



Monthly Meeting January 6, 2020

Bayland Community Center

6400 Bissonnet St, Houston, TX

6:30 pm Christmas Bird Count Prize Drawing

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

7:15 pm [Program](#): Sparrow Identification by Cin-Ty Lee

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[ONC/OG Dues are Due Now! Bring them to the meeting or mail \(Link to web page\)](#)

Sparrow Identification

By Cin-Ty Lee



We are very happy to have Cin-Ty Lee explaining Sparrow identification for our January 2020 program!

He has previously helped to improve our abilities to distinguish dowitchers (Nov 2014), gulls and terns of Texas (Feb 2016), and introduced his new guide to Empidonax flycatchers (April 2017).

Cin-Ty is an experienced birder who leads regular birding walks on the Rice University campus, where he serves as Professor and Chair in the Dept of Earth, Environmental and Planetary Sciences. And he is a talented artist!

<https://twitter.com/CinTyLee1>

<http://www.cintylee.org>

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Letter from the Chair

Welcome to another year of birding adventures!

There were many interesting birds in our general area in December, notably several Fork-tailed Flycatchers (Aransas NWR CBC on Dec 20-22, and at Eagle Lake Municipal Park Dec 11-14, Colorado County), Green-tailed Towhee (Cullinan Park, Sugar Land), and lovely Sparrows: Henslow's Sparrow at Brazos Bend SP,

And a bit farther down the coast, Groove-billed Ani at the Tejano Wetlands in Jackson County.

On December 21, Justin Bosler posted to the ABA Rare Bird alert:

“Although not chase-able, TEXAS' 3rd-ever KING EIDER, an immature male, was harvested by a duck hunter this past week in a wetland/ flooded rice field near Eagle Lake in Colorado County. That county has now had a FORK-TAILED FLYCATCHER and KING EIDER within the same week in December and is one of the least birded counties between Houston and Austin.”

Be sure to check out the list of upcoming birding events, especially our field trips and the Texas Ornithological Society (TOS) Winter Meeting, in nearby Bryan-College Station (January 16-19).

Best wishes for good birding,

Nina Rach

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Minutes of December 2019 OG Meeting

By Jean Greenhalgh

The December meeting of OG was held on December 2nd 2019 at the Bayland Park Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet at 6:30 pm. 25 people attended.

The meeting started with social time, with snacks provided by several members.

Membership fees of \$20 are due now.

The main program was entitled So You Want to do a Big Day – Bird ID Skills, Logistics and Stamina. This was presented by Tony Frank who is Chairman of the Texas Bird Records Committee and has, with his team, won the Texas Great Birding Classic (TGBC) Big Day on more than one occasion. From 2009 to 2019 the team has seen between 198 and 214 birds on the upper Texas coast (UTC) in 24 hours. The TGBC can be any day from April 15th to May 15th.

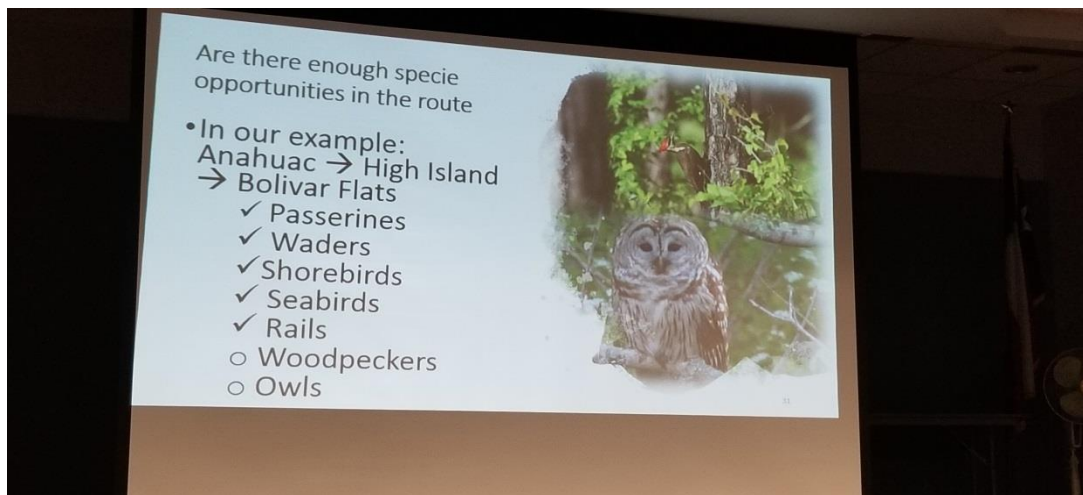
Rules for Big Day

A Big Day lasts 24 hours. Most people do this from midnight to midnight but can be any 24 consecutive hours.

The American Birding Association rules differ from the Texas Birding Classic rules. For Texas there have to be 3 to 5 participants. There is no spotlighting to search for birds, there are no playbacks to call birds in. In order to count, 95% of the birds have to be seen or heard by all members and the remaining 5% must be heard or seen by 2 people.

Deciding where to go

The greatest species diversity has to be seen which entails going to as many diverse locations as possible. This could include Uvalde Park Chalk Bluff; Bolivar Peninsular; Corpus Christi for Blucher Park and Rose Hill Cemetery; High Island; Sabine Woods; Anahuac; Boykin Springs.



Routing/Planning

Choose locations by looking at eBird hotspots and recent eBird reports and plan the route using Google Maps (which shows real-time traffic conditions and road construction). Also decide how long to spend at each location. Bolivar tide-tables are needed to determine best shore-birding time.

After choosing diverse locations to find diverse species a route has to be planned to ensure the most efficient use of time. This can include factors such as traffic conditions (not going through Houston during rush hour) and possible road construction delays.

Decide where to start for hearing owls, nightjars. Before leaving the vehicle play the expected vocalizations so that everyone can identify what is being heard. Always park to leave easily by facing the exit direction and not getting blocked in.

Scouting is essential in order to determine where the birds are. This can include finding which rice fields will hold the shorebirds and finding nesting locations.

Have a list of birds which are expected at each location to ensure species are not missed, for example swallows, terns or sparrows.

Creating a spreadsheet

Creating a spreadsheet containing all the planning information is a very useful way for all participants to know what is expected to happen. Adhering to the schedule can ensure the most efficient day.

More Realistic Spreadsheet

2	Location	Drive (Mile s)	Drive Time	Arrive Time	Bird Time	Depart Time
3	Shovelor loop					
4	Skillem	14	0:30	1:00 PM	0:30	1:30 PM
5	1985 flooded fields	3	0:06	2:00 PM	0:15	2:15 PM
6	Boy Scout Woods	10	0:10	2:21 PM	0:15	2:36 PM
7	Smith Oaks	2	0:07	2:46 PM	0:50	3:36 PM
8	HI Beach	3	0:12	3:43 PM	1:00	4:43 PM
9	Rollover pass	9	0:16	4:55 PM	0:15	5:10 PM
10	Yacht Basin Rd	1	0:03	5:26 PM	0:20	5:46 PM
11	N. Tuna Rd	6	0:10	5:49 PM	0:10	5:59 PM
12	Bob's Rd	5	0:13	6:09 PM	0:05	6:14 PM
13	Rettilon Rd/Bolivar Fla	10	0:17	6:27 PM	0:07	6:34 PM
14						
15	Total	63	2:04		4:32	
16		sunrise: 6:35 am				
17		sunset: 7:54 pm				
18						

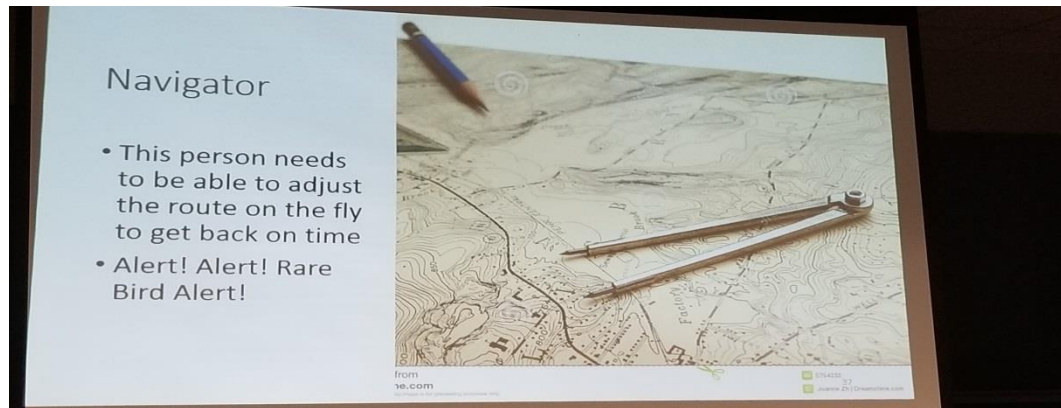
How many people on team

Tony prefers three people and feels each team needs a driver, a navigator and a time-keeper.

Why a TIMEKEEPER?

1	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
2	Big Day Planner	start time	3:00 AM	Route 1 - Uvalde am				
3	Location	Time all Ar.	Time Dep. time			Travel Di	Speed	minutes
4	Frio Bat Cave	0:40	3:00 AM	3:40 AM EASO, GHOW, ELOW, CWWI, COPO		18	45	24
5	CR 410	0:40	4:04 AM	4:44 AM Barn Owl, Elf Owl, Pauraque, LONI, GHOW		4	30	8
6	Uvalde	0:05	4:52 AM	4:57 AM LONI, CONI,		25	0	
7			4:57 AM	4:57 AM		25	0	
8								
9	Nueces bridge FM 481	0:30	5:10 AM	5:40 AM ELOW, GHOW, COPO, LONI; if dawn TRKI, Turkey,		10	45	13.333
10			5:40 AM	5:40 AM COKI, OLSP, BCFI, GRJA		50	0	
11			5:40 AM	5:40 AM		20	0	
12	SCQU spot	0:10	6:33 AM	6:43 AM SCQU, NOBO, ATFL, CACW, CATO, sparrows, PYRR, COPC		40	45	13.333
13	Mi. 11.6 oaks	0:10	6:57 AM	7:07 AM GCWA, YTIWA, PISI, HUVI, BEVI, YTVI, VERD		10	45	13.333
14			7:07 AM	7:07 AM		45	0	
15	Live Oak Rd - mi 7.0	0:05	7:13 AM	7:18 AM GRSP, Turkey, CASP, LBTH, CBTH, PYRR,		4.5	45	6
16	GRVI spot - mi 3.8	0:10	7:24 AM	7:34 AM GRVI, SCJA, RCSP, CATO, LBTH, SCOR		3.2	30	6.4
17	GRVI east - mi 2.5		7:34 AM	7:34 AM		20	0	
18	Chalk Bluff	0:50	7:46 AM	8:36 AM WTDO, ROWR, CANW, RIKI, GRKI, lots		8.8	45	11.733
19	TX-55 BTGN spot	0:05	8:47 AM	8:52 AM BTGN, HOLA, AMPI, YHBL,		9.7	50	11.64
20	Uvalde - 4th & Cenizo	0:03	9:04 AM	9:07 AM GKIS, AUOR, GRJA		7	35	12
21	Uvalde Fish Hatchery	0:15	9:21 AM	9:36 AM Ducks, Shorebirds, VERD,		5.7	25	13.68
22	Uvalde Dump	0:03	9:39 AM	9:42 AM CHRA, CRCA, ROWR		2	35	3.4286
23	CR 481 bridge		9:42 AM	9:42 AM TRKI, GRJA		55	0	
24			9:42 AM	9:42 AM		15	0	

If more time than is planned is spent at one site all participants will be involved in determining if a site will not be visited and the navigator will need to plan the new route.



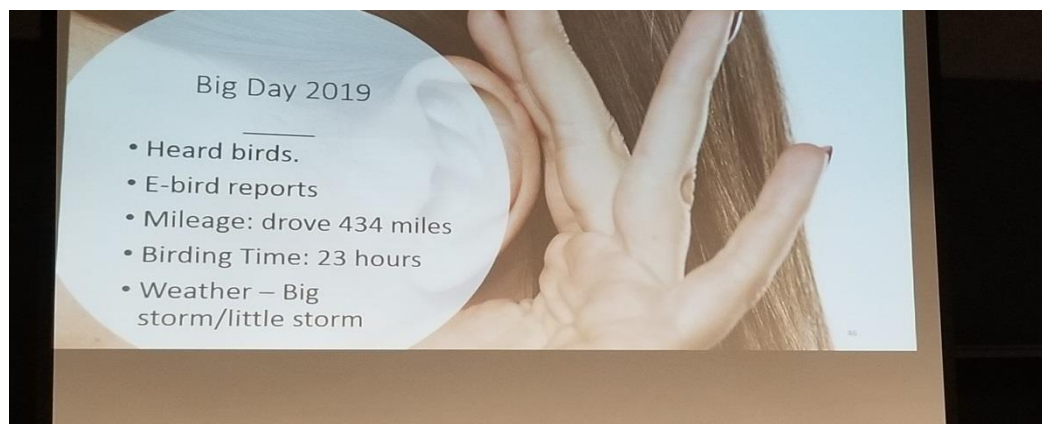
Team make-up

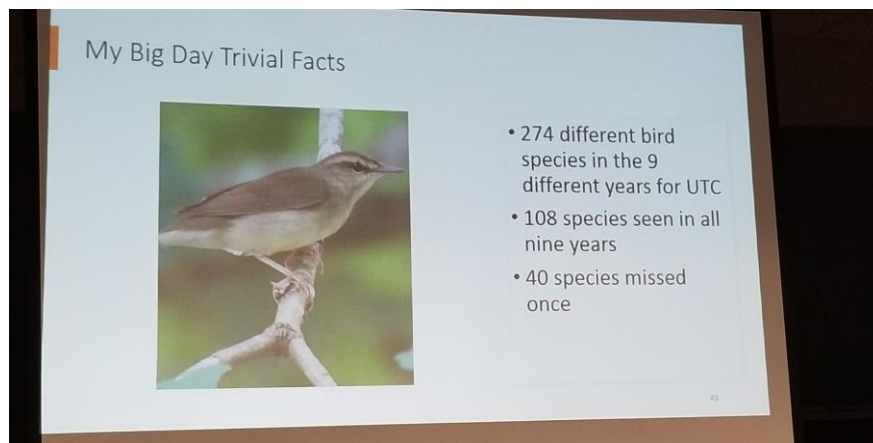
Having experienced, reasonably compatible participants is good. Birding by ear skills are especially useful.

Logistics

Each participant is responsible for their own food and drinks. Each participant should have a scope which needs to have its tripod legs extended for efficiency. To facilitate this, there is only room for one cooler.

Big Day 2019





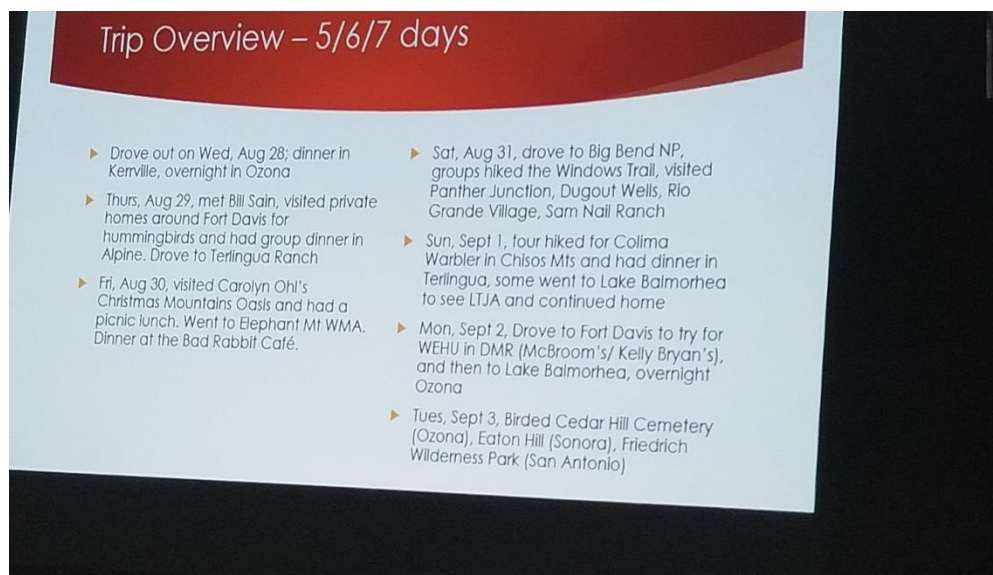
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Minutes of October 2019 OG Meeting

by Jean Greenhalgh

The October meeting of OG was held on October 7th 2019 at the Bayland Park Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet at 6:30 pm. 25 people attended.

Learning Corner was a presentation about the OG trip to the Trans Pecos region on Labor Day weekend. 9 counties were birded. The Trans Pecos region encompasses 11% of Texas and is the Chihuahuan desert west of the Pecos River.

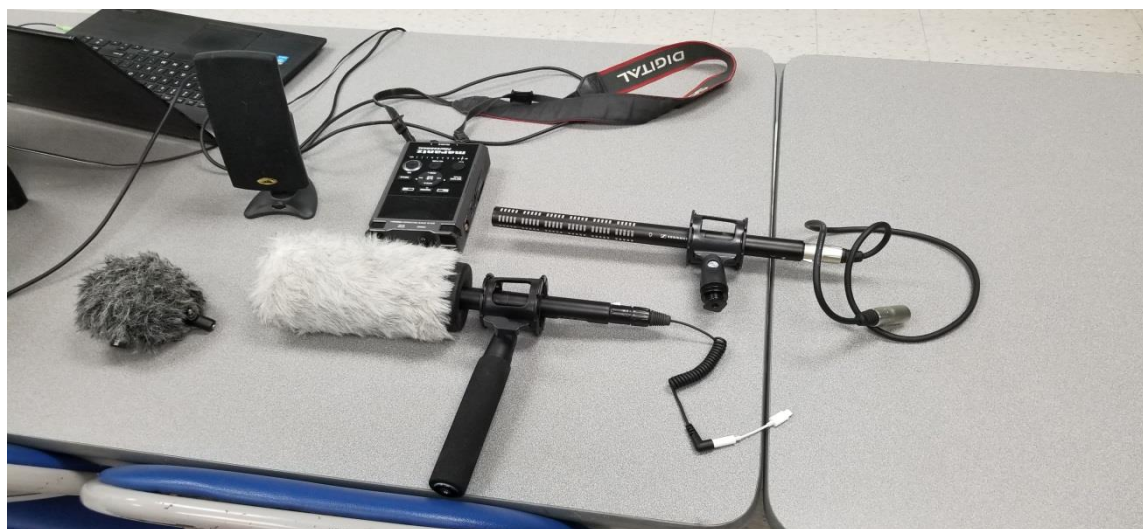


The main program, Recording Birds, was presented by David Sarkozi.

Why record bird vocalization? It can improve birding skills. More detail can heard in calls when listening to your recordings. Many bird vocalizations have not yet been studied. Many local variations have not yet been recorded. It documents voice only identification of species and sub-species.

There are three levels of equipment

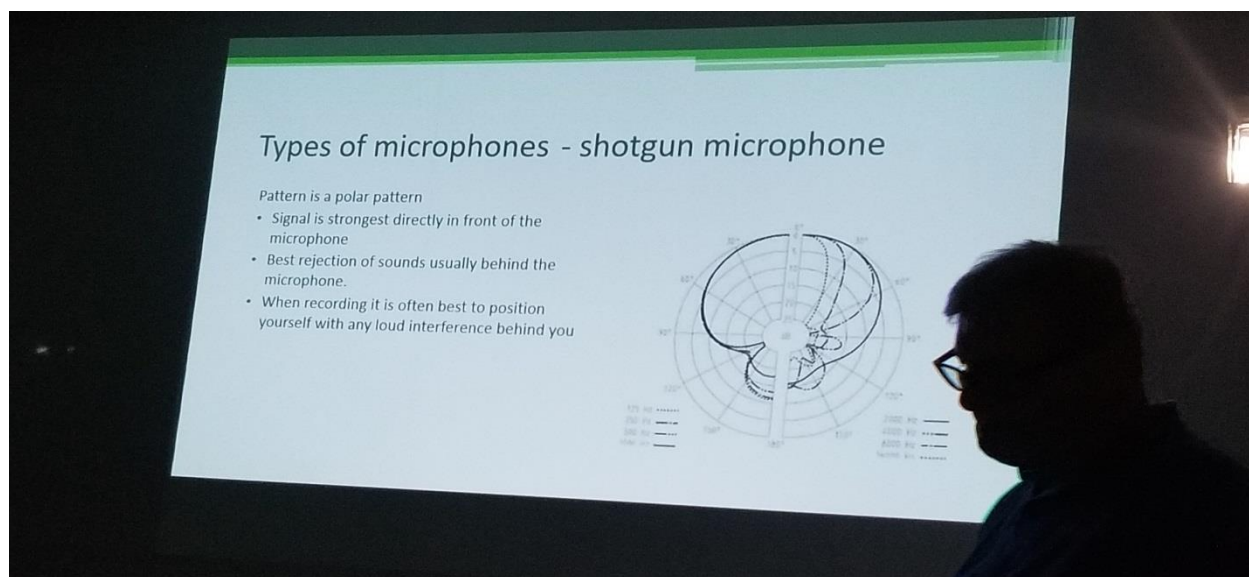
1. Use a smart phone
2. Smart phone and external microphone costs \$40 - \$150.
3. Dedicated recorder and microphone cost \$150 - \$750



The equipment David uses is shown in the photo above.

There are various types of microphone.

Shotgun microphones. These are very directional and have a relatively even frequency response. They are best used with a shock mount. Cost is \$50 - \$300.



Parabolic reflector collects sound and focuses it to one point.

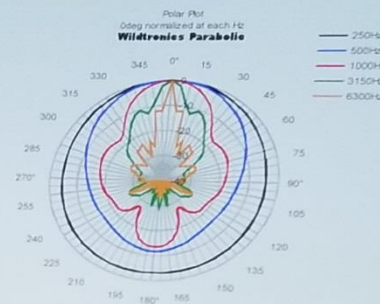
Types of microphones – Parabolic Reflector

- Significant amplification of the target sound
- Ideal for recording a single vocalizing bird
- Allows recording more distant birds



Types of microphones – Parabolic Reflector

- Amplifies high frequencies more than low frequencies.
- Must be at least one wavelength wide to amplify
- To amplify the sound of a Morning Dove (200 Hz) the dish would need to be at least 6 feet in diameter



Smart phone use.

The voice memo app. Is not an effective tool for recording birds. Apps which allow adjusting the microphone gain work well. Two free apps which work well are RODE Rec LE and Voice Record Pro.

To add a microphone to a smart phone there are a few options

A clip-on microphone – costs 450 – 475

A mini shotgun microphone with a cable - costs %25 - \$100

A professional grade shotgun microphone and cable – costs 4100 - \$500. David uses a RODE (\$200)

All of these need a fur wind screen, either small or large – called a dead kitten and a dead cat.

Basics of recording

Record in WAV(PCM) files (PCM is Pulse Code Modification)

Lossless recording – 16bit and 44 kHz sampling.

Don't make a noise yourself. You have to be by yourself and stand still

Get as close as you can – half the distance equals four times the sound intensity.

It is often helpful to have the wind to your back and shield the microphone with your body.

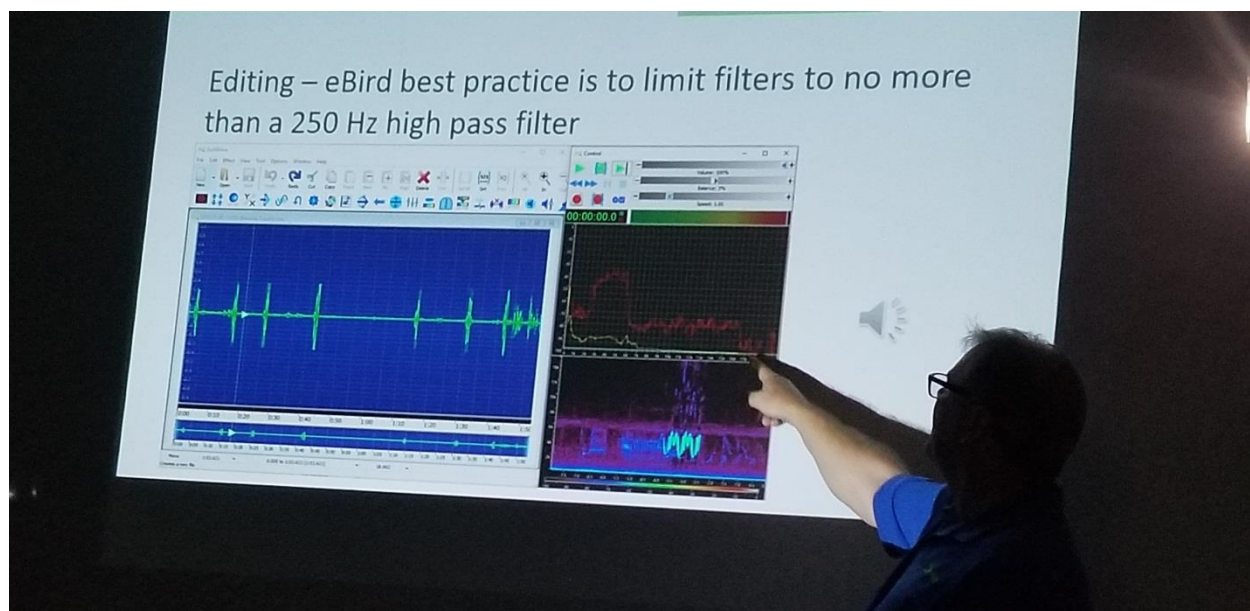
Try for three repeats of the call or at least 30 seconds.

Editing apps – Audacity; Goldware; Beautiful audio editor

Turn off interfering noise if you can have at least 30 seconds of recording.

eBird does not clip out undesirable noises. Wind noise and traffic noise filters out at a high 250 Hz pass.

Normalize the volume to -3 dB.



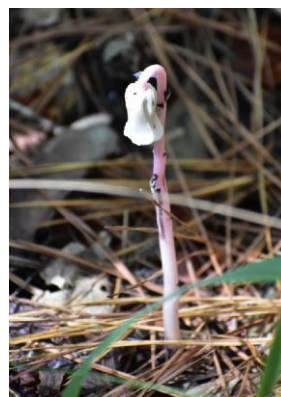


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Little Thicket Indian Pipe Samples Included in Ohio State University Research

By Nina Rach

During the Oct 26 Open Day at the ONC's Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary in San Jacinto County, Chris Steinke, Bobby Hatfield and I found and photographed common white and less-common pink forms of beautifully translucent Indian Pipe and submitted photos to iNaturalist (<https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/35026288>)



I was contacted by **Ashley Keesling**, Department of Evolution, Ecology, and Organismal Biology at The Ohio State University (<https://eeob.osu.edu/people/keesling.3>), asking if we could provide samples for her research.

Four LTNS volunteers, Wanda and Sergio Henao, Charles D. Peterson and Paul Roling, collected and mailed several plants to Ashley in early December (thanks, folks!) Charles noted that the Indian Pipes at LTNS have a nice almond-like aroma.

Ashley Keesling explains her research:

*I am a graduate student at The Ohio State University studying genetics and host specificity in Indian pipes (*Monotropa uniflora*). These plants are leafless and do not photosynthesize. They obtain nutrients by parasitizing fungi underground. They are often mistaken for mushrooms due to their ghostly white appearance, but they are actually plants in the blueberry family, *Ericaceae*.*

*I am investigating a species that was proposed in 1927; *Monotropa brittonii*. Also known as the southern Indian pipe, *M. brittonii* was thought to occur mainly in Florida and to be larger, hairier, and more scented than most Indian pipes. Today, it is usually not recognized as a species because researchers working on this group did not think the Southern Indian Pipe was different enough to merit status as a species.*

I am investigating these plants through analysis of morphological, genetic, and ecological features. I am collecting Indian pipes from across their distribution in the US to analyze differences in morphology, genetics, and fungal hosts. Are there unique features to Florida populations that were previously unknown? Are there differences in which species of fungi these plants parasitize? Are there differences in habitat preferences? That is what I plan to find out.

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Winter Grassland Bird Captures in Marfa

by Nina Rach

The first of this season's grassland bird captures at the Dixon Water Foundation property in Marfa took place Dec 17-22.

But there are two remaining opportunities to help: **January 24-29** and **March 6-11, 2020!**

The research team at Borderlands Research Institute at Sul Ross State University writes:

“Remember that this experience allows you to be close to your grassland birds and watch trained people counting, catching, and banding these birds. Chances of seeing a Baird's Sparrow have never been so high!

As a volunteer, you will help us herd the birds towards our mistnets, and sometimes carry poles and mistnets. You should be prepared to hike quite a bit through the Marfa Grasslands. Our captures take place at the Mimms Ranch owned by the Dixon Water Foundation. This means that you will get access to this private property that holds one of the most beautiful grasslands in the Chihuahuan Desert.



Each day, we will gather at the Mimms Ranch headquarters at 7:30 am. We start with a short presentation on the project and explain what we are going to do that day. Then we will get into BRI trucks and drive to our study site to start our field day. Remember to carry lots of water and pack a lunch. We typically capture from 8 am to 1 or 2 pm, with a lunch break in the field. The schedule may change depending on the weather.

Thank you for your interest in our project! We really appreciate the help of our volunteers, without you this project would not be possible.”

Please contact Alejandro (Alex) Chavez at alexchavezt@gmail.com or Julie Rumbelow at Julie.rumbelow@sulross.edu

Mimms Ranch is an eBird hotspot: <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L3060785>

During the Dec session, 35 species were reported to eBird, including Scaled Quail, Lark Bunting, Chihuahuan Raven, Sprague’s Pipit, Chestnut-collared Longspur, Short-eared Owl, Prairie Falcon,, Ferruginous Hawk, Burrowing Owl, and sparrows: Cassin’s, Baird’s, Savannah, Grasshopper, Vesper. Lots of great birding potential!

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Ornithology Group Officers

Chair: Nina Rach | 281-433-0651 | Nina.Rach@yahoo.com

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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

Swifts: Pam Smolen | pjsmolen@att.net

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

Field Trips: Volunteer needed

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Ornithology Group Outdoor Nature Club Representative: Tira Overstreet
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OG website: <http://www.ornithologygroup.org/>

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

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