



Monthly Meeting May 11, 2020 Online via Zoom

6:30 pm [Ornithology Group](#) (OG) Business Meeting

6:45 pm [Program](#): The Quest to See 700 Species in the Lower 48 by Adam Wood

Field Trip: No field trips scheduled

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The Quest to See 700 Species in the Lower 48

by Adam Wood

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://utexas.zoom.us/j/96374608704>

Meeting ID: 963 7460 8704

One tap mobile

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Letter from the Chair

Greetings, from our house to yours! I hope everyone is staying healthy and positive.

Although the Ornithology Group had to cancel our April meeting, we have rescheduled our May speaker a week later than usual, but safely online. We've tested out Zoom meetings with Adam Wood, and feel that we're ready to go with his program "The Quest to See 700 Species in the Lower 48," on May 11 at 6:30pm.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://utexas.zoom.us/j/96374608704>

Audio only, Dial: +1 346 248-7799, then 963 7460 8704# US (Houston)

We had a great **birding field trip to Matagorda Island** using a chartered boat on Sunday, April 26. You can read about it in this issue, along with photos by three of the six participants. We had great weather and saw 100+ species. Hope to repeat this trip in April 2021.

We still need to hold the annual Outdoor Nature Club meeting; **two ONC board positions are up for election**: Executive Director of Sanctuaries (currently Sergio Henao) and **Secretary/Treasurer** (currently Connie Blakely). Both of these are two-year terms. Connie would like to step down and we could really use someone to step up and help with this.

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The **100-year Anniversary** of the Outdoor Nature Club is fast approaching! Let's do what we can to spread the news about ONC and OG and let more people know about our meetings and field trips and Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary.

Moving forward... Do you enjoy our field trips and meetings? Please consider sharing YOUR talents by planning a field trip, proposing or arranging speakers for meetings, leading a Learning Corner or preparing a talk, writing for The Spoonbill, bringing snacks to a meeting, or helping with creative advertising. There's a lot to do, and we will be a more successful club if everyone helps a bit.

Birding Podcast to watch:

Episode 5 of The Wild Wild West-End Podcast: The Rails of Galveston County Part 1 (Tribute to Dominic Le Croisette) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nOx61d8wzFg&>

Nina Rach, OG Chair

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Ornithology Group Field Trip to Matagorda Island, April 26, 2020

By Nina Rach

with Billi Wagner, Abhay Sawant, Karen Terrell, Robyn Savage, and Tim Young



I'm very glad that we were able to go through with our plans to go birding in Calhoun County, with proper precautions, despite the COVID-19 crisis. We drove in separate cars, wore masks in public places, and maintained recommended social distancing.

Six of us met Captain Larry Wheeler at Clark's Marina on 7th St. in Port O'Connor at 8:00am on Sunday morning. We were all masked for the trip over, and brought a large shared cooler for the day. The 10+-mile crossing took about 20 minutes. T-Mobile service/data was pretty good most of the day.

We set up our day camp at one of the covered picnic tables near the boat dock, and after a seemingly quick (one-hour) reconnaissance of the immediate area, five of us started the hike to the Matagorda Lighthouse. There are a few circuitous paths in the area just east of the docks, so it is useful to look at an aerial photo in order to follow the most direct path. [One very clear map is available using the iNaturalist phone app.]

There is marvelous mixed thicket in this base area, lots of McCartney Rose, some Prickly Pear cactus, many wildflowers. Excellent edge habitat everywhere. We had ample sunshine and a good breeze all day, so there was no problem with mosquitoes. Everyone wore long-sleeved shirts for sun protection.

Despite it being late in the migration season, we still encountered hundreds of birds. Matagorda Island is a welcome stop for these trans-Gulf migrants, some stopping to feed, and others hopping from bush-to bush, anxious to continue their journey to the mainland and beyond. The very few trees on the island are quite short and scrubby, so there is no problem with “warbler neck.”

After we left the dock about 5:00pm, most of us drove across town to King Fisher Park, on Tira Overstreet’s recommendation. Contractors for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers were actively working on a beach replenishment project in Port O’Connor (POC), and the deposition of wet sand slurry was attracting hundreds of pelicans, gulls, terns, and shorebirds, which we studied with scopes for an hour and 20 minutes.

Last year, 97,000 cubic yards of sand (dredged from the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway) was added north of and under the POC fishing pier, reducing fishing access, but the increasingly wide beach is still a welcome addition to the town. https://www.victoriaadvocate.com/counties/calhoun/port-o-connor-hopes-economy-will-grow-along-with-beach/article_aba5a8e8-7742-11e9-937f-ef4a93dbd4e3.html

After leaving Port O’Connor, we passed through Port Lavaca and checked out the waterfront along Commerce Street at 7:25pm, and saw Common Nighthawk, Belted Kingfisher, and Scissor-tailed Flycatchers. With restaurants all closed, we picked up pizzas and ate them overlooking the water before we drove back towards I-77/59 and home.

As a group, we saw 100+ species for the day, 102 of which are listed below.

Thanks to Janey Woodley for the suggestion for this field trip. I hope there will be some interest in repeating this next spring, perhaps mid-April!



Species list (grouped by the dozen):

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*), Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*), Eurasian Collared-Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*), Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*), Yellow-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*), Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*), Chimney Swift (*Chaetura pelagica*), Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*), Clapper Rail (*Rallus crepitans*), Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*), Black-bellied Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*), Wilson's Plover (*Charadrius wilsonia*),

Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*), Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*), Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*), Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*), Red Knot (*Calidris canutus*), Sanderling (*Calidris alba*), Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*), Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularius*), Willet (*Tringa semipalmata*), Laughing Gull (*Leucophaeus atricilla*), Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*), Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*),

Least Tern (*Sternula antillarum*), Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*), Caspian Tern (*Hydroprogne caspia*), Forster's Tern (*Sterna forsteri*), Royal Tern (*Thalasseus maximus*), Sandwich Tern (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*), Common Loon (*Gavia immer*), Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*), Wood Stork (*Mycteria americana*), Anhinga (*Anhinga anhinga*), Neotropic Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*), Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*),

Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*), Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*), Great Egret (*Ardea alba*), Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*), Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*), Tricolored Heron (*Egretta tricolor*), Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*), White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*), White-faced Ibis (*Plegadis chihi*), Roseate Spoonbill (*Platalea ajaja*), Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*), Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*),

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*), White-tailed Hawk (*Geranoaetus albicaudatus*), Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*), Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*), Belted Kingfisher (*Megaceryle alcyon*), Crested Caracara (*Caracara cheriway*), Merlin (*Falco columbarius*), Aplomado Falcon (*Falco femoralis*), Eastern Wood-Pewee (*Contopus virens*), Acadian Flycatcher (*Empidonax virens*), Least Flycatcher (*Empidonax minimus*), Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*),

Eastern Kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*), Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*), White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus*), Philadelphia Vireo (*Vireo philadelphicus*), Warbling Vireo (*Vireo gilvus*), Carolina Chickadee (*Poecile carolinensis*), Northern Rough-winged Swallow (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*), Purple Martin (*Progne subis*), Bank Swallow (*Riparia riparia*), Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*), Sedge Wren (*Cistothorus platensis*), European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*),

Gray Catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*), Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*), House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), Grasshopper Sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum*), Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*), Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis*), Lincoln's Sparrow (*Melospiza lincolnii*), Eastern Meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*), Orchard Oriole (*Icterus spurius*), Baltimore Oriole (*Icterus galbula*), Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*), Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*),

Great-tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus mexicanus*), Golden-winged Warbler (*Vermivora chrysoptera*), Blue-winged Warbler (*Vermivora cyanoptera*), Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*), American Redstart (*Setophaga ruticilla*), Blackburnian Warbler (*Setophaga fusca*), Yellow Warbler (*Setophaga petechia*), Chestnut-sided Warbler (*Setophaga pensylvanica*), Blackpoll Warbler (*Setophaga striata*), Black-throated Green Warbler (*Setophaga virens*), Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*), Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*),

Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*), Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*), Blue Grosbeak (*Passerina caerulea*), Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*), Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*), Dickcissel (*Spiza americana*)

** Did you spot all of the Tautonyms? (In the binomial (scientific) name, the genus and specific epithet are the same). Go back and check Anhinga (*Anhinga anhinga*), Bank Swallow (*Riparia riparia*), and Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*).

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Area Access Update, May 2020

By Nina Rach

Access to many public birding locations has been limited during this year's Spring migration, but folks have found open spots and reported to TexBirds and eBird, and various FaceBook birding pages. Try the national forests, for example.

Many (not all) **Texas State Parks began reopening** on April 20 for day-use only, and advance day pass reservations are required – EVEN IF you have a state parks pass; reserve a day pass online at <https://texasstateparks.reserveamerica.com/> or by calling (512) 389-8900.

“What to know before you visit:

- Face coverings are strongly encouraged.
- No groups of over five people are allowed, except for families or people living in the same household.
- Maintain at least a six-foot distance from people not in your group.
- All park headquarters, visitor centers, park stores and group sites (halls, campsites, etc.) are closed.
- We have cancelled all in-person events and equipment rentals and loans.
- Park hours may be adjusted - be sure to check park hours before you visit.
- Check travel restrictions before you go.”

State Parks reportedly will allow camping in some locations on Monday, May 18, with limited capacity and social distancing standards in place. However, they are not taking any new reservations at this time, and will honor only some of existing reservations.

The **Lone Star Trail** is open, with 96 miles of continuous trail and 32 miles of loop and crossover trails, in and around Sam Houston National Forest in Walker and San Jacinto Counties. It passes just a half-mile south of our Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary.

Among the 16 national recreation areas in Texas, most are at least partially accessible.

Big Thicket National Preserve trails are open, but the Visitor Center closed on March 27 and has not reopened, nor has the Lakeview Sandbar and day use area. The bridge over Turkey Creek just south of the Sandhill Loop Trail is closed due to flood damage.

Guadalupe Mountains National Park remains closed to hiking and camping.

Big Bend National Park and Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River remain closed, as of May 11, with no date yet for reopening. <https://www.nps.gov/bibe/learn/news/big-bend-national-park-closed.htm>

Padre Island National Seashore reopened May 2, with camping on North and South Beaches, Yarbrough Pass, and overnight parking at the boat ramp. But the visitor center and Malaquite and Bird Island Basin Campgrounds remain closed.

In Cameron County, the **Palo Alto Battlefield** National Historical Park, has been closed since March 23. The Gorgas Science Foundation's **Sabal Palm Sanctuary** is also closed until further notice (although there was a short eBird list submitted on April 25, perhaps from the gate).

The **Nature Conservancy** has 38 nature preserves and conservation properties, along with 130+ easements in Texas, but all preserves are closed due to COVID-19. However, they are still listing five **potential** open weekends in 2020 for the Davis Mountains Preserve. Let's hope those open weekends on July 10-12 and Aug 7-9 come to pass! <https://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/united-states/texas/>

Houston Audubon reopened its sanctuaries on Monday, May 4, and people are enjoying the facilities again and reporting a lot of nice migrants. Tira Overstreet and I explored both Smith Oaks and Boy Scout Woods the day they re-opened, and enjoyed good walks and nice migrants.

Our Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary in San Jacinto County remains open to members, although we are not ready to resume monthly open houses just yet (if you need the gate code, just contact me). Several members have been visiting.

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Texas Species Distribution, Century Club Websites

By Nina Rach

Dell Little (Fort Davis) has finished compiling maps comparing eBird records with the maps in the Texas Ornithological Society Handbook of Texas Birds, 2nd Ed. There are 75 multi-layered maps for quick comparison to related species. Here you can access the page of links on the Texas Century Club site:

http://texascenturyclub.org/index.php?title=Texas_Species_County_Maps

Dell says he designed these maps to find what species are missing on eBird within their normal range, and also see which species show up in counties outside of their range.

He thanks Eric Carpenter for coming up with scripts to help finish a little faster.

Dell also put together the County Big Days page on the Texas Century Club (TCC) website, where he says he has gotten about 100 entries from 16 birders. The list is starting to fill out. Chambers is the first county with the top ten Big Days above 100 species. Many counties still don't have 10 Big Days above 25 (which is the minimum set to make a list). Here's the link:

http://texascenturyclub.org/index.php?title=County_Big_Days

If you have any Big Days that could fit on this list, send them to Dell via Messenger or email. Spreadsheets are great but not necessary.

A BIG round of applause to Dell for doing this work!

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Ornithology Group Officers

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

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

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