

## Monthly Meeting August 7, 2017

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



6:30 pm Learning Corner: How David Sarkozi is doing on his big year

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

7:30 pm [Program](#): Belize OG Birding Trip of February 18-26, 2017 by David Sarkozi and Nina Rach

**Field Trips:** No field trips this month.

[Article of Interest | Minutes of May 8 OG Meeting](#)  
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## Belize OG Birding Trip of February 18-26, 2017

by David Sarkozi and Nina Rach

Members of the Ornithology Group traveled to Belize in February 2016. 243 species of birds were recorded. We'll talk about the places visited, the lodges, and of course the birds seen. Travel the Western Highway to San Ignacio and the Guatemala border, the Hummingbird Highway to the Southern Rainforest at Mayflower-Bocawina to the coastal wetlands of Crooked Tree.

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## Article of Interest:

### This Beautiful Parasitic Bird Could Soon Turn Up in Your Yard

Scientists have developed a model to predict the spread of Pin-tailed Whydahs and found they could strain native bird populations in California, Texas, and elsewhere. Link to this *New York Times* article at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/29/science/pin-tailed-whydahs.html>

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## Minutes of May 8, 2017 Ornithology Group Meeting

By Jean Greenhalgh

The May meeting of OG was held on May 8<sup>th</sup> 2017 at the Bayland Park Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet, at 6:30 pm. 30 people attended. The May meeting of OG was held on May 8<sup>th</sup> 2017 at the Bayland Park Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet, at 6:30 pm. 30 people attended.

Joann Raine organized the Learning Corner, which was a sales table of birding books. Most of the books were from the Estate of Jim Stewart, one of the founding Board members of the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, and some were from Joann. The proceeds are to be sent to GCBO.

Some of the notable birds seen during migration included a MacGillivray's warbler at Edith L. Moore and Black-whiskered Vireos at both Lafitte's Cove and Sabine Woods, with the Sabine Woods vireo still there on May 5<sup>th</sup>.

Nina Rach thanked Joann for organizing the sales table, and Jean Booth for her work as Field Trip Coordinator for the last two years.

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. Additionally Joann will be stepping down as Vice President and Program Organizer at the end of 2017. Nina has been President for four years and would also like to step down. Please contact Nina if you are interested in any of the positions or would like further details.

Nina, ONC as well as OG President, reported Outdoor Nature Club news and status. ONC is financially solvent. Calvin Blakely, Secretary - Treasurer and his wife, Connie, have produced the ONC Yearbook and Member Directory in the past and are in the process of updating it.

ONC has owned Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary for around 70 years. It is open on the third Saturday of most months except July and August. Visits can also be arranged by appointment by getting the gate code. There are 20 miles of trails and a recent visit found nesting Swainson's Warblers. Aaron Stoley has been maintaining the reserve for many years but is pulling back from some of the most physical work. Someone else has taken over some of this work.

Nina then brought to OG's attention an article in the Houston Chronicle on May 5, about Bird experts calling for community action after 398 birds crashed into a Galveston building, the American National Building at 1902 Ave. D. Because of stormy weather the birds were flying lower than usual and it is believed lights left on in the building may have disoriented the birds, most warblers, on Wednesday. The link is

<http://www.chron.com/neighborhood/bayarea/news/article/Bird-experts-call-for-community-action-after-398-11123882.php> This led to a discussion on what can be done to prevent this.

The main program was by Stephen Gast, a retired oil and gas geologist and well-known local birder, about Birding Cuba. He showed wonderful photos of the birds, the habitats and the people and places of Cuba.

Cuba has recently become more open for birding, but there are not many facilities so trips are still somewhat limited. The current rules mean that all tours have to qualify as people to people style, with cultural and educational visits interactions throughout the tour. This included visiting a cigar making operation, watching local folkloric dancing and visiting a plantation. Visiting Cuba to bird demonstrates to both the Cuban government and the local population, that birds,

and their habitats, have value and bring in tourist dollars. Some of the small, colorful, endemics are popular as caged birds in Cuba and this makes them very vulnerable.

After landing in Santa Clara the first night was spent in there, before travelling on to Cayo Coco for two days. While birding on the way to Cayo Coco, birds of note included Cuban Robin, Red-legged Thrush, Cuban Blackbird and, because every Caribbean island seems to have its own endemic pewee, Cuban Pewee,. It was interesting to see many warblers fattening up for migration north. However the best bird, not always seen on this tour, was Gundlach's Hawk. Cayo Coc, and the close by Trinidad, is an area of limestone cays and has some beautiful endemics including Oriente Warbler, Cuban Gnatcatcher, Cuban Bullfinch, Cuban Oriole, Cuban Emerald and Cuban Tody. Views of the near endemic and notoriously shy Bahama Mockingbird were a bonus.

Then on to Topes del Collante and further to the Zapata Peninsula, including the Zapata Swamp, and Playa Larga – the Bay of Pigs. Birds seen in these areas included the Loggerhead Kingbird, Cuban Kestrel, red-shouldered Blackbird, Fernandina's Flicker, Bare-legged Owl, Cuban Crow, Yellow-headed Warbler, Bee Hummingbird, Cuban Parakeet, Zapata Wren, Zapata Sparrow and Cuban Pygmy Owl. There were four Quail-Dove species – the endemic Gray-fronted and Blue-headed as well as the non-endemic Ruddy and Key West. The mangroves at the Bay of Pigs are the site of a land-crab migration. These inedible crabs are so numerous that it's impossible to miss them while driving and flat tires are almost guaranteed.

The next couple of days were spent at Soroa, Sopillar and Vinales which are at a higher elevation and include some limestone mountains. Different birds seen there included Cuban Solitaire, Cuban Trogon, Cuban Green Woodpecker and the near endemic Olive-capped Warbler.

No trip to Cuba can miss going to Papa Hemmingway's house and there a Cuban Parrot was seen. Then on to Havana and great views of the Cuban Grassquit on the way.

There are 25 endemics and Stephen saw 22 of them, and photographed most of them too, as well as some of the 12 near endemics. Cuba is accessible from Houston nonstop by United and South West on a two and a half hour flight. Stephen travelled with Victor Emanuel Nature Tours led by David Ascanio, as well as local guides, and accompanied by a Cuban government employee. VENT contracts with International Expeditions for this tour.

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## The Early Bird Gets the Worm

By Hart Rufe (Reprinted with permission from the Hart Beat, first published July 1, 2017)



*American Robin on way to feed its young*

One of those maxims we learn in early childhood is: “The early bird gets the worm.” So get yourself out of bed and off to school, work, your chores, or at least, something worthwhile. The invocation applied to whatever activity our parents wanted us to engage in that was more important than remaining in bed asleep. Even today, many decades later, as I am sometimes inclined to loaf a little longer in bed in the morning, I can hear my parent’s admonition in my

mind, “Get out there and get those worms!” For many species of birds, getting those worms, or not, is a matter of survival.



The cliché photo of a bird “getting the worm” is usually one of the American Robin tugging hard on a hapless worm as it struggles to liberate the worm from its secure ground habitat. I was not early enough to get that shot (missed the worm?) but I was in time to see the Robin with its mouth full of worms on its way back to feed its babies in the nest in our Rhododendron. However, on another occasion, I was early enough in the process to capture a Piping Plover (*left*) making the final pull that would promise that it would eat that day. And thus we have concrete evidence that worms can be found on grassy lawns and dry beaches.

We don’t normally associate worms with wetlands or watery places, and yet we should, for many shorebirds are successful in finding worms in water that covers their feet, such as this Black-bellied Plover (*right*) about to take one down the hatch (another cliché?).

Then, on the contrary, we should not be at all surprised to learn that birds do find worms in farm fields, as the working of the ground for planting makes for ideal habitat for those dirt mulching worms. We watched this American Pipit (*left*) search for quite a while before he/she found this morsel. But the quintessential worm eater is the American Woodcock, (*below*) which counts



earthworms as the main staple of its diet, although it will eat other organisms it finds while robing the woods and marshes for food. Interestingly, the American Woodcock and Wilson's







rear of their heads so that they can watch for predators even while having their long beaks deep in the mud. But not all worms are found in the ground. Indeed many smaller birds search for and find worms in the trees. It's just that the worms they find are not earthworms, but rather the larva or caterpillars of many flying moths and insects too numerous to recount here. This House Wren





(below) brought this “worm” to our feeder pole to show off his prowess in capturing his meal



and that he didn't need our help. It was certainly not one of the foods offered in the feeders hanging from the pole.

But how will the "late bird" fare? To prove the point of the maxim, this Wilson's Snipe, (*below*) photographed in the waning late afternoon sunlight is still probing hard and fast for its daily bread apparently not having arisen early enough to get the early worm. Hopefully he/she found a late worm and did not go to roost hungry. How many other bird cliché maxims did we learn as children that we have later learned have an actual basis in life? "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." Or, "Birds of a feather flock together." If you "Get your ducks in a row," do you have a better chance of "killing two birds with one stone?" Ok, I'm done, so "don't get your feathers all ruffled." "It's all water off a duck's (my) back."



*NOTE: I apologize, dear Reader, that some of these photos are of poor quality. When sorting through my years of photos to find bird/worm examples, I had to go back a number of years to my earlier work, to a time when I knew even less than I do now about photography. The Robin and Woodcock are my more recent shots. I do indeed recognize I still have a way to go.*

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## About the Ornithology Group

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