



Monthly Meeting February 3, 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](#): Birding in Oregon by Glen R. Lindeman

Field Trips: [Brazos Bend State Park](#), Saturday February 1, 8 am, led by Mark Scheuerman and [Warren Ranch](#), Sunday, February 2, 11:30 am, led by John Berner

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[Upcoming Texas Birding Events \(link to web page\)](#)

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

Birding in Oregon

By Glen R. Lindeman

Glen is based in Oregon, has birded extensively throughout the state, and led field trips there. He last spoke for OG in March 2018 ("A Taste of Australia"), and has been traveling and birding extensively since then.

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Brazos Bend State Park Field Trip, Saturday, February 1, 8:00 am

Led by Mark Scheuerman

Join long-time Texas birder Mark Scheuerman for winter birding at Brazos Bend State Park in Fort Bend County. Weather permitting, we will meet in the 40 Acre Lake parking lot at 8:00 am, and walk around the lake until ~ 11am. We'll then probably head to Elm Lake for more birds and a picnic lunch.

The headquarters office opens at 8:00 and there is an entry fee of \$7.00 unless you have a Texas State Parks Pass (please buy one and support our park system!)

RSVP to Nina.Rach@yahoo.com AND to Mark.Scheuerman@gmail.com so that we know how many to expect.

Warren Ranch Field Trip (Katy Prairie Conservancy), Sunday, February 2 (limited opportunity for 13-14 people), 11:30 am

Led by John Berner

This trip will access areas of Warren Ranch normally closed to the public, in order to track some unusual birds seen during the recent CBC. All in Harris County. **This trip is currently full; but you can add your name to the waiting list.**

Four main targets: 1) resident Ladder-backed Woodpecker 2) Lark Bunting 3) Bewick's Wren 4) Ash-throated Flycatcher. We won't cover every part of Warren Ranch, but we should get other species near the targets.

Secondary, less-likely targets: Harris's Sparrow, Sprague's Pipit, Inca Dove, Common Ground-dove

Due to hunting in the morning, this will be a mid-day field trip and we will meet at 11:30am at the Warren Ranch parking lot on Sunday, February 2. You can arrive earlier and bird Warren Ranch Lake from the tower.

Please bring \$10 donation to Katy Prairie Conservancy (check or cash in envelope please). Everyone will need to sign a waiver.

We will need to watch out for lingering quail hunters with dogs (but they likely will have left.)

We can take a maximum of four cars that can tolerate some mud (nothing too crazy), 4 people per car.

Wear boots! Expect shallow water, up to 1-2 inches, probably less.

Advance registration required, first-come, first-served.

RSVP to Nina.Rach@yahoo.com AND to jcazberner@yahoo.com

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Letter from the Chair

Welcome to another year of birding adventures!

There were many interesting birds recently near Houston, notably a Mountain Plover, Lapland Longspurs, and Rusty Blackbirds in Burleson County, Say's Phoebe in Brazos County, and Virginia Rail in Grimes County – all seen on field trips during the Texas Ornithological Society's winter meeting based in Bryan, January 16-19.

Farther afield, a Mew Gull was seen for a few days mid-January in Port Aransas at the Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Ctr. (CTC 057).

High Island sanctuaries - Big changes are underway at Houston Audubon properties in High Island, and they were explained by Coastal Sanctuaries Manager Peter Deichmann at an HAS meeting on January 9. The High Island Master Plan encompasses new buildings (including restrooms!), habitat restoration and invasive species (Chinese Privet and Chinese Tallow) removal, a rookery resiliency and enhancement project at Smith Oaks, bolstered nature tourism thanks to a \$2.3mn grant from the McGovern Foundation, and promotion of the Bolivar Peninsula Nature Trail.

In 2017, HAS developed a local management model that blends staff and volunteers to manage 2500+ coastal acres. The new base of operations is the Hulsey Coastal Operations Center (2019) on Old Mexico Road in High Island, to be augmented by a new field station planned for Fifth Street.

Climate Watch - Audubon's Climate Watch is a new community science program explores how North American birds are responding to climate change. The current survey period is **January 15 - February 15 and the next will be May 15-June 15**. The surveys are open to the public, including all interested Audubon chapters and centers, and organized groups and individuals with an interest in birds. Perhaps OG can help!

The twelve target species are Bluebirds (Eastern, Mountain, Western); Nuthatches (White-breasted, Red-breasted, Brown-headed, Pygmy); Towhees (Eastern, Spotted); Goldfinches (American, Lesser); and Painted Bunting, surveyed in 10 km x 10 km squares. Eight of these 12 species can be found within the greater Houston area, so we are in a good position to help acquire data. Audubon protocol includes 12 five-minute point counts per square, which means each square can be surveyed in just a few hours.

Grassland sparrow surveys - Reminder that the team at Sul Ross and the Borderlands Research Institute in Alpine are looking for volunteers for winter grassland bird captures. The first two sessions were held Dec 17-22 and Jan 24-29. There is one more opportunity to help: March 6-11. Details can be found in the January 2020 Spoonbill.

Be sure to check out the list of upcoming birding events, especially our winter-spring field trips and local birding festivals.

Best wishes for good birding,

Nina Rach

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Minutes of January 2020 OG Meeting

By Jean Greenhalgh

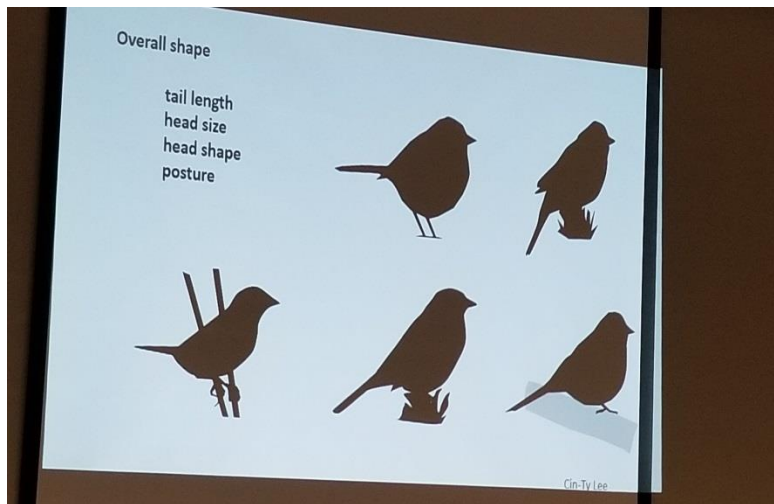
The January meeting of OG was held on January, 2020 at the Bayland Park Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet at 6:30 pm. 33 people attended.

The next meeting will be February 3 at Bayland Park Community Center and Glen Lindeman will talk on Birding Oregon – Why, When, Where and What.

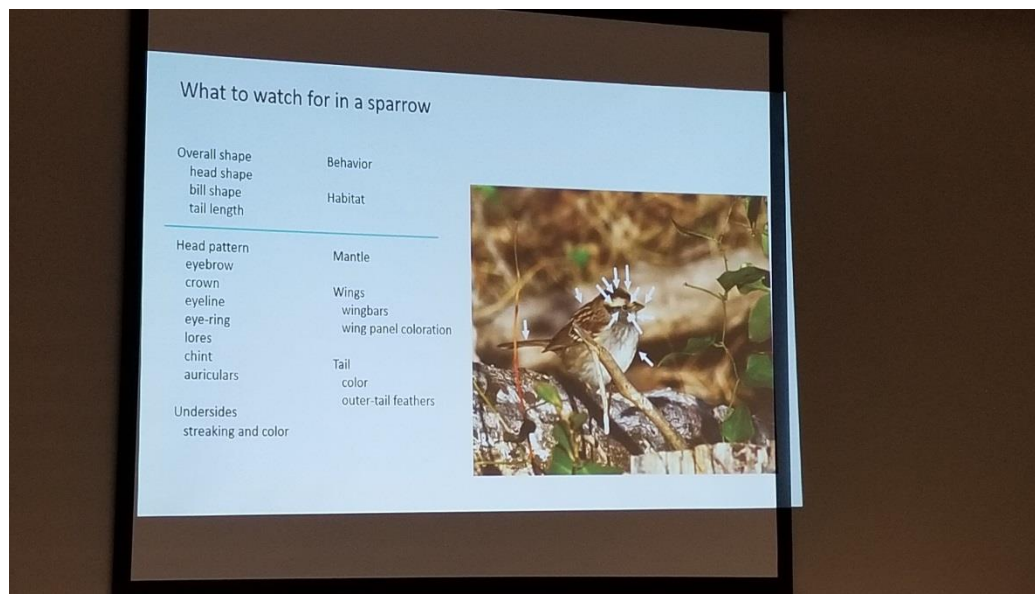
Membership fees of \$20 are due now.

The main program was an Introduction to Sparrow Identification, with a Gulf Coast slant, presented by Cin Ty Lee. Cin Ty is a Professor of Geology at Rice University and also teaches undergraduate Ornithology.

The first thing to look for when identifying sparrows is shape, including tail length, head size and shape, and posture.

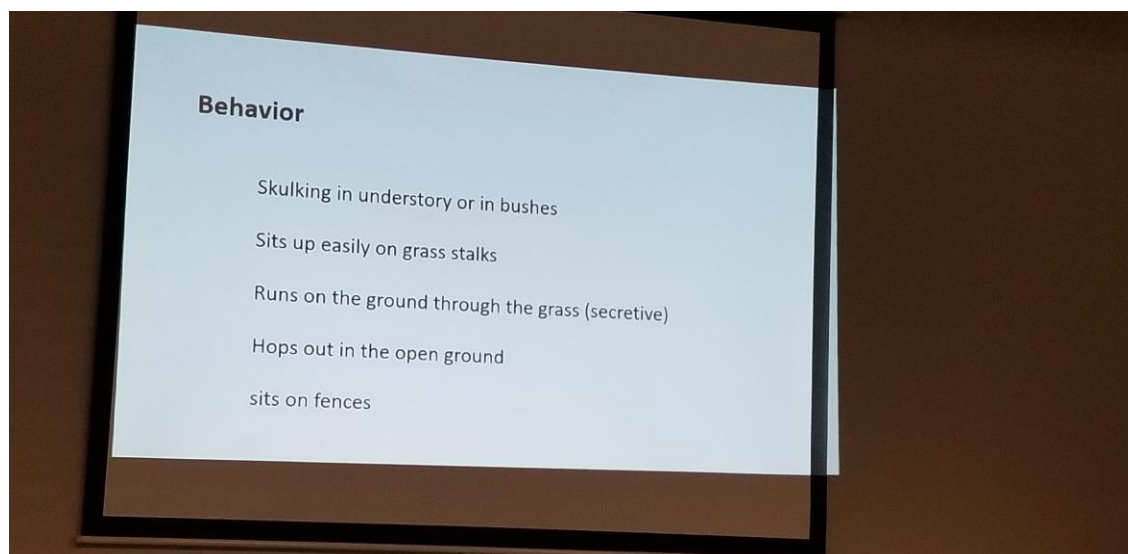


This is followed by looking for plumage details



Next is habitat, though sparrows can be found outside of their usual habitat. This includes near water, tall grass, short grass, thickets, mixed grassland and trees.

Behavior can be another identifier, though not always reliable.



Identification of plumage details of specific areas of the bird is very helpful, though not easy on swiftly moving birds.

Mantle pattern and colors

scaly



streaked



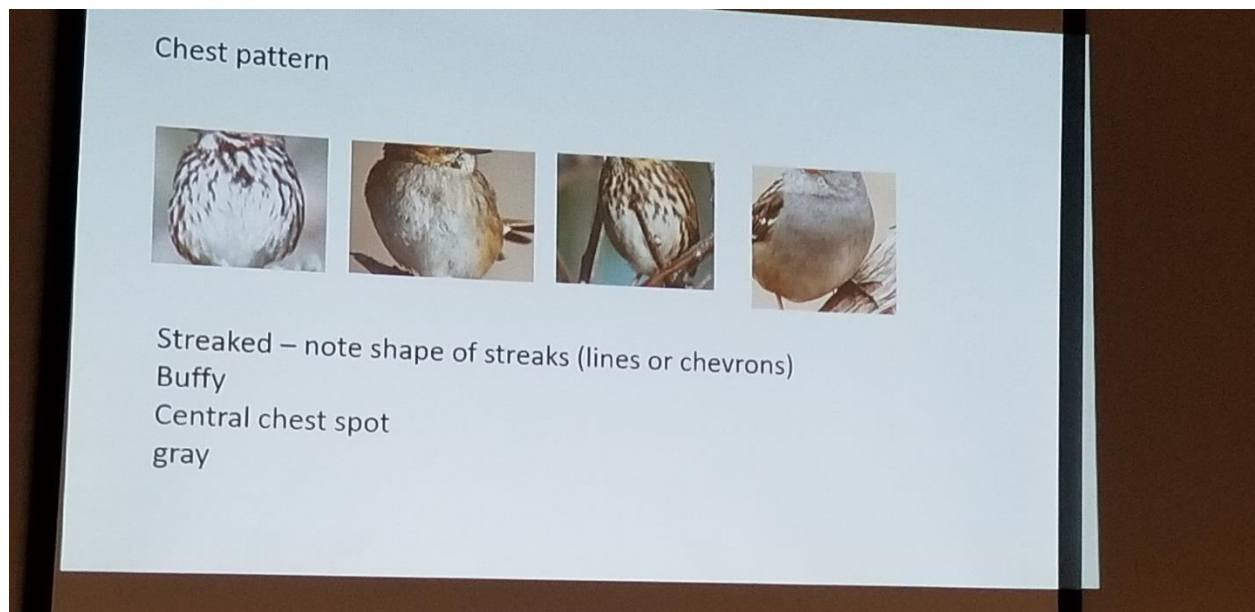
More uniform



Does it have an eye ring.

Does the bird have an eyeline?
A supercilium?
What about its lores?





Taxonomic types of sparrows

Ammodramus sparrows – Grasshopper, LeConte's, Nelson's, Henslow's

These have the following common characteristics

Small sparrow with flat crown and shortish tail.

Grassy habitats (or spartina for Nelson's), skulkers.

Typically run along the ground. When flushed typically fly very low and straight before ducking back into bushes or grass.

Zonotrichia sparrows – White-throated, White-crowned, Harris's

Big sparrows with plain breast, peaked or crested head and long tail.

Habitat is bushes, understory and trees.

Passerculus sparrows – Savannah

Often found in flocks in grassland. Can perch on grass stalks or be on roadsides.

Streaked breast and yellow supercilium .

Pooecetes sparrows – Vesper.

Similar habitat and flocking to Savannah, but less likely to perch on grass. Has white eyering and white outer tail feathers visible in flight.

Melospiza – Song, Lincoln's, Fox, Swamp, Lark

Each of these has different characteristics.

Song is streaky, often with central breast spot. It has a cocked-up tail and is often in treed or brushy areas, sometimes sitting in the open and singing. Tends to be a solitary, territorial, bird.

Swamp sparrow is found in wetter areas, sometimes in reeds

Fox sparrow is big and has bold breast markings

Lark sparrow is a big sparrow and is not streaked. It has bold face markings, white outer tail feathers and a long tail. It sometimes flocks and likes open grass or dirt areas.

Lincoln's is small, with a peaked head and a cocked-up tail (almost a wren-like silhouette). It is a skulker and likes brushy areas.

Spizella – Chipping' Field, Clay-colored

Not as small as ammodramus. They have a slim body and slim, slightly forked tail.

Each has different plumage characteristics.

Unstreaked chests

Small to medium sized with long narrow tail

Open forest and edge habitats

Chipping has a gray collar

Field has no facial markings, which gives it a blank-faced look. Has a pink bill. When flying it has a longer tail and shorter wings.

Clay-colored looks like an immature chipping sparrow. It has a gray collar, a complete auricular border and a white eyebrow which continues round the auricular.



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Harris County Birders Select Best Local Birds

By John Berner

A lively group of fifty-one local birders met at Houston Audubon's Edith L Moore Nature Sanctuary on Saturday, January 11, and voted (using a Gold-Silver-bronze method for 1st, 2nd, 3rd) to select what we felt were the best recent local birds.

The following "ducky" trophies were presented (shoutout to David Heinicke for his previous original design idea for the trophies we made for this event)

2017 Harris County Best Bird: Sabine's Gull--Elisabeth & Elisha Hehir (a.k.a. the Gemini Twins)

2018 Harris County Best Bird: Flammulated Owl--Sue Orwig

2019 Harris County Best Bird: Red Phalarope--Nicholas Demaio

2019 Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary Best Bird: Tropical Parula--Dominic Le Croisette

2019 Best Harris County Big Year: Stuart Nelson

Thanks to all who attended and brought food and drink!

Special Thanks to Houston Audubon's Mary Anne Weber for sharing the stunning rehab Barn owl and Great Horned Owl.

Special Thanks also to Houston Audubon and Tim White and Lauren Miheli who were present and hosted us at the cabin.

Lastly, special thanks to our organizing committee co-members Drew Dickert and Letha Slagle, plus expert vote counters Steve Gast and Tim White for a successful event.

We are contemplating a second annual event to be held around the same time in January, 2021 to pick 2020 birds. Please go out and find some rare Harris County birds in 2020 and join us then to celebrate them!



The six Ducky Award Winners! The Gals: Elisabeth & Elisha Hehir, Sue Orwig; The Guys: Nick DeMaio, Dom Le Croisette, Stuart Nelson.

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Bird Alarm Texas

By David Sarkozi

Just in time for RGV Birding Festival! Announcing the roll out of Bird Alarm Texas. Bird Alarm is a rare bird alert mobile phone app widely used in Scandinavia and now available in Texas! Bird Alarm will give you alerts and let you share alerts for Birds on the Texas Bird Records Committee Review List birds.

In the roll-out period you can use Bird Alarm FREE FOR 90 DAYS from November 1, 2019 to May 1, 2020.

Getting Started with Bird Alarm

With Bird Alarm, share your observations in a few clicks and get access to precise and reliable information on rare species spotted around you, and all over the world.

Read more about Bird Alarm at <http://www.birdalarm.com>

To create an account, go to www.birdalarm.com and click on 'Register'. Fill in the registration form. Your email will be your username. You will also need to indicate a country. Choose United States and then choose **Texas Birding** as your club.

You will receive a confirmation email from Bird Alarm. Click on the link in the email to activate your account.

Go back to www.birdalarm.com and sign in.

Then go to 'Shop' and select the free trial. You can now use Bird Alarm for 90 days!

Mobile Phone App

Download the mobile app on the App Store if you have an iPhone or on the Play Store for Android.

To use the app, you need to have an active account and a valid subscription.

Once you have signed in, you will be able to see the alerts sent today. Click on an alert to see detailed information (position of the bird, circumstances of the observation, picture, sound, comments and eventual contact details of the person who sent the alert).

To send an alert, click on the 'Submit' button in the bottom menu. Fill in the fields and click on the 'Submit' button again. Note that for the alert to be sent out, you need to be connected to internet. If you are offline, you can save the alert in your drafts and send it later.

Use the website

You can go on the website if you need to manage your account (for instance if you wish to change email address and/or password) or renew your subscription.

To retrieve certain alerts (by dates, by places, by species, etc.), go to the 'Sightings' menu and apply the different filters you're interested in. You can also do a quick search by applying a profile you have created (see below on how to create a profile).

You can also get a list of the sightings you have sent as well as statistics on all sightings.

If you wish to limit the number of incoming alerts, you can do so by creating a profile. Go to the Profile menu, click on 'Create new', choose a name for your profile and start creating rules. You will be asked which species (or rarities) and which countries and/or regions you wish to include in your profile. Select the option 'follow-up notifications' if you wish to receive updates about a certain observation.

You can also import one of your club's profiles if you do not want to create your own. In the box "Club profiles," choose the profile you want to use, click on "Copy Profile," name the copy and save.

If you do not wish to use any profile, you will receive by default all the incoming alerts.

In case of issues regarding your registration, subscription, or any other technical problem, please contact us at support@birdalarm.com.

If you have any questions regarding local species and alerts, please contact your club admin David Sarkozi at david@sarkozi.net.

Any other general question about Bird alarm can be directed to our project manager Chloé Castagnet at chloe.castagnet@birdalarm.com.

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Upcoming Ornithology Group Events, 2020

by Nina Rach

Jan 30 (Thurs) - ONC Board Meeting at Mercer Arboretum

Feb 1 (Sat) - OG Field Trip led by Mark Scheuerman to Brazos Bend

Feb 2 (Sun) – OG Field trip with John Berner to Warren Ranch; special access to KPC properties to re-find rarities. Meet at 11:30am.

Feb 3 (Mon) - OG Meeting at Bayland CC; Speaker: Glen Lindeman, "Birding Oregon"

Feb 6-9 - Laredo Birding Fest

Feb 29 (Sat) –Leap Day field trip with David Sarkozi to the east side of Chambers County; special access to private Dutton Lake. Trip is limited to 18 participants.

March 2 (Mon) - OG Meeting at Nature Discovery Center, Bellaire; Speaker Robbin Mallett

March 7 (Sat) - OG Field Trip led by Robin Mallett to Cullinan Park, Sugar Land

March 14-15 (Sat-Sun) – **tentative** weekend trip to Welder Wildlife Foundation, Sinton, and other San Patricio County hotspots, with Ron Weeks. <http://welderwildlife.org>

April 6 (Mon) - OG meeting at Bayland CC

April 15-18 - Birding the Border Festival, Del Rio (Val Verde County),
<https://wildlife.tamu.edu/birding/birding-the-border/>

April 16-19 - Galveston FeatherFest, www.GalvestonFeatherFest.com

May 4 (Mon) - OG Meeting at Bayland CC; Speaker: Adam Wood

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Ornithology Group Officers

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

Vice Chair (Programs): Volunteer needed

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 | michaelhonel@sbcglobal.net

Field Trips: Volunteer needed

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

Ornithology Group Outdoor Nature Club Representative: Tira Overstreet
713-202-3568 | Oddbird47@comcast.net

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

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

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