas.

Details to be announced.

Jan 16-17 – Sat-Sun – Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary (LTNS) Visitors’ Weekend, San Jacinto County; camping permitted. Owned by Houston Outdoor Nature Club, located NW of Cleveland; entrance off FM 945.

www.outdoornatureclub.org/LTNS_route_map.pdf

Jan 21 – Thurs – Baytown Nature Center Survey

Feb 1 – Mon – OG monthly meeting, Bayland Community Center, Speaker: Cin Ty Lee, “Gulls & Terns of Texas”

Feb 3-6 – Laredo Birding Festival – www.laredobirdingfestival.com

Feb 6 – Sat – Sparrow Fest at Balcones Canyonlands NWR, <http://www.friendsofbalcones.org/sf>

Feb 13 – Sat – OG Monthly Field Trip – Katy Prairie – afternoon – led by Bob Honig and Steve Gast

Feb 20-21 - Sat-Sun – Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary (LTNS) Visitors’ Weekend, San Jacinto County; camping permitted. Owned by Houston Outdoor Nature Club, located NW of Cleveland; entrance off FM 945.

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Feb 25-28 – 20th annual Whooping Crane Festival, www.whoopingcranefestival.org Port Aransas – www.portaransas.org

March 4-5 – Fri-Sat – Marsh Madness Sandhill Crane Festival, Linton, Indiana.

March 7 – Mon – OG monthly meeting, Bayland Community Center, Speaker: Patrick Walthur, “Bird studies and future plans for Anahuac NWR.”

March 11-13 – Spring Photography weekend at Mo-Ranch, Hunt, Texas – will emphasize bird photography

March 17-20 – Audubon’s Nebraska Crane Festival, www.nebraskacranefestival.org

March 19-20 – Sat-Sun – Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary (LTNS) Visitors’ Weekend, San Jacinto County; camping permitted. Owned by Houston Outdoor Nature Club, located NW of Cleveland; entrance off FM 945.

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March 26 – Sat -OG field trip – Mad Island Marsh Preserve – Clive Runnells Family – Smithsonian crew is banding

April 4 – Mon – OG monthly meeting, Bayland Community Center, Speaker: Glenn Olsen, “American Woodpeckers”

April 8-10 – Nebraska Prairie Chicken Festival, Burwell, NE, www.nebraskaprairiechickens.com

Mid-April – 22nd Attwater Prairie Chicken Festival, Attwater NWR, http://www.fws.gov/refuge/attwater_prairie_chicken/

April 13-19 – Wed-Tues - Lesser *Prairie-Chicken Festival*, Woodward, OK, www.lektreks.org

April 14-17 – Thurs-Sun - 14th Annual Galveston FeatherFest (new – moved to third weekend)

April 16-17 – Sat-Sun – Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary (LTNS) Visitors’ Weekend, San Jacinto County; camping permitted. Owned by Houston Outdoor Nature Club, located NW of Cleveland;

entrance off FM 945.

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April 22-24 – Fri-Sun – Balcones Songbird Festival, Balcones Canyonlands NWR – registration opens 2/15/16

May 2 – Mon – OG monthly meeting, Bayland Community Center, Speaker: _____

May 6-15 – The Biggest Week in American Birding, Black Swamp Bird Observatory, Magee Marsh and Ottawa NWR in NW Ohio, www.biggestweekinamericanbirding.com

May 21-22 – Sat-Sun – Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary (LTNS) Visitors' Weekend, San Jacinto County; camping permitted. Owned by Houston Outdoor Nature Club, located NW of Cleveland; entrance off FM 945.

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