

Monthly Meeting September 11, 2017

Bayland Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet St, Houston, TX



6:30 pm Learning Corner: No learning corner this month; come early to visit with fellow members

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

7:30 pm [Program](#): Historic Birding Records for Texas and Harris County by John Berner

Field Trips: No field trips this month; it is up to the members to organize field trips since we no longer have a field trip coordinator

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In Memory of Aaron Stoley

By Charles Smith

Long time Ornithology Group (OG) and Outdoor Nature Club (ONC) member Aaron Stoley died August 16 at the age of 89. Aaron was introduced to birding on a field trip to Galveston Island with John Tveten in the 1970's. A spring fallout got him hooked on birds and led to a long life as a birder and nature lover. He was a tireless worker noted for accomplishing more work than most men younger and larger than him. He was the Sanctuary Vice-President for ONC from the 1970's until his death and was responsible for the operation and maintenance of ONC's Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary. He was a faithful participant in area CBCs, and was an area leader for OG's Houston Count for many years. In recent years he led a weekly survey of the birds of the Hogg Bird Sanctuary. He worked for Houston Audubon at the High Island sanctuaries, Edith L. Moore Sanctuary and other locations. He will be greatly missed.

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Hummingbirds

Put up your hummingbird feeders now for the fall migration. Remember to use a mixture of four parts water to one part sugar and to clean the feeders and replace the mixture at least twice a week during the summer.

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Birding Records for Texas and Harris County

by John Berner

There are currently 412 species reported in eBird for Harris County and one of my hobbies has been tracking down old journal articles and notes from 19th Century and early 20th century explorers of Texas and Harris County and the unusual species they encountered. These include well-known names like Audubon and Baird who passed through Harris County or Texas but there were also many lesser known visitors such as Henry Nehrling, and George F. Simmons who contributed mightily to the local record.

Finally I would like to also talk about the results of the earliest Audubon Houston Christmas bird count and differences from the most recent counts. John lives in West Houston with his wife Cathy and two children--Abby a freshman at U Texas, and Zach a senior in High School. John's spark bird was a beautiful long-staying red-tailed Hawk outside his office window in 2004.

John was an early adopter of eBird back when the maps were horrible and there were very few users. He remembers having almost 40% of the eBird lists in January 2005 in Harris County. It is gratifying that eBird use is now almost universal among local birders

John has enjoyed exploring all corners of Harris County since then and has managed to see 378 species in the County. He is currently the eBird reviewer for Harris and Waller Counties and the eBird hotspot editor for Texas. John credits Fred Collins for inspiring him to do Citizen Science locally.

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Minutes of August 7, 2017 Ornithology Group Meeting

By Jean Greenhalgh

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

David Sarkozi led the Learning Corner by updating us on his big Texas year. As of August 2nd he had seen 479 birds, but the next 21 will be the most difficult. He will need at least one or two pelagic trips, plus chasing some rarities, and trying for some birds he would usually see earlier in the year like Black-throated Blue Warbler and Eastern Whip-poor-will.

Some of the sources for birds that he uses are an hourly eBird update; Texas Chase Birds Facebook page; Texbirds, both Facebook and email; Real Texbirds. Also he receives calls, texts and email from birders statewide. David said “It takes a village”. The previous big year record is 522 held by Lynn Barber who did it in 2005.

Nina Rach, OG President, then reported that volunteers are needed for Field Trip Coordinator, President and Vice President/ Program Organizer. One possibility for Field Trips is for a different member to organize one field trip every month. Please contact Nina if you are interested in any of the positions or would like further details.

The Friends of Anahuac have a photo contest, closing date September 9. Sheldon Lake State Park is holding a Birding League in September. More details on their website. In December there is a Rock and Roll Birding festival in Cleveland, OH. Home of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

As a follow up to the heavy bird strike in Galveston in May, the building owners have decided to turn off all the lights during migrations.

The main program was by David Sarkozi on the OG Trip to Belize on February 18 – 26. He showed wonderful photos of the birds taken by himself and participants, including Nina and Marie. Some of the birding sites were Mayan ruins, which were spectacular.

The group saw 243 bird species. He will be leading another tour to Belize next February.

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They're Not Bats

By Hart Rufe (Reprinted with permission from the Hart Beat, first published November 1, 2016; contact Hart at hartrufe@gmail.com)



From a high vantage point, Chimney Swifts can sometimes be seen at eye level.



It was a very strange inquiry: “Why are all those bats flying around in the middle of the day right over the center of town?” Right, very strange! Bats are primarily nocturnal, although they can be seen sometimes at dusk, and they are not likely to be seen flying high over developed areas with buildings and paved streets, for they search for insects over fields and grassy areas where their prey is more likely to be found, and not in the middle of the day in any event.

While not being present to observe what the questioner was seeing, it is probably safe to assume the “bats” were actually Chimney Swifts. With their small size and stiff winged, jerky flight, marginally similar to bats, it would be easy to see how one could mistake Chimney Swifts for bats.

Often described as flying “cigars with wings,” Chimney Swifts (*left*) spend virtually their entire day in the air feeding, catching insects with an unusually large mouth considering the size of the bird (*right*). The only swift in the east (there are three different species in the western United States), the Chimney Swift is incapable of perching, and can only cling to rough surfaces, most



commonly found on the interior of brick or masonry chimneys where the swifts often congregate in large numbers.

In addition to their feet adapted for clinging, the Chimney Swift has tail spikes which help it in its clinging posture. The spikes are clearly visible in photo (*left, click for larger version*). Chimney Swifts actually nest in chimneys which undoubtedly accounts for their more commonly being found in cities and towns where chimneys are more likely to be found. They also are summer residents only, which, of course, is the time of year when chimneys are not typically belching out lots of smoke for winter heating purposes. For an internet photo of a Chimney Swift



nest and babies,

see: www.dilabiobirding.ca/images/backyard_2008-07_0388_ChimneySwiftBabies_W600.jpg.

Most commonly Chimney Swifts are seen high overhead and are best identified by their unique body shape and long wings, as seen in the photo (*below right*). But sometimes, if seen from a high vantage point such as we found on the Poughkeepsie, NY, Walkway across the Hudson River (walkway.org/), Chimney Swifts can be seen at eye level against a mountain side background (*top of page*).

In late summer when Chimney Swifts gather to begin their south bound migration to north-western South America

(Columbia, Ecuador, Peru, and north-western

Brazil) https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Chimney_Swift/lifehistory, they

congregate in large numbers at favorite chimneys such as this one in Kintnersville, PA, not far

from our Pennsylvania home. (*photo below*) In past years, Jewel and I have witnessed

thousands of Chimney Swifts coming into their chimney roosting place. They form into a funnel

from a



large circle high above the chimney, not unlike the “murmuration” pattern we have seen Tree Swallows use in Florida.

See stlucieaudubon.org/hartBeat/hb2012/hb120301murmur.html. They then drop down into a tight double circular pattern that resembled a figure eight just above the chimney opening, creating two streams on opposite sides finally flowing into the chimney. The whole procedure is accomplished in a matter of 15 to 20 minutes, and it is virtually dark when the last Swifts enter their nightly roosting spot. I have not found any video of such a scene taking place inside the chimney, but, if ever documented, it undoubtedly would make spectacular viewing.



I made two trips this past August and early September, the prime time for this epic saga to occur, but alas, either missed the height of the migration gathering, or the Swifts have found a more preferable chimney. I estimated approximately three hundred Chimney Swifts gathering at the chimney and took some disappointing photos of them entering the chimney just before dark. (photo 7) I also took a video of the last nine minutes of the roosting procedure, which occurred when it was almost completely dark. The video, in which I have greatly increased the exposure so the birds can be seen, thereby creating an eerie pixelated cast to the video, can be found at: youtu.be/LORkumMS63M (Warning, viewing this video may remind you of watching paint dry.)



Chimney Swifts do occur in Florida and we have seen them on St Lucie Audubon field trips in April. They may have been migratory birds though, for the 1992 Florida Breeding Bird Atlas recorded only a handful of breeding locations for the species in St Lucie County. But clearly, wherever you may be in the summer in eastern North America, if you see “bats” flying around in the middle of the day over the center of town, do a double take and check to make sure: They are probably Chimney Swifts. And while they may resemble cigars with wings, you can bet they are “smoking” a lot of very pesky bugs and mosquitos.

For more on Chimney Swifts,

see www.chimneyswifts.org/ and legacy.myfwc.com/bba/docs/bba_chsw.pdf.

For a photo of Chimney Swifts roosting in a chimney,

see post.queensu.ca/~pearl/pics/Swiftpics/swiftsroosting.jpg.

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