



The Spoonbill

A Publication of the Ornithology Group (OG)
of the Houston Outdoor Nature Club

February 2008
Vol. 57 No. 2

February Meeting

Monday, February 4, 2008 -- 7:00 p.m.

Bayland Community Center
6400 Bissonnet, Houston

Learning Corner (6:30): with Glenn Olsen

**Program: by Karen McBride –
Birding in Australia and New Zealand**

Karen McBride is a native Texan who lived out of the state for nearly 30 years before returning in 2006. She grew up in the Dallas area, attended the University of Texas at Austin, and North Texas State College. Karen is currently Office Manager at Gulf Coast Bird Observatory. Karen is an avid birder who has traveled all over the world chasing birds, was a guide and birding tour leader in Arizona for eight years, and has headed up a number of birding clubs. She loves to talk "birds" with anyone and will go birding at the drop of a hat!

In February, Karen will share her once-in-a-lifetime adventure Down Under. She spent 58 days of non-stop birding in Australia, the Australian state of Tasmania, and New Zealand.

Other Events

**February 16: Monthly Trip
Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR**

**March Trip (date to be determined)
San Bernard NWR
(Yellow and Black Rails)**

**April 10-13, 2008 Quarterly Trip
Laredo, Falcon Dam, San Ygnacio**

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2008 Dues are Due!! -- Renew your ONC/OG membership if you haven't already done so. ONC/OG dues are paid by the calendar year. Life Members of ONC still need to pay yearly OG dues – to help pay for *Spoonbill* printing/ mailing expenses, speakers, OG donations to other organizations, and other OG expenses. Pay by check at the next OG meeting, or use the form on the back of *The Spoonbill* (it specifies the proper dues amounts), include updated information for the ONC yearbook and database, and mail along with your check to the ONC post office box. Your dues keep the Ornithology Group running! If you have questions about your membership status, contact Margret Simmons at msimmons@compassnet.com or 713-776-2511.

Minutes of the Monthly OG Meeting

Monday, January 7, 2008
Bayland Community Center
Number of Attendees: 59

1. Learning Corner: Michael Williams discussed where to find ducks in the greater Houston area. Some of the areas discussed were Sheldon Lake, Lake Houston, San Jacinto Monument area, Eisenhower Park and Hermann Park. Michael also had a copy of "Ducks At A Distance, a Waterfowl Identification Guide" for everyone.

2. Sightings: Bernice Hotman opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m. with bird sightings. Sightings included Wilson's Warbler and Bald Eagle at Brazos Bend SP, Osprey at Pecan Grove, Rufous Hummingbirds, 2 banded and 2 not, Yellow-Breasted Chat at San Bernard, Merlin at Anahuac, Buff-Bellied Hummingbird in Sagemont area, Dark-Eyed Junco at the Cooney Property on the Katy Prairie, White-Tailed Hawk on the Katy Prairie, and 7 Crested Caracaras and Palm Warbler west of the Warren Ranch.

3. John O'Neill has had a stroke. Pam Smolen passed around a get well card for everyone to sign for the ornithologist and author who was the OG guest speaker in December.

4. Minutes of the December meeting were accepted as printed in the Spoonbill.

5. Treasury Report: Jim Winn reports that finances are in good order with approximately \$8,500 in the bank with dues for 2008 steadily coming in.

6. Membership: Margret Simmons reminded everyone to sign in and pay dues for 2008. She has a list if you want to see if you have paid. She also reminded everyone that Outdoor Nature Club dues have to be paid as well as OG dues in order to be a member of OG.

7. Spoonbill: Al Shultz announced the deadline for materials for the next issue is Sunday, January 13. Summaries of Christmas Bird Counts will be included if received.

8. Library: Andy Scott announced that there are a few books out over a year and a few are missing. Please check your shelves to see if you have these. Also let him know if you have any special requests.

9. Field Trips: Adam Wood reported that the density was low on sparrows and everyone had to work hard to get them on the Christmas Bird Counts. The next monthly field trip will be January 19 to Chappell Hill.

About the Ornithology Group

The Ornithology Group (OG) is a division of the Outdoor Nature Club (ONC), a non-profit organization dedicated to greater knowledge about the environment and wildlife of the Upper Texas Coast. The OG is a club of individuals interested in all aspects of birding, including bird identification, listing bird sightings, competing in birding events, and preserving bird habitat. Some members study bird behavior, biology, distribution and migration, while others just enjoy watching birds. The organization is designed to accommodate these diverse birding interests. Monthly meetings and field trips provide an opportunity to interact with and learn from experts in local and international birding.

Chair:	Bernice Hotman	713-782-7889
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Library:	Andy Scott	281-251-4815
Membership:	Margret Simmons	713-776-2511
Field Trips:	Adam Wood	713-515-1692
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ONC website: <http://www.outdoornatureclub.org/>

The quarterly trip will be to Calhoun County, January 24-27, with a special day at Guadalupe Delta WMA on Friday. The monthly trip in March will be to the San Bernard NWR to search for Yellow and Black Rails; Jennifer Wilson will be the guide. A date is not set yet, so let Adam know if you are interested. An Owl Workshop in Montana, led by Denver Holt, will take place May 8-13, 2008. If interested, let Adam know.

10. Program: Robert and Kay Lookingbill discussed bird banding and had a very interesting slide presentation. Bird banding requires federal and state banding permits; Robert and Kay hold permits in Texas and New Jersey for all species except eagles, endangered species and waterfowl. There are 5,000 banders in the US and Canada; only 150 banders are permitted for hummingbirds. Robert and Kay are active in a year-round bird banding station at the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory in Lake Jackson, Texas. The Cape May raptor banding project in New Jersey is another favorite project. Kay's explanation and slides of the molting patterns on hawks were very informative.

11. Meeting adjourned at 8:40 pm.

--Cindy Douglass, Secretary of OG

Trip Announcement: February 16, 2008
Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge

Meet at Refuge Headquarters, 8:00 a.m.

This month's trip will be to the Attwater Prairie-Chicken National Wildlife Refuge (APCNWR). A U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service official will be our guide for the day. APCNWR, located approximately 60 miles west of Houston, is one of the largest remnants of coastal prairie habitat in southeast Texas and is home to one of the last populations of the critically endangered Attwater's Prairie-Chicken, a ground-dwelling grouse of the coastal prairie ecosystem. Presently, less than 200,000 fragmented acres of coastal prairie habitat remain, leaving the birds scattered among two Texas counties. The refuge is one of a handful of national wildlife refuges managed specifically for an endangered species; however, recovery activities for this imperiled bird and management of its declining ecosystem go beyond the refuge's boundaries. We will not make an attempt to see the Attwater's Prairie Chicken during this trip. If we see one it will be by chance. However, we will get access to areas and habitats that are not normally open.

The refuge supports over 250 species of birds besides the Attwater's Prairie-Chicken. They may not receive as much attention as the refuge namesake, but your chances of seeing a number of them are much higher. Both Fulvous and Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks inhabit refuge marshes. White-tailed Hawks soar over the prairies. Crested Caracaras and vultures keep a sharp lookout for carrion. During the summer months, Scissor-tailed Flycatchers and Dickcissels grace the grasslands. In the marshes, Roseate Spoonbills carry the pink glow of a morning sunrise on their wings. You might see Anhingas perched on branches with their wings spread wide to dry. In winter, geese abound in neighboring fields, while the refuge hosts a diversity of ducks, Sandhill Cranes, Sprague's Pipits, and several types of sparrows. The main targets for the trip will be wintering ducks (especially the Cinnamon Teal and maybe a few lingering Fulvous Whistling-Ducks), American Woodcock, Wilson's Snipe, White-tailed Hawk, Sprague's Pipit, Palm Warbler and Grasshopper Sparrow as well as other wintering sparrows. This should be a great trip that you will not want to miss especially with the slim chance of getting to see an Attwater's Prairie Chicken. I may have to move the date if the refuge is planning a prescribed burn a few days before the trip. One final note: this will be a full day's trip, so make sure to bring a lunch.

Directions: We will meet at the refuge headquarters at 8:00 a.m. The refuge is located 6.5 miles northeast of Eagle Lake, off FM 3013, or south from Sealy on Highway 36 to FM 3013 and traveling west for 10 miles. Headquarters is located 2 miles west of the main entrance on FM 3013. To get there from Houston, take IH 10 west from Houston towards Sealy to SH 36. Head south (right) on SH 36 to FM 3013 and go right, which will have you heading to the southwest on FM 3013 for about 10 miles to the refuge entrance. Follow the refuge entrance road for about 2 miles to the refuge headquarters.

Be sure to bring: Binoculars, a lunch, water, hat, sunscreen, a warm jacket in case it is cold, raingear in case it rains, boots because we may do some hiking through wet and brambly fields, spotting scope, camera if you wish, and snacks.

~ Adam Wood, OG Field Trip Coordinator, birdsondabrain@earthlink.net, 713-515-1692

Spring Quarterly Trip: Laredo and Falcon Area -- April 10-13, 2008

Meet in Laredo, Family Gardens Inn & Suites Lobby, April 10, 7:30 p.m.

This spring's quarterly trip will be to Laredo, Falcon Dam and San Ygnacio. We will be spending Friday birding from Falcon Dam to San Ygnacio and we will spend Saturday and Sunday morning birding around Laredo. Joel Ruiz will be our leader on Friday in the Falcon area and Susan Forster will be our guide for Saturday and Sunday around Laredo. Joel Ruiz was the curator of the San Ygnacio Bird and Butterfly Sanctuary until he retired recently. He has spent most of his time recently keeping tabs on the White-collared Seedeaters in the Sanctuary. Susan Foster is the compiler for the Laredo CBC and has birded the Laredo area extensively for many years and has led several trips for TOS and HAS in the Laredo area.

We will start the day on Friday in the Falcon area, looking for Least Grebe, lingering wintering ducks like Canvasback (our only chance for Muscovy Duck will be here), all three kingfishers, Gray Hawk, Hook-billed Kite (if we get lucky), Red-billed Pigeon (this also is our only chance for this species during the trip), Black Phoebe, Great Kiskadee, Audubon and Altimira Orioles. This will be an early morning (getting going around 5:00 am) because we will be staying in Laredo all three nights and it is an hour and a half drive to Falcon. The afternoon will be spent birding Zapata and San Ygnacio. The White-collared Seedeater will be our primary target at San Ygnacio and around the Zapata Library. Other good birds we may encounter are Chihuahuan Raven, migrant warblers like Townsend's and maybe Black-throated Gray Warbler, Cassin's, Brewer's, Olive and Clay-colored Sparrows, Lark Bunting and Green-tailed Towhee. You will need to bring a lunch on this day because there are very limited locations to stop to pick up a lunch in the Zapata area. We will spend the rest of the trip birding in and around Laredo with Susan looking for Scaled Quail, Zone-tailed Hawk, Ferruginous Hawk and Yellow-headed Blackbird. We will stop for lunch on Saturday, so you will not need to bring a lunch.

This should be a great trip where we will spend a good bit of time trying to find some of the tougher LRGV specialties. We will have two great leaders to help us find these birds, so you will not want to miss it.

Accommodations & Directions: We will be staying in Laredo at the [Family Gardens Inn & Suites](#). (Click the link to view a map for their location.) The hotel is located directly off of IH 35/US 83 between W Calton Road and W Mann Road. The address for the hotel is 5830 San Bernardo Ave, Laredo, TX 78041 and the phone number is 1-800-292-4053. The rate is going to be \$65 a night plus taxes. When you call in to make you reservation, ask to speak with **Stacy Fritz** (extension 326) and mention to her that you are with the Houston Ornithology Group. Please plan on getting there before 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, April 10th.

We will be meeting in the hotel lobby to go to dinner at 7:30, and I will let everybody know at that point what time they will need to be ready to go the next morning. It will be early. If you can't make the dinner, please contact me so that I can let you know when and where to meet us Friday morning.

If you are interested in going on this trip, please let me know.

~ Adam Wood. *OG Field Trip Coordinator*

birdsondabrain@earthlink.net

713-515-1692

Ducks at a Distance, the pocket guide that Michael distributed at the January Learning Corner, is no longer in print. I am aware of three ways you may obtain a copy...

- Your friendly National Wildlife Refuge manager MAY still have some copies available for educational purposes. Stuart Marcus, Trinity NWR manager, generously donated the copies for OG.
- <http://www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/birds/waterfwl/index.htm> has the pages to download/print. (I have not tried this, so I can't comment on the quality, or the number of pages it takes.)
- Kalkomey Enterprises has the reprints available to order. The pocket guide is \$3.50 from <http://stores.kepubs.com> or 2906 Ladybird Lane, Dallas, TX, 75220

-- Bernice Hotman

England: A Birder's Impressions

Hello Fellow Birders,

This is a birding update from England. It begins with what for me is a first. I'm sitting at my computer, looking out the window, and what do I see? A female Ring-necked Pheasant on the roof of the neighbor's barn next door. Yes, it's the same pheasant as the ones in Texas, but it's on the bloody roof of a barn! Actually, we have five females and at least one male as daily visitors in the "apple orchard" (a half-acre plot with two apple trees). They love the bugs that accumulate in the fallen apples littering the ground under the trees. I was going to clean up the mess, but have decided to enjoy the visitors instead.

I'm not sure if my birding experiences so far are typical in this country, but I'm having a lot of fun looking at all these lifers. I met a fellow newcomer to England at the local bird club meeting, and we're ticking off lifers as fast as we see birds. The local birders are having fun showing us around, and are very friendly and helpful. One person told me that it's nice to have someone new to English birds because it makes common birds fresh for him. (On my first field trip the group's average birding experience was 27 years!) I told him that we experience the same thing when we get visiting birders. It's just fun to help someone see new birds.

It took me five weeks to find House Sparrow and Starling. Turns out that the British have cleaned up their trash, roads, towns, and cities to such an extent that there's no food for several bird species, House Sparrows and Starlings being the most noticeable. (They have also lost most of their flies, which is what they think the birds were eating.) The coastal seabird populations have dropped dramatically, also, because of the totally clean effluent dumped into the sea. This has caused a drastic decline in the micro-ecosystems that had developed at the drainage exits, upon which the fish were feeding. No fish means no sea birds. Cleaning up one's act, trash-wise, seems to have unexpected results.

Learning the new species here isn't very difficult because so many are familiar, even though I may not know the correct name. Take Tits for example. They're Chickadees; there's just a lot more varieties. About half of

the ducks are the same or extremely similar. There's only one Kingfisher, but as brilliantly colored as this one is, there's no need for more. I have refused to try to figure out which Canada goose they have because it hurts my head to think about it-I just let it go as one of the middle-sized ones. Their LBJs mostly seem to be what they call "warblers," though I'd put them in different families. A couple look and act more like wrens, and several are more vireo-like. Since I have many things to keep up with because we're living here (not a lot of "take out" or restaurants, so I'm doing more shopping and cooking, for example), I'm not frantic to see every species. However, I do have a big "target" list. I've put some on the list just because of their name, like the Twite, Brambling, Hobby, Whinchat, and Yellowhammer. It'll be fun saying that I've seen those birds, and a hobby as serious as birding should also be fun.

Rather than tally up the birds I'm seeing (which you can look up in a book), I thought it would be more interesting to talk about how things work in England. It's brilliant, as the locals say. There are countless Reserves (the Brits think it's funny that we "preserve" land, preserves being something one spreads on toast). Most seem to be owned by a conservation organization, The National Trust. Many reserves are free, but some have entrance fees, particularly those owned and operated by the local conservation organizations. Keeping wildlife habitat is a passion of the English, and they do it very well. Keeping green spaces in cities and towns is a hot topic. Preventing the development of farm land is also very important. Any time any development is proposed, whether in town or in the country, notices go out to every citizen in the area, town meetings are held to "discuss" it, and adverts are run in all the local newspapers. They take conservation very seriously.

And they enjoy the results of their efforts daily. There is an entire network of paths across England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland that are open to the public. Most of the historic sites (and there are a lot) can be accessed via the path system. Folks here are into walking; it's a national activity. The British are very outdoorsy. (...cont. p. 6)

(continued...) I noticed at a local reserve that every wood boardwalk and bridge had chicken wire stapled down the middle of the walk to give excellent traction on the wet, mossy, muddy wood. It's done everywhere we go! It's a brilliant way to solve a slippery problem.

The National Trust has done some incredible work saving habitat, and not just in this country. They've spread their reach to include many habitat protection projects in under-developed countries, especially those recovering from natural disasters and wars. One war-torn country asked The National Trust to be their partner in forest protection just because they had helped out one of the

villages with supplies during the war. They seem to try to have their hands in as many pies as possible to reap future rewards, just like we do. However, one of the differences here is how well educated the public is about the need to pay to keep habitat and species protected. Admittedly, they've had 5,000 years of history on this small island to prove to them that managing the land correctly is the only assurance they have that future generations will have any nature to enjoy. It's incredible to be in a place where everyone living here values nature so highly.

--Kathy Farr (past OG Chairman), Nov. 2007

2007-2008 Christmas Bird Count Roundup for the Upper Texas Coast

Dec. 15: Brazos Bend State Park -- Rain followed by chilly high winds and less than favorable conditions didn't prevent over 40 participants, including several OG members, from enjoying the 23rd CBC at Brazos Bend State Park. The results were down about 5-10% at 136 species. This was likely due to the birds being more sensible than our participants in keeping out of the weather! American Woodcock, Peregrine Falcon, Yellow-throated Vireo, Yellow-breasted Chat, Least Flycatcher and a number of Common Goldeneye were special treats, but it was Stephan Lorenz and the sighting (and photograph) of an American Redstart which made him the winner of the "Big Bird" award for the event. BBQ was enjoyed by all at the conclusion, and the date for 2008 was set as Saturday, December 20. Hope to see you there! -- *Bill Godley*

Dec. 17: Matagorda County Mad Island Marsh -- 236 species were reported on our 15th CBC. 113 field observers began counting at midnight and continued until 6 p.m. The winds stayed relatively mild and blew out of the east all day, making bay waters easy to bird, but it was much colder than the forecast for low 40s. Better birds included Aplomado Falcon, Franklin's Gull, Acadian Flycatcher, Wood Thrush, Yellow Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Summer Tanager, Olive Sparrow, Green-tailed Towhee and Pyrrhuloxia. Mad Island is a great

count for many reasons. However, from a total species standpoint, we are probably best known for our lingering neotrops. With this year being another "down" year, we still amassed 13 species of warblers, a number which few CBCs in the country can duplicate. -- *Brent Ortego*

Dec. 18: Galveston -- The Galveston CBC listed 171 species on December 18, 2007. Highlights included Red-eyed Vireo, Broad-winged Hawk, Hairy Woodpecker, Nashville Warbler, Northern Waterthrush, Glaucous Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Yellow and Black Rails, Stilt Sandpiper, Groove-billed Ani, Horned Grebe, and Fulvous Whistling Ducks. The 2008 Galveston County Spring Count is scheduled for May 3, 2008 and the 2008 Galveston CBC is scheduled for December 16, 2008. -- *Dwight Peake*

Dec. 21: Guadalupe River Delta - McFaddin Family Ranches -- 220 species were reported on our 4th CBC. Some of the better birds were Fulvous Whistling-Duck, Long-tailed Duck, Aplomado Falcon, White-tipped Dove, Groove-billed Ani, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Pauraque, Black Phoebe, Great Crested Flycatcher, Bell's Vireo, Chihuahuan Raven, N. Parula, Yellow Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Am. Redstart, Ovenbird, Summer Tanager, and Pyrrhuloxia. -- *Brent Ortego*

Dec. 29: Buffalo Bayou -- The 2007 version of the BBCBC did what it often does to a veteran participant: it stirred wonderment anew. I've always been enchanted by this count circle, centered at the Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary; its urban/suburban fabric is constantly evolving (just listen to the stories of the 15,20,25, and 30 year participants). To be able to observe over time how our local and migrating avifauna interact with it makes for an interesting laboratory environment. In much of the urban area of the count, it can be difficult to find sizeable areas of unmowed grass. Lucien Bouffard and I found such a space behind Westwood Mall along Bray's Bayou, and there we saw Osprey, Belted Kingfisher, Great and Snowy Egret, Blue-winged Teal, Mexican Mallard, Kestrel, Shrike, and Red-tailed Hawk (which had just captured a rodent in the unmowed grass)! We saw all this in close proximity to large numbers of urban species such as House Sparrow, grackle, Starling, Rock Pigeon, and doves, against a backdrop of wave after wave of cormorants and ibis flying into Braeburn Country Club to roost for the night. You bet I'm excited about next year! (Many thanks to you, Bob Romero!) I love the thrill that can occur in many parts of the BBCBC, of forgetting that you are in the midst of a major metropolitan area. -- *Michael Williams*

Jan. 1: Cypress Creek -- Katy Prairie -- A record 66 observers reported a record 146 species on this year's CBC. We also had access to a record number of acres thanks to the Katy Prairie Conservancy and its many land partners. Access to other private ranches and acreages like the Kelsey Ranch, Laas Ranch and Bridgeland Properties gave us access to over 32,000 acres. Unusual birds included Yellow-crowned Night-heron, Glossy Ibis, Golden Eagle, Prairie Falcon, Common Moorhen, Ladderback Woodpecker, Cave Swallow, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Palm Warbler, and Pyrrhuloxia. The Golden Eagle was reported from the Longenbaugh Katy-Hockley FM 529 area by Caroline Callery and is hanging around the prairie; I have now had three reports from three different locations in the 13 days since the count. The Prairie Falcon reported by Al Shultz has also been confirmed by Adam Woods on Penick Road above the greenhouse area. This is also where one of two Ferruginous Hawks was reported. The day was beautiful, but strong wind

made birding difficult and occasionally unpleasant. We missed some species that we normally get during count week if not on count day: Canvasback, Redhead, Goldeneye, Western Sandpiper, Forster's Tern, Short-eared Owl, Red-headed Woodpecker, Couch's Kingbird, Gray Catbird, and Grasshopper Sparrow. Thanks to all who made this our best count yet. Join us for number 33 on January 1, 2009. -- *Fred Collins*

Jan. 5: San Jacinto Wilderness -- An incredible 43 birders lent themselves to an awesome effort for the debut of this count. This circle covers parts of Harris, Montgomery and Liberty Counties and has within its boundaries thousands of acres of riparian woodlands and flatwoods preserved in Lake Houston Parkland Damuth Preserve, as well as hundreds more acres of private ranchland outside Dayton. To cover an area this diverse, we employed both road (The Tri-Lakes Roadies) and kayak (The Iron Ducks) crews as well as several groups dedicated to specific parts of the preserves (LHP Trekkers and Damuth Diehards). The Dayton Prairie Muckers took on two huge landholdings in Liberty County. The Iron Ducks had quite a misadventure on their trip down the San Jacinto River's East Fork. Being stymied by low water, they made little headway, so darkness fell with them still on the river. They were mistaken for poachers and apprehended at gunpoint by a local resident. Some tense phone calls were made and the sheriff intervened before they were exonerated. The local vigilante apologized profusely and drove them back to their cars, and they were all home before midnight. They can't wait 'til next year! By contrast, the Dayton Prairie Muckers had better luck, thanks to a serendipitous meeting with a major landowner who had a Bald Eagle on his property and was anxious to show it to us. Having already seen a Peregrine earlier in the day, seeing our national symbol was icing on the cake - or was that the thousands of Snow Geese rising up from the pasture as one organism? While we didn't quite reach our stated goal of triple digits for species (a real milestone for an inland count), seeing just shy of 11,000 birds and 94 species reveals quite a bit of effort, and this is without Damuth being covered! So, we look forward to more birds in the future! -- *David F. Henderson*

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The Spoonbill Wants Your Help...

Stories, notes, trip reports, or other materials for future issues are always welcome. Send to the Editor at

og_spoonbill@earthlink.net

TO START OR RENEW A MEMBERSHIP:

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ONC Annual Dues:	\$ 8.00	\$ 15.00
OG Annual Dues:	\$ 14.00	\$ 19.00
Total:	\$ 22.00	\$ 34.00

Additional contributions are welcome in any amount.

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PO Box 270894
Houston TX 77277-0894

Membership questions? Contact Margret Simmons
phone 713-776-2511
msimmons@compassnet.com

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