



Monthly Meeting October 2, 2017
Bayland Community Center
6400 Bissonnet St, Houston, TX

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

7:30 pm [Program](#): Protecting Nesting Birds on the Beaches by Kristin Vale

Field Trips:

[Sabine Woods Sanctuary and Sea Rim led by John Haynes on Thursday, September 28, 8 am](#)

[Cullinan Park led by Mark Scheurman on Saturday, October 7, 8 am](#)

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Protecting Nesting Birds on the Beaches

By Kristin Vale

Populations of Gulf Coast birds have seen a steady decline since the days John James Audubon fell in love with the area's abundant birdlife. For our "Fab Four" of Gulf Coast birds, the Black Skimmer, Least Tern, Snowy Plover, and Wilson's Plover, nesting on the beach is a huge challenge. Coastal development, off-road vehicles, beachgoers, and pets—along with disasters like Hurricane Katrina and the BP/Deepwater Horizon oil spill—equal a perfect storm of threats that endanger their very existence.

But our Gulf Coastal Birds Program is making a difference, working with partners across the Gulf and combining media outreach with physical protection, monitoring of nest sites, and on-the-ground educational activities to bring back beach-nesting birds. In 2014, we discovered Snowy Plovers breeding on East Beach in Galveston, Texas. It had been five years since breeding for this species was documented on the highly populated upper coast of Texas.

Through our conservation activities, Snowy Plovers had an 80 percent hatching success rate and fledged one chick per pair, an atypically high reproductive output.

We have installed more than 50 interpretive signs in key sites across Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, and Texas, providing information on sensitive beach-nesting birds and how beachgoers can help them thrive. For example, our Black Skimmer sign helps visitors recognize the species and minimize threats to the breeding birds.

Kirstin Vale works for the American Birding Conservancy protecting beach nesting birds.

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Field Trips:

Sabine Woods Sanctuary and Sea Rim

Led by John Haynes, September 28, 8 am

Fall migration is underway, and dozens of migratory passerines are being seen across the Gulf Coast. The OG/ONC September field trip will head to the Texas Ornithological Society's Sabine Woods Sanctuary in Jefferson County on Thursday, Sept. 28. This will be led by John Haynes, local patch expert. It's about 2 hour's drive east from Houston.

The size of the group is limited. Contact Nina Rach, nrach@autrevie.com, if you are interested in reserving a spot. There will be a fee of \$10 that will include a group donation for continued upkeep by the Golden Triangle Audubon Society.

Meet at entrance at 8:00 am, State Hwy 87, Sabine Pass, TX 77655.

Cullinan Park Sugarland

Led by Mark Scheuerman, October 7, 8 am

Meet in the parking lot by the pond and tower at 8 am at Cullinan Park, S Highway 6, Sugar Land, TX 77498. Contact Teresa Connell at teresaconnell@live.com or 505-280-7443 for further information.

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Letter from the Chair

Welcome to the new 2017-2018 year of Ornithology Group (OG) activities! I'd like to thank everyone for their continued membership and participation in the OG. We want to provide useful information and enjoyable experiences for everyone, from fall and spring migrations, visiting seasonal birds, breeding and nesting, on public and private lands. There are great opportunities to watch new species at monthly/quarterly bird counts and Christmas bird counts throughout the region, and dedicated organizations (like ours) that we'll partner with to offer quality birding experiences. I believe it's also part of our mandate to help support birding habitat and research wherever we can. To this end, we are planning to contribute to habitat maintenance to keep properties open and accessible for field trips. This will entail a small trip fee for OG field trips. Let us all try to carpool on field trips! It will be more enjoyable and keep the group together. It's also less noisy and reduces our parking requirements.

Hurricane Harvey

Our local birding community has been very much affected by the onslaught of Hurricane Harvey in late August. Several members have suffered losses during the storm and subsequent flooding and I know it will be a long road to recovery of homes, vehicles, and businesses. Access to well-loved birding areas has been restricted, habitat degraded, and various parks closed. I touched on as much of this as I could at the OG meeting on September 11. I'm happy to report that the Bayland Community Center and surrounding park is in fine shape after the storm and will continue to serve as the OG meeting place.

The following state parks are closed due to damage: Brazos Bend SP, Goliad SP, Goose Island SP, Lake Somerville SP, Lake Whitney SP, Mustang Island SP, Palmetto SP, Stephen F. Austin SP, and Village Creek SP.

The main entrance to Buescher SP is closed; an alternate approach is described on their website.

Tyrrell Park Nature Center, Beaumont, flooded. It has been the meeting place for Golden Triangle Audubon Society, which had to cancel their Sept meeting.

The Gulf Coast Bird Observatory's Xtreme Hummingbird Xtravaganza, which had been scheduled for Sept 16 & 23, was cancelled, although GCBO reopened on Sept 11 (their new, raised office building weathered the storm!). GCBO will be hosting a 20th Anniversary fundraising event on Saturday, Oct 14, 4:00-8:00pm: Brew on the Bayou! Tickets are \$25 and include multiple beer tastings. Attire is "Nature Casual."

Safety During Hunting Season

I want to remind everyone that Saturday, Sept 23 (fourth Sat.) is National Hunting and Fishing Day, and we need to be mindful as we walk trails, even in state parks and other "protected areas." There are poachers, and even those who shoot illegally from cars. The muted colors of typical birding attire are not going to keep you safe, so please be wary. This weekend, Sept 23-24, is also the closing weekend of Texas' 16-day teal hunting season, so be wary around marshes. The general dove season opens Sept 22 for Texas' South Zone, which comprises all the area south of I-10 from the Louisiana border to San Antonio, and then south of US-90 to Del Rio.

Field trips

We recently put together two field trips and are planning more for the coming year, including week-day activities for those who can take advantage of them. We will continue to try to offer a variety of programs and field trip opportunities and we're always looking for new ideas and volunteers to help make them happen. Teresa Connell is organizing trips and has been looking into tried-and-true as well as new locations for us.

On Thursday, Sept 28, OG has a field trip to the TOS Sabine Woods Nature Sanctuary, to be led by John Haynes.

On Saturday, Oct 7, OG offers a field trip to Fort Bend County, to be led by Mark Scheuerman to Cullinan Park.

In January, we'll have another field trip to Brazoria NWR led by Ron Weeks and Jean Booth. Date TBA.

I'm very interested in putting together a long weekend OG trip based at historic Mo-Ranch, on the North Fork of the Guadalupe River, in the Hill Country near Hunt, Kerr County. Mo-Ranch has many trails and feeders, is adjacent to Kerr WMA, only 40 miles from Lost Maples State Natural Area, and about 50 miles from South Llano River State Park. More info here:

www.moranch.org/explore-mo-ranch/bird-watching/

Former OG members Paul & Deloris Sellin, who moved out to Ingram in Sept 2015, have done some terrific birding near Mo-Ranch, and contributed many valuable eBird reports from the area. Paul introduced me to birding at the fish hatchery (Heart of the Hills Fisheries Science Center), a Kerr County e-Bird hotspot. Teresa is looking at a full-day at Lost Maples, and perhaps we can add a day at South Llano. Stay tuned.

Birding Around the State

Please take advantage of the updated Texas Birding activities list for guided opportunities to bird all over Texas! If you hear of additional events or note any mistakes, please contact me and I will amend the list.

Advance notice! Coming up in January (14-17) is the Texas Ornithological Society (TOS) Winter Meeting, to be co-hosted by Piney Woods Audubon in Nacogdoches, TX. The TOS Spring meeting will be held May 3-6 in the Alpine area.

Best wishes to all for your fall birding,

Nina Rach
NRach@AutreVie.com

UPCOMING OG SPEAKERS:

- ▶ Oct 2 - Kristen Vale, American Bird Conservancy
- ▶ Nov 6 - Learning Corner: Jean Greenhalgh & Glenn Lindemann, "Birding in the NW USA;" Program by Stephan Lorenz.
- ▶ Dec 4 – Photos, or John Berner's 9/11 program
- ▶ Jan 8 - David Sarkozi, Texas Big Year

- ▶ Feb 5 - Fred Collins and Bob Honig, A retrospective focusing on "Good Birding Trips." This will be a guide for bird finding within striking distance of Houston put out by OG in the late 1960s, and how things have changed since then.
- ▶ Mar 5 – TBA
- ▶ Apr 2 – Steve Mayes

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Jabiru in Chambers County

By Janna Whittle (Reprinted with permission from the *Newsletter of the Golden Triangle Audubon Society*, September 2017; vol. 23, no. 9, p. 5)

What bird is 52 inches long, has a wingspan of 90 inches, and when in North America, it hangs out with Wood Storks, Ibis, and Roseate Spoonbills? And its normal range is Central and South America. That is right! A Jabiru.

It was so exciting to see a post on FB Texbirds that Jan and David Hanson had spotted a Jabiru while they were collecting wildflower seeds around 5:30 PM on August 1st of this year, near the intersection of FM1985 and Pear Orchard Road. That intersection is on the way if you travel on FM1985 to go to Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge. Many people drove down to the area that evening to try to relocate it, but no one else saw it. About 75 people appeared the next morning to try to relocate it. At 8:25 John and Debbie Park saw it very closely. Then the bird went down below a levee. The bird had flown about a mile down Pear Orchard Road when they saw it. So then the rest of the people searching for it, came down, but they could not find it either. A landowner came with some equipment and scared the Jabiru up. Around 11:00 AM, every person there saw it fly for a good while and then it flew out of sight. But seeing it then made many birders happy. Birders had been standing on the beds of their trucks and some were even standing on top of their cars to try to see over the levees and into the fields better. That afternoon there were several other sightings in that area also. I did not get to the site until 7:15 PM Wednesday night. There were about eight of us there and we saw it very well as it was eating in the field. Then it flew away from where we could see. On Thursday, more people came out. One lady said that she saw it at 7:00 AM, but no one was with her. One person that came a little later said that she and others could not relocate the bird until after 11:00 AM which meant that they searched the roads for at least 4 hours. They all got to see it and it flew away. No other people have seen the bird as far as I know. This was the first sighting of a Jabiru in Chambers County.

I have tried to research how many have been seen in the States. At this point, I believe that this recent sighting was the 17th. Most of them are in Texas, but there was one at Mississippi, one in Oklahoma in a catfish pond, and in Louisiana. So here are the records and dates that I have found: We are not sure that this is all of the sightings, but at this time, this is all that I could locate. I would like to thank Ron Weeks and Eric Carpenter for allowing me to use a list of the accepted TRBC records. Please, if you know of others, let us know.

An 1867 Jabiru specimen was found in Austin and given to the Museum of Science in Philadelphia, but it is now missing, so some people will not count this.

August 11-September 8, 1971 Escondido Lake, Kleberg County

September 1972 La Sal Vieja, Hidalgo County

July 26-27, 1973 Harris County

July 28-August 9, 1974, Bixby, Oklahoma

October 29, 1979 there were 2 Jabirus seen at Encino, Brooks County

September 6-18, 1981, Oso Bay, Corpus Christi, Nueces County

August 5-8, 1985, Near Bentsen State Park, Hidalgo County

August 11, 1997, Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, Cameron County

August 24-25, 2007, a catfish farm in Isola, Mississippi, in Sunflower County

July 31, 2008, Houma, Louisiana, which is about 100 miles from New Orleans

August 10-22, 2008, near Raymondville, Willacy County at hwy. 409 and 1/2 mile from FM 1425.

June 10, 2009. Nueces Delta Preserve, San Patricio County

September 20, 2009, San Benito, Cameron County

August 6, 2014, private ranch, Victoria County

August 20-25, 2016, near Placedo, Victoria/Calhoun County, 90 miles northeast of Corpus and 140 miles southwest of Houston.

August 1-3, 2017, near Anahuac Wildlife Refuge, Chambers County

In summary, six times the species only appeared for one day. two times it appeared for two days, two times it appeared for three days, and the rest of the sightings were anywhere from five to 28 days. So, we need to be diligent getting the word out when we hear about this species. There are still many birders who would like to see it in North America. I will leave you with one of the many things people have been known to say after seeing the bird.

"It looked like a small plane compared to other birds flying." I guess it did look big because of its long length and the wide wingspan. It is the second largest flying bird when it appears in North American yielding only to the Whooping Crane.

Again thank you to David and Jan Hanson for posting it on FB Texbirds. If they had not been so quick to post it, there would have been many people who would not have seen it. More than 100 people were able to see the Jabiru if you look at eBird, and then add in the people like me who do not use eBird.

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Piping Plover Sighting Help

By Gretchen E. Nareff

I'm a biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and we would like to get a message out to coastal birders. Biologists in the Carolinas and now Texas and Florida would like to know how Piping Plovers are responding to major hurricanes (Matthew, Harvey, and Irma). We want to ask birders and photographers to pay particular attention to any bands they see so that we can attempt to determine if the PIPL are dying (or at least disappearing) in the storms or if they're moving elsewhere for a period of time. They have such strong site fidelity so if we aren't observing banded birds on known territories, or if those birds are showing up at other beaches, this will help us understand their response.

Bands should be reported to www.reportband.gov, but in this case, they can also be reported directly to me.

Gretchen E. Nareff

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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