

The Spoonbill

A Publication of the Ornithology Group
of the Houston Outdoor Nature Club

August 2021

Greetings! Although we maintain our 2021 reservations at Bayland Community Center, in an abundance of caution, we will continue to use the Zoom online platform for our monthly meetings.

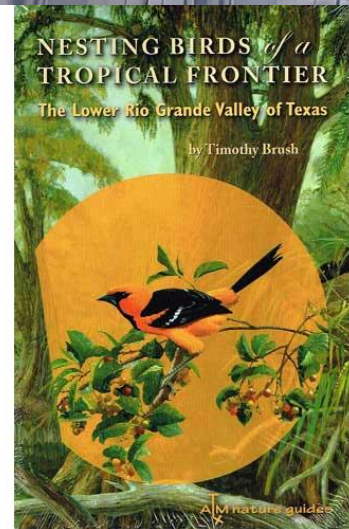
2 August 2021 OG meeting

The program: **“Birdlife of a shifting tropical frontier,”** was presented by UTRGV Prof. Timothy Brush.

The Lower Rio Grande Valley is a prime birding area, given the many tropical bird species seen there regularly. Many parks and other natural areas provide the opportunity to visit the tropics without crossing the border! In recent decades, the Valley has seen many changes to its birdlife, as new species have established themselves while others have declined. Some birds have spread northward quite far, while others have shown different patterns. Dr. Brush discussed some case studies and put the Valley into perspective within the broader region, as a stepping stone for bird movements.

His book, ‘Nesting Birds of a Tropical Frontier,’ was published by Texas A&M University Press in 2005.

Each month, the Zoom lobby opens at 6:45pm for check-in, and the meetings begin at 7:00. Zoom links are sent to registered OG/ ONC members.



August Trivia Q: Are any birds poisonous?

(Answer is at the very end of the newsletter)

Oregon, 2021

Aug 1-15, 2021

Six participants from Houston OG enjoyed a wonderful birding trip to Oregon, led by Rich Hoyer. Four of us were in the entire two-week tour to both western and eastern Oregon, and other two participated eastern part of the tour. We experienced some smoke and haze from Washington fire brought in by NE wind, along with a couple days of high temperature. However, none it impacted our birding. We birded from mudflats to rocky jetties, from coastal ancient forests to cascade mountains, between vast sagebrush steppe and stunning Steens Mountain. In total, we saw 213 species of birds in two weeks, including 7 members of Grouse/Quail families, 11 species of woodpeckers, 5 species of owls. The highlights of the trip voted by participants were Northern Saw-whet Owl, Lewis's Woodpecker, Great Gray Owl.



Pictures by Li Li and Letha Slagle



Pigeon Guillemot, Black Oystercatcher, Wandering Tattler, Wrentit



Northern Saw-whet Owl, Clark's Nutcracker, Black-backed Woodpecker, Great Gray Owl, Lewis's Woodpecker

[A big THANK YOU to Lisa Li for organizing and reporting on the Oregon trip!]

Upcoming 2021 Ornithology Group meetings (Monday evenings, 7:00pm, on Zoom)

Sept – **Martin Reid**, Pandemic Birding: Balcony Birding in the Time of Coronavirus

Oct – **Carolyn Ohl-Johnson**, History of the Christmas Mountains Oasis

Nov – **Mark Kulstad**, Birds of the World: Simplifying the problem of 10,000 Species

Webinars, August 2021

3 Aug – Tues – “**How High-Energy Hummingbirds Survive – a Q&A with the Experts,**”

Join researchers Anusha Shankar from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Erich Eberts from the University of Toronto Scarborough as they share what they’ve learned about how hummingbirds use energy. Discover the demands of migration, the nesting season, and even just getting through the night; plus learn how sleep differs from torpor. We’ll also spend time answering your questions about these flying jewels during live Q&A.

<https://academy.allaboutbirds.org/live-event/how-high-energy-hummingbirds-survive-a-qa-with-the-experts/>

16 Aug – Mon – “**How to Save Songbirds with Your Morning Coffee,**” The Cornell Lab,

Many migrant songbirds spend winters on farms where coffee grows under tall trees. In addition to offering critical habitat, shade-grown coffee farms help local economies, too. Join the Cornell Lab’s Amanda Rodewald and Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center’s Ruth Bennett as they discuss coffee, birds, and conservation efforts.

<https://academy.allaboutbirds.org/live-event/how-to-save-songbirds-with-your-morning-coffee/>

12 August – Thurs – “**A World Full of Parrots with Stephen-Pruett Jones,**” who joins Nate Swick to discuss his new book, a new book, *Naturalized Parrots of the World: Distribution, Ecology, and Impacts of the World’s Most Colorful Colonizers*. <https://www.aba.org/a-world-full-of-parrots-with-stephen-pruett-jones/>

19 August – Thurs – “**Secrets of Summer Birding,**” American Birding Podcast. ABA colleagues Jennie Duberstein and Greg Neise join host Nate Swick to talk about what excites them about the season, from molt to shorebirds to birding camp, and how to be prepared to handle the difficulties.

<https://www.aba.org/secrets-of-summer-birding/>

26 August – Thurs – “**This Month in Birding,**” American Birding Podcast. Mollee Brown from The Birding Co-op and the Life List podcast, Andrés Jiménez of Birds Canada’s new podcast The Warblers, and our old friend Nick Lund, The Birdist, join host Nate Swick to talk about birding ethics, trash parrots, fur thieves, and whether we have saved a bird.

<https://www.aba.org/this-month-in-birding-august-2021/>

PSA: 2/3 for the Birds - <https://www.234birds.org/>

The Problem

North America has lost close to 3 billion birds since the 1970s, almost a third of the entire bird population. It is not just rare or endangered birds that we are losing, our familiar backyard songbird populations are disappearing too. The die-off is primarily attributed to *loss of habitat* and the *use of pesticides*.

The Solution

We are the solution. Our residential, ornamental and recreational landscapes can provide sufficient habitat to restore the bird population. We just need to provide the essential ingredients and stop using pesticides. No petitions, no donations, no bureaucracy. We can simply stop being the problem by changing the way we garden.

Birds need 70% native plants in their range to maintain healthy population levels (Tallamy et al.)
That's approximately 2/3 native plants, and that's our goal.

Advisors

John Fitzpatrick - *Executive Director, Cornell Lab of Ornithology*

Elijah Goodwin - *Ecological Database Coordinator, Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture*

Carl Safina - *The Safina Center*

Doug Tallamy - *Entomologist, University of Delaware*

Evan Abramson - *Principal, Landscape Interactions*

Upcoming local birding events – please wear a mask

Baytown Nature Center Monthly Bird Count, Harris County –

Third Thursdays: **August 19, Sept 16.**

Meet David Hanson & Chuck Davis at 8:00am in the parking lot behind the entrance building.

Seabourne Creek Nature Park, Rosenberg, Fort Bend County - Weekly Wednesday Bird Walks

- Meet at 8:00am. <https://rosenbergtx.gov/seabourn-creek/>

Kleb Woods Nature Preserve, Tomball, Harris County – Wednesday morning bird walks, 8:30am-11:30am. Kleb Woods staff also run First Saturday bird walks, 8-10am and Senior (50+) Fri. bus trips.

John Paul Landing Environmental Education Center, 9950 Katy-Hockley Rd, Katy, Harris County – Thursday morning bird walks 8:30am-11:30am

Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary Open Day (usually fourth Saturday): **Aug 28, Sept 25**



Texas State Parks Status

Almost all Texas State Parks are open, although access and hours may be limited, and camping is still closed at some.

As of June 26, 2021, the swimming pool and day-use areas at Balmorhea SP (Toyahvale) are open, but there is no camping allowed yet.

The Wyler Aerial Tramway (El Paso) remains closed from 2020.

Indian Lodge (Fort Davis) is open, but satellite TV is out. Just go birding.

See <https://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/parks-map>

Ornithology Group - www.OrnithologyGroup.org and www.facebook.com/OrnithologyGroup

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Treasurer	- OPEN – easy job!	Your email here!
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The Spoonbill Editor	- OPEN – temporarily Nina -	Nina.Rach@yahoo.com

Three Great Volunteer Opportunities at OG

1. The Ornithology Group needs someone to serve as Newsletter Editor for The Spoonbill.
2. The OG Vice-Chair (**your name here**) is in charge of arranging our monthly speakers – consider volunteering and trying this out for a year!
3. Harlan Evans has volunteered for many years but has stepped down as OG's Treasurer. We need someone to take this on. There is not much monthly work involved, but a multi-year commitment would best.

Please contact Nina if you would like additional information or are interested in any of these positions.

We could really use the help to keep our activities going.

August Trivia Q answer:

Poisonous Birds – not *just* a good name for a band.

Yes, some birds are known to be poisonous when eaten; the toxins are thought to be acquired from their diet.

The first documented poisonous birds were **Common Quail**, *Coturnix coturnix*, some of which feed on poisonous plants during migration, and acquire a stable toxin that causes “coturnism”- muscle tenderness and muscle cell breakdown. The condition was already recorded in the 4th century BC by ancient Greek (and subsequently Roman) naturalists, physicians, and theologians. The Old Testament (Numbers 11:31-34) mentions an incident where the Israelites became ill after having consumed large amounts of quail in Sinai. Illustration by Richard Crossley - The Crossley ID Guide Britain and Ireland



The **Hooded Pitohui**, *Pitohui dichrous*, at right, and the Northern/Southern Variable Pitohuis, are medium-sized songbirds in New Guinea related to Old World orioles. Their skin, feathers and other tissues contain several different batrachotoxin compounds, extremely potent cardio- and neurotoxic steroidal alkaloids found in certain species of beetles, birds, and frogs. The toxins in Pitohuis may derive from their consumption of Choresine beetles.



The genus name, Pitohui, is a Papuan term for *rubbish bird*, a reference to its inedibility. In 1990, toxicity of the skin and feathers was noted by scientists handling skins, and this discovery was published in 1992.

The **Blue-capped Ifrit**, *Ifrita kowaldi*, is another New Guinean bird with poisonous skin and feathers containing batrachotoxins. A small passerine, it's an ancient relict species, little changed since the Oligocene (23-33 million years ago). Illustration from Gerrard Keulemans - Novitates Zoologicae, vol. 6, Public Domain, Wikimedia Commons.



Other toxic birds include: the Rufous/ Little Shrikethrush in New Guinea and Australia, the Spur-winged Goose in sub-Saharan Africa, Hoopoes in Europe-Africa-Asia, North American Ruffed Grouse, Bronzewing Pigeons in Australia, and Red Warblers in Mexico.

See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toxic_bird
