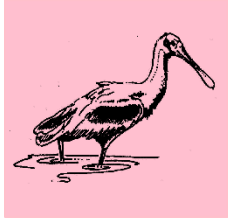


## Monthly Meeting April 3, 2017

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



6:30 pm Learning Corner: Cin-Ty Lee is bringing painting and some new field guides

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

7:30 pm [Program](#): A New Guide to the Field Identification of Empidonax Flycatchers by Cin-Ty Lee

**Field Trips: Powderhorn Ranch, guided by Daniel Walker, Friday or Saturday, April 21 or 22**

[Choke Canyon Field Trip Report | Mad Island Marsh Preserve Field Trip Report | Minutes of the March 6 Meeting](#)

[2017 Dues are Due: http://ornithologygroup.org/Dues](http://ornithologygroup.org/Dues)

## **A New Guide to the Field Identification of Empidonax Flycatchers**

by Cin-Ty Lee

Empidonax flycatchers are probably the most challenging complexes for field identification. This is because much of the identifications are based on overall impressions, proportions, etc., features which are difficult to quantify and communicate well in field guides. Cin-Ty Lee will present a new systematic approach to empid identification, which is simple enough to be accessible to beginning birders. He will present a preliminary draft of a new empidonax guide he and Andrew Birch are working on. Copies of the guide will be available at the lecture. OG will be only the second group of people to see this work in progress.

Cin-Ty Lee is a professor of geochemistry in the Department of Earth Science at Rice University, where he is currently the department chair. He got his BA at UC Berkeley and his PhD at Harvard. He works primarily on the origin and evolution of continents and how interactions between the Earth's interior and the atmosphere modulate the evolution of Earth's climate through time. He spends much of his spare time birding, painting birds, and writing articles on bird identification. Together with his wife, he operates Greenpitta.com, which specializes in making designs and logos with natural history themes and more

[↑top↑](#)

## **Field Trip:**

### **Powderhorn Ranch guided by Daniel Walker - Project Leader for Powderhorn Wildlife Management**

**Friday, April 21 or Saturday, April 22 (Jean will tell you which date you are assigned to)**

Owned in conjunction with TNC and TPW, this property is in transition and not open to the public. Read description below of property.

This field trip is limited and registration is required. Contact Jean Booth - cell 832 816 1060.

Owned in conjunction with TNC and TPW, this property is in transition and not open to the public. Read description below of property.

This field trip is limited and we may add another day due to size of group, which would be Friday. Registration required.

Just off a quiet stretch of highway in Calhoun County, beyond a nondescript metal gate, lies a 17,000-acre mosaic of dense live oak forests, coastal prairies, saltmarshes and wetlands. This tract, known as **Powderhorn Ranch, is one of the largest remaining undisturbed tracts of native coastal prairie habitat left in Texas**—and likely the largest conservation deal in the history of Texas.

### **Crucial Habitat Protection**

Secured by a partnership between ***The Nature Conservancy, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and The Conservation Fund***, it offers **sweeping, unobstructed views of tallgrass prairies and marshland and 11 miles of tidal bay front that protect vitally important seagrass beds and mollusk reefs**. Its environmental significance cannot be overstated. Federally endangered whooping cranes currently winter just 15-30 miles south of Powderhorn. With the number of wild whoopers expanding, the ranch will undoubtedly become a critical habitat for whooping cranes in the coming years.

Powderhorn's saltwater wetlands also offer important, year-round habitat for shorebirds, wading birds and waterfowl. Elsewhere, extensive woodlands and freshwater wetlands provide critically important "fall-out areas" for migrating songbirds, particularly during spring migration when, exhausted from their flights across or around the Gulf of Mexico, birds use these areas to rest and refuel. The Conservancy plans to conduct extensive wildlife and plant surveys on the ranch, which will undoubtedly become a haven for bird watchers, as well as people interested in fishing, kayaking, and canoeing.

### **Distinctive by Design**

The ranch also includes a unique geologic formation called the Ingleside Barrier, which supports unique plant life such as the seacoast bluestem and Texas coastal bend live oak. And it enjoys several miles of Matagorda Bay frontage—the bays and flats along that shoreline are important nurseries for a variety of fish and shellfish, including brown shrimp, redfish, spotted sea trout and blue crab.

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation funded a significant portion of this at-scale conservation project using fine money resulting from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation has played a lead role in securing that funding, and will continue to raise money to support habitat restoration and management and create a long-term endowment. As the easement-holder, the Conservancy will play a key role in restoring areas that have been overgrazed or over-run with invasive species. Full ownership of Powderhorn, which is slated to become a state park, will eventually be turned over to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

[↑top↑](#)

## **Trip Report - Houston OG Weekender to “Choke Canyon,” February 10-12, 2017**

**by Mike Austin, leader for the trip**

***What a great trip and great birding. Thanks Mike for a memorable trip and weekend.***

A cast of birders which maxed out at ten spent the weekend birding the Interstate 37 corridor from the Calliham Unit of Choke Canyon SP through Lake Corpus Christi to the central Gulf Coast. We enjoyed good food, good lodging, good times and, most of all good birds. The trip tallied 119 bird species, most of which were fortunately seen by all the participants. The weather wasn't exactly typical for February, with the temperatures topping out at 91 on Friday and 94 on Saturday! The warm weather this winter had also kept wintering sparrows and finches to the north, but we tried to make up for it with other species. Our journey tallied 14 species of ducks,

most in wonderful light and 16 species of shorebirds.



Bird highlights of the trip included an unusually co-operative preening Verdin and 4 Cinnamon Teal who joined a strange Cinnamon X Blue-winged Hybrid Teal at Choke Canyon, a Bald Eagle nest with two recently-fledged chicks, and a distant scope-viewed Peregrine Falcon at the north end of Lake Corpus Christi, and the season's first Purple Martin at Hazel Bazemore County Park in Calallen outside of Corpus Christi.

The real highlight of the trip was a visit to Joel and Vickie Simon's beautiful home at the north end of Lake Corpus Christi at Dinero. They have a fantastic yard which looks out on the lake and contains feeders of many descriptions. Joel took us on a hike around his birdy neighborhood which added 17 species to our weekend bird list. A special thanks is due to these very generous folks for making the trip truly memorable!

[↑top↑](#)

## Trip Report to Mad Island Marsh Preserve, March 11, 2017

By Michelle Rometry (trip led by Bob Freidrich)

The field trip took place at the Mad Island Marsh Preserve, which covers over 7000 acres of coastal wetlands system. OG members had also been there in November so it is interesting to see how the species change in just a short time. Our group of 9 hearty souls, was again guided by Bob Friedrich, who is so familiar with the area. The unfortunately correct forecast called for 70% chance of rain, but we don't scare easily.



Not long into our travel, we were treated to a very cooperative Aplomado Falcon. Many oohs and ahs could be heard while trying to get photos in the increasing wind. After winding through the roads, we walked out to the covered platform behind the lodge to get some of the best birds of the preserve. Despite wind and rain, Bob got us on Gull billed Terns, Snow Geese, Sandhill Cranes, Red Breasted Merganser, Vermillion Flycatcher, Bonaparte's Gull, Sora, Clapper, and Virginia Rails.

We left to check out the Sod fields nearby and hit bird jackpot. American Golden Plovers were coming in and quickly became a common bird. Many were developing their breeding color and one could only imagine how they would look by the end of their flight. Moving to another area got us on Pectoral Sandpipers and then a few Baird's Sandpipers flew in! American and Sprague's Pipits were seen side by side. Amazing to see large groups of birds and several species in the same field of view. We learned a lot from Bob on feeding habits for each. Two American Bald Eagles put in an appearance along with many other raptors for the trip. Many thanks to our patient and tireless guide, for literally taking us on a great ride.



[↑top↑](#)

## Minutes of March 6, 2017 Meeting

By Jean Greenhalgh

The March meeting of OG was held on March 6<sup>th</sup> 2017 at the Bayland Park Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet, at 6:30 pm. 47 people attended.

Learning Corner was a Brief Overview of the Honduran Emerald (*Amazilia luciae*) from Stephan Lorenz. This hummingbird is the only Honduran endemic and the rarest in Central America. It was first described in 1867 and seen regularly until 1950 when it was lost. In June 1988 Stephen Howell and Sophie Webb rediscovered it in the Aguan valley. Unlike most hummingbirds, it is a resident of dry forest and the lives in intermontane valleys in the rain shadow. It has now been found similar habitat in at least four small areas and there are estimated to be 250 – 1,000 birds, but it is difficult to find and count. It moves seasonally but to where has yet to be determined. The 12,000 acre Honduran Emerald Reserve, where it is most easily seen and is doing fine, is well protected and next to a Honduran Air Force area with armed guards. It is relatively easily accessible with a good road for a never developed resort running through it.



Nina Rach talked about upcoming birding events, including a field trip to Powderhorn Ranch on April 22 and 23. Contact Jean Booth for more details and to sign up.

Jean is stepping down from her position as Field Trip Coordinator after two years, when she has arranged for some great days and weekend trips. Consequently, a replacement coordinator is needed. Please contact Nina if you are interested or would like further details.

As part of the Great Texas Birding Classic, big sits are being held in some of our local State Parks. Erik Ostrander, TPWD, talked about the Sit to be held at San Jacinto SP Saturday May 6. Contact Erik at 281 476 4827 for more information.

David Sarkozi is going to lead a trip to Maine for OG, June 5 - 11. The itinerary will be Cannon Mountain, NH, which has an Aerial Tram for reaching Bicknell's Thrush habitat; Bar Harbor, ME; a pelagic trip; and Bangor, ME. Additional target birds include Boreal Chickadee, Gray Jay, Atlantic Puffin, Razorbill, Black Guillemot, Common Murre, Eider, Northern Gannet, Fulmar, and lots of warblers. Approximately 100 species are possible. Cost, excluding air fare, will be around \$1200 depending on number of participants, with a maximum of 7. Please contact Jean Booth to sign up and for more details.

Upcoming birding events include Featherfest in Galveston April 6 – 9 and the Texas Ornithological Society meeting in Rockport May 5 – 7. There is also the inaugural Birdiest Festival in America to be held in Corpus Christi April 20 – 23, details of which are at [STXBOT.ORG](http://STXBOT.ORG).

Stephan Lorenz presented the main program Birding the Gem of Honduras: The Lodge at Pico Bonito. Stephan, a professor of biology at San Jacinto College, is also a tour leader for High Lonesome Birdtours. He has led 4 tours to Pico Bonito. Wonderful photos were shown of the colorful, not so colorful, and, sometimes shy, birds that can be seen in Honduras.

Honduras is situated between Guatemala, San Salvador and Nicaragua and has over 800 bird species. 81% of the country is mountains rising to over 9,000ft and habitat includes highland rainforest; cloud forest; lowland rainforest; pine oak forest; wetlands and coral.

The Lodge at Pico Bonito, one of the top 50 ecolodges in the world, is set in 400 acres and is at 1,000 – 1,200ft on the Nombre de Dios mountains, which rise to over 8,100ft. It is on the edge of the 400 square mile Pico Bonito National Park. Uphill is virgin rain forest and downhill is secondary rain forest.

Over 400 different birds can be seen within 20 minutes of the Lodge. “Yard birds” include Collared Aracari; Blue and Red-legged Honeycreepers; Rufous-winged and Yellow-winged Tanagers; White-vented Euphonias; Red-capped Manakins; five species of trogon; Black-cheeked and Chestnut-colored Woodpeckers; Black-cowled Orioles; Melodious Blackbird and Social and Piratic Flycatchers. Meals are taken in a restaurant that is open on one side and are often interrupted by watching avian visitors to the feeders.

The signature birds within the grounds of the lodge, many of which are difficult to see elsewhere, are the Keel-billed Motmot (rare in Central America) and the Lovely Cotinga. Additional birds in the grounds include Black-throated green Shrike-tanager, six species of woodcreeper; foliage gleaners; Ferruginous and Central American Pygmy Owl; Guatemalan Screech, Mottled, and Black and White Owls and Great Potoo. Primates include spider, howler and white faced capuchin monkeys, agouti; coati and kinkajou.

Stephan went on to describe the locations in Honduras that are visited on his trips and showed photos of the birds and habitat.

On the coast the **Cuero y Salado Wildlife Refuge** has water birds including Agami and Bare-throated Tiger Herons and Sungrebes. **Lancetilla Botanical Gardens** has Rufous-tailed Jacamars and Oropendolas. **Pico Bonito – Rio Santiago Nature Reserve** has many different hummingbirds including White-bellied Emerald; Scaly-breasted Hummingbird; Violet Sabrewing; Stripe-throat and Long-billed Hermit; Band-tailed Barbthroat. In addition to the Honduran Emerald the **Aguan Valley** has White-throated Flycatcher, Turquoise-browed Motmot and Lesser Roadrunner.

Field guides include Birds of Honduras, self-published by Robert Gallardo and the Peterson Field Guide to Birds of Northern Central America by Jesse Fagan and Oliver Kumar.

Useful websites: Pico Bonito – picobonito.com; highlonesometours.com; James Adams, the Naturalist at the Lodge, is on facebook; Pico Bonito NP [www.honduras.com/pico-bonito-national-park/](http://www.honduras.com/pico-bonito-national-park/);

[↑top↑](#)

## **About the Ornithology Group**

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

**Vice Chair (Programs): | JoAnn Raine | RaineJoann@gmail.com**

**Secretary | Jean Greenhalgh | JeanBrit01@yahoo.com**

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

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

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

**Membership: Michael Honel | 713-432-1985 | michaelhonel@sbcglobal.net**

**Field Trips: Jean Booth | ljeanbooth@aol.com**

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

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

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

**ONC website: <http://www.outdoornatureclub.org/>**

[↑top↑](#)