

The Spoonbill

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

March 2022

Greetings! This month, our meeting is being held in-person at Bayland Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet St, Houston, TX, and on the Zoom online platform.

7 March 2022 OG meeting

The program: “**Birding Locally! A Harris County (Fun) Year,**” by OG member Letha Slagle, describes the evolution of her very productive 2021 birding year, during which she saw 304 bird species and entered 290 eBird checklists in Harris County, Texas (1778 sq miles total, with 1729 sq mi of land).

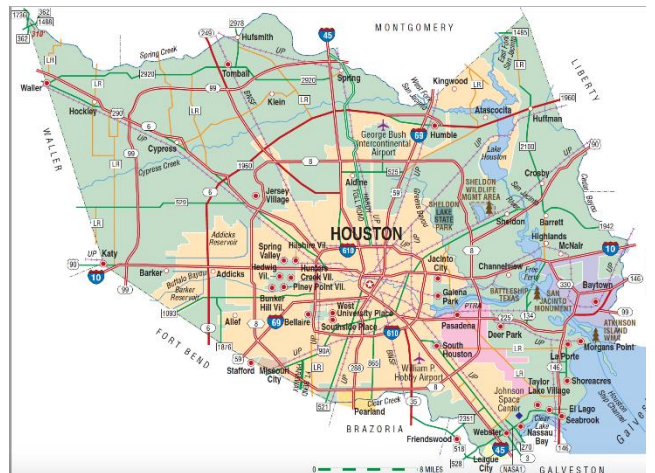
She said that after “mucking around in inaccessible places,” including “extreme birding in salt marshes,” during which she found Nelson’s and Seaside Sparrows, Least Bittern, and an odd gull with Cin-Ty Lee, she knew it was time to go for a personal big year.

Letha uses a Canon camera and a Samsung phone with recording apps (such as EZ Voice).

Photo at right, by Letha Slagle, of Couch’s Kingbird (COKI), *Tyrannus couchii*, year bird #304, seen on the Pine Forest golf course.

Map of Harris County, Texas, at right.
Map Credit: Robert Plocheck.

Each month, the Zoom lobby opens at 6:45pm for check-in, and the meetings begin at 7:00.



March Trivia Q:

Which one of our enigmatic local birds was found in England in late 2021, attracting hundreds of British twitchers? [Answer is at the end of the newsletter]

March Meeting: Letha Slagle

Thanks to all 39 people who attended in person (9) or logged in for our Zoom meeting! As we expected, there was great interest in local birding information and suggestions from our experienced local speaker!

Letha's photo and Samantha Ketterer's article about local birding was featured on the front-page of the Houston Chronicle on 31 Dec 2021 (online Dec 30).

Photo at right by Yi-Chin Lee, Houston Chronicle / Staff photographer

<https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/The-Big-Year-16739470.php>



"We're all about sharing this love of nature to other people," Slagle said. "If people don't love it, they're not going to protect it."

Please **RENEW** your OG/ONC membership for **2022!**
We operate on a calendar-year basis.

OG/ONC Annual Dues:
\$ 20.00 for individuals; \$ 30.00 for families
Life membership remains \$250.00

Additional contributions are tax-deductible and welcome in any amount, to help support our Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary in San Jacinto County.

If you have questions about your membership status, contact Michael Honel at michaelhonor@spcglobal.net or 713-432-1985.

Make checks payable to Outdoor Nature Club,
Send to:
Outdoor Nature Club
PO Box 1014
Bellaire, TX 77402

Recent ONC expenses – where part of your membership money is used

Liability Insurance for LTNS (annual), Dec 2021	\$744.97 (Texas All Risk General Agency)
Zoom annual subscription, Jan 2022	\$159.80 (Nina Rach)
Tractor maintenance at LTNS, 2018-2021	\$232.32 (Charles Smith)
Restroom fan part, handles, tractor/barn keys, 2021	\$229.92 (Calvin Blakley)
Paint for front gate and septic barrels pumped at LTNS	<u>\$204.74 (Mike Zuchowski)</u>
Total	\$1,571.75

A big **Thank You** to all the volunteers who keep the Little Thicket Sanctuary running!

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OG Field Trips for members

6 March 2022 – NRG Cooling Ponds, led by Dave Sarkozi

2 April 2022 – W.G. Jones State Park, to be led by Claire Moore (Red-cockaded Woodpeckers)

1 May 2022 – Damuth Woods Sanctuary, Liberty County, to be led by Carlton Collier

1-9 March 2023 – Santa Marta Mountains, Colombia, led by Sebastian Ballesteros Caro. Trip will start/end in Barranquilla, Colombia. Contact Nina Rach or Lisa Li if interested.

Info: <http://www.northerncolombiabirdingtrail.com/birding-santa-marta-mountains.html>

If you are interested in birding any other locations, or want to plan a trip, contact Lisa Li to discuss. You should have your 2022 membership on file BEFORE you sign up for any OG field trip.

Upcoming: April 2 Field Trip to see Red-cockaded Woodpeckers



On Saturday, April 2nd, join Claire Moore at 7:45am for a field trip into W.G. Jones State Forest as we search for the endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker and other pine forest specialties.

Claire is a Texas Master Naturalist with a specialty in birding. She is the compiler for the Spring Creek Christmas Bird Count, which includes Jones State Forest.

Plan to meet Claire at the after-hours parking area for Jones State Forest at 7:45 a.m.

In general, this is located between Conroe & The Woodlands, on FM 1488 1.5 miles west of I-45. The little grass & gravel parking area is just 100 yards west of the Jones State Forest headquarters office and their paved parking lot which is located at 1328 FM-1488, Conroe, TX 77384.

Remember to drive about 100 yards past the office to the after-hours parking lot. Call Claire at 832-372-5033 if you have problems finding it.

Be sure and study up on their call before April 2nd, as their call is normally the first indication that the woodpeckers are feeding near us.

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Red-cockaded_Woodpecker/sounds

Upcoming 2022 Ornithology Group meetings (First Monday, 7:00pm)

April 4 – **Billi Wagner**, Birding Andros Island, Bahamas (Zoom)

May 2 – **Drew Harvey**, Lesser Prairie-Chickens (Zoom)

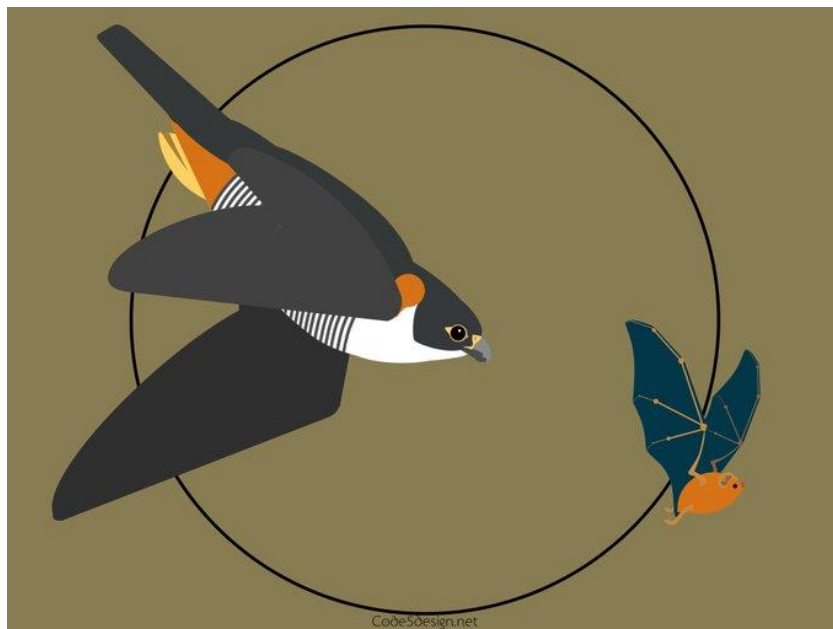
June 6 – **Charles Alexander**, Wild Parrots of the Lower Rio Grande Valley (Zoom)

July 14 – **ONC annual meeting**; in-person at Bayland Community Center (and on Zoom)

Bat Falcon in the Rio Grande Valley, a first US record!

On December 8, 2021, Rebecca Gelernter photographed a lone, boldly colored **Bat Falcon**, *Falco ruficularis*, at Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, in Hidalgo County, Texas. This is the first time this species has ever been recorded in the United States, and explains why thousands of birders have traveled to see it (there are 1040 observations of this Texas bird in the eBird database!) It hit national media channels last month, and was even highlighted by USA Today.

This is a Code 5 bird, defined by the American Birding Association (ABA) as “Accidental. **Species that are recorded 5 or fewer times in the ABA Area, or fewer than 3 records in the past 30 years.**”



By February 6, **Code 5 Design**, a firm that specializes in illustrations of Code 5 birds, had designed a snazzy BAFA graphic (above) – see their work at <http://code5design.net/>

Birding Webinars & Live Events, March-April 2022

3-10-17-24-31 March – Every Thurs – ABA’s **American Birding Podcast** with host Nate Swick (every Thursday). <https://www.aba.org/podcast/>

13-20-27 March 2022 – Sun – Guided Bird Tour at **Mitchell Lake Audubon Center**, 10750 Pleasanton Road, San Antonio, 8:00-11:00am. Tickets \$10, max 10 people per tour. Pre-register at <https://mitchelllake.audubon.org/events/guided-bird-tour-67>

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Upcoming, repeating, local birding events

Baytown Nature Center Monthly Bird Count, Harris County – Third Thursdays:
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+) birding bus trips, usually on Fridays, usually 12 hours long.

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

Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, Lake Jackson, Brazoria County (third Saturday, 8am-12pm)
Join licensed bird banders and GCBO Research Associates Robert and Kay Lookingbill, as they weigh, measure, band, and record details of birds captured in mist nets.
<https://www.gcbo.org/avian-research-and-monitoring/bird-banding-at-gcbo/>

Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary (LTNS) Open Day, San Jacinto County – fourth Saturday, usually first nature walk begins at 10:00am: **Feb 26, March 26, Apr 23**

Monthly Bird Counts through Houston Audubon – You can join any of 14 different surveys in the Greater Houston urban area to learn more about bird movements and meet fellow birders.
See: <https://houstonaudubon.org/birding/bird-surveys/surveys.html>

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

Chair	Nina Rach	Nina.Rach@yahoo.com
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ONC Board Represent.	Tira Overstreet	Oddbird47@comcast.net
The Spoonbill Editor	- OPEN – temporarily Nina -	Nina.Rach@yahoo.com

Great Volunteer Opportunities at OG

1. The Ornithology Group needs someone to help as Newsletter Editor for The Spoonbill.
2. The OG Vice-Chair 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 work involved, but a multi-year commitment would best.
4. Advertising and outreach – We could use some help in these areas!

Please contact Nina if you are interested in any of these positions, or have ideas to contribute.
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March Trivia Q:

On 8 November 2021, an adult male **Belted Kingfisher** was found by George Shannon (of Whittle-le-Woods) while fishing on the River Ribble, near Lancashire Wildlife Trust's (LWT) **Brockholes Nature Reserve** (a former quarry) in Preston, England.

It was the fourth time the species has been sighted in England; previously seen in Staffordshire and Aberdeenshire in 2005, and in Cornwall in 1979-1980 (also in 1908).

Shannon wrote, "I heard a very loud but unfamiliar rattling croaky call... I looked round and watched a slate blue and white bird flying upstream towards me about 10ft above the centre of the river. It proceeded to land in dead trees directly opposite where I was sitting. I got my bins on it and genuinely couldn't believe the image I was seeing. I thought "it's a Belted Kingfisher but it can't possibly be a Belted Kingfisher... I then suddenly had that gut wrenching feeling "I need a picture or at least someone else here to confirm I wasn't actually going insane."

It was seen on the River Ribble through November 2021.

The bird was rediscovered at a farm pond on the River Darwen at Samlesbury in early December, and continued to be seen at the Roach Bridge stakeout, through the holidays (final eBird reports were 27 Dec 2021). According to David Campbell at birdguides.com, it was seen 29 Jan-4 Feb 2022.

Belted Kingfisher, *Megaceryle alcyon* [BEKI] – Unlike the UK's Common/Eurasian Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*), the BEKI has a white band around its neck. It's native to North America, and is featured on the reverse of the 1986 Canadian 5 dollar banknote.

Sources:

[https://www.rarebirdalert.co.uk/v2/Content/Finders in the Field Belted Kingfisher Brockholes Lancashire.aspx?s_id=956053653](https://www.rarebirdalert.co.uk/v2/Content/Finders%20in%20the%20Field%20Belted%20Kingfisher%20Brockholes%20Lancashire.aspx?s_id=956053653)

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<https://www.birdguides.com/articles/tracking-down-the-belted-kingfisher/>

<https://www.birdguides.com/articles/review-of-the-week/review-of-the-week-31-january-6-february-2022/>

