



The Spoonbill

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

September 2020

Welcome to the beginning of our Fall activities!

Although Bayland Community Center has reopened, in an abundance of caution, we will once again use the Zoom online platform for our Sept 14 meeting. A Zoom account is not required if you are only joining Zoom Meetings as a participant. You can participate using a computer, tablet, or cell phone.

Join Zoom Meeting: <https://utexas.zoom.us/j/93965127303> Meeting ID: 93965127303
The Zoom lobby will open at 6:45pm for check-in, and the meeting will begin at 7:00pm.

The program, "**The Pandemic Birding Boom: Opportunities in the Time of Covid-19,**" will be given by Megan Ahlgren, Harris County Naturalist at Kleb Woods/John Paul Landing

The pandemic brought a surge of interest in birds and nature as people spent more time at home and in their local parks. Birding has proven to be a great social distancing activity (see photo), although restrictions have caused many of us to change how and where we bird. But between spending more time with your local area birds and an ever-growing number of virtual offerings, there are still plenty of opportunities to grow as a birder during this time.



September Trivia Q: What is the most common wild bird in the world? (Answer is at the very end)

2020 Membership

If you have not yet renewed your 2020 membership, please do so. The ONC/OG has continuing expenses for our website, Zoom, speakers, yearbook printing, and maintenance of the Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary.

OG single membership \$20, Family \$30, or consider once-in-a-lifetime ONC dues! Life membership \$250, Patron \$500, Founder \$1000, or Benefactor \$5000.

Please make checks payable to “Outdoor Nature Club” and mail to:

Outdoor Nature Club, P.O. Box 1014, Bellaire, TX 77402-1014



New ONC Life Member

Please welcome our newest ONC Life Member, Billi Wagner, from Vero Beach, Florida! She participated in OG’s Christmas Mountains Oasis-Big Bend trip in Sept 2019 and the Matagorda Island trip in April 2020, and several of you met her then, or at the Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival and El Cielo trip in Nov 2018. Billi has been birding for decades and has visited Australia six times, spending 6 months in Queensland in 2000; it took her three trips before she finally saw Southern Cassowary. She returned there in January to bird Tasmania & Queensland with Teresa Connell. Billi and Nina met through the Bird-a-Day challenge, which originated in Florida. Her local bird club is Pelican Island Audubon, Indian River County. Her nemesis bird is Black-billed Cuckoo. She says the best migration birding on FL’s Atlantic coast is in the fall (beginning in August, but particularly good in the first half of Oct) and the best migration on the FL Gulf coast is in the Spring. OG members travelling to Florida are welcome to contact her at cassowary@bellsouth.net



Bird Week 2020 will be held Sept 19-26, celebrating the important role Houston plays in the journey of billions of migratory birds and the everyday lives of our resident birds. Think virtual bird walks, classes, trivia, movie night, and more. For those in-person experiences, the event will have socially distanced events such as outdoor watch parties and bird walks for small groups.
www.HoustonAudubon.org/BirdWeek

Ornithology Group Fall 2020 Field Trips

Sat, Oct 3 – Bear Creek Park with Drew Dickert, Meet at 7:30am at Equestrian Parking Lot

Sat, Oct 24 – Birding at Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary, San Jacinto County

Sat, Nov 14 – Cullinan Park, Sugar Land, With Robbin Mallett and other local volunteers

Tues, Dec 1 – Keith-Weiss Park, 12300 Aldine Westfield Rd, with Nina Rach & Tira Overstreet

Local birding events

In addition to the OG fall field trips ...

Baytown Nature Center Monthly Bird Count –

Friday, Sept 18, meet David Hanson & Chuck Davis at 8:00am in the parking lot behind the entrance building.

Smith Point Hawk Watch, Aug 15-Nov 30 –

Sponsored by the GCBO and other organizations, there are special rules for 2020 COVID-19 birding.

See: <https://www.gcbo.org/avian-research-and-monitoring/smith-point-hawk-watch/>

Seabourne Creek Park, Weekly Wednesday Bird

Walks - Beginning Oct 7, meet at 8:00am

Kleb Woods Nature Preserve –

Wed morning bird walks, 8:30am-11:30am

Kleb Woods staff also run First Saturday bird walks, 8-10am (Sept 5, Oct 3, Nov 7, Dec 5)

John Paul Landing –

Thurs morning bird walks 8:30am-11:30am



Volunteer Opportunities!

The **Ornithology Group** needs a Newsletter Editor for The Spoonbill, as Larry Dybala stepped down. Enjoy our field trips? We really could use a Field Trip Coordinator to insure that they continue! The OG Vice-Chair (**your name here**) is in charge of arranging our monthly speakers – consider volunteering and trying this out for a year!

The **Outdoor Nature Club**, which is the nonprofit educational and scientific organization of which the Ornithology Group is a part, has four board positions, all of which are filled for two-year terms.

In even-numbered years (2020) we vote on the Sanctuaries VP, and Secretary/Treasurer. Charles Peterson is currently our Sanctuaries VP, and Connie Blakley is our Secretary/Treasurer.

In odd-numbered years (2021), we vote on President and Membership VP.

We normally hold an election in May, but that was not possible this year due to Covid-19, and so we are sending out mail ballots this month. Please return your response as soon as possible, and we will announce the results in the November issue of the Spoonbill.

Record-keeper extraordinaire Connie Blakley has served for many years as ONC Secretary/ Treasurer but would like to step down for a well-deserved break. This is an extremely important position, fundamental to the operation of the entire organization, and we all hope that someone will step up to take over this essential job.



Texas State Parks Status

Almost all Texas State Parks are open, although access and hours may be limited, and camping still closed at some. The following are closed: Honey Creek SNA (Spring Branch), Balmorhea SP (Toyahvale), and Wyler Aerial Tramway (El Paso).

Texas' National Parks status

Big Bend National Park is partially open (day-use only). The paved road between Persimmon Gap and Maverick entrances is open. The road to Chisos Basin is open, and the road to Rio Grande Village. Most trails along those roads are open. No camping or lodging open yet.

On Tuesday, Sept 15, the Chisos Basin Campground will reopen, with groups limited to one household or 8 people, and reservations **MUST** be booked through www.recreation.gov. No first-come-first-served camping allowed. All paved park roads will be open and some improved gravel roads will re-open.

Also on Sept 15, the Rio Grande will open for day-use river trips from paved access points, and several additional hiking trails will re-open: Balanced Rock, Upper/Lower Burro Mesa, Ward Spring, Burro Spring, Chimneys, Mule Ears Spring, Tuff Canyon, Dorgan-Sublett, Santa Elena Canyon, & Blue Creek.

See: <https://www.nps.gov/bibe/planyourvisit/big-bend-covid-19-status-updates.htm>

As of Sept 1, **Guadalupe Mountains National Park** has reopened the following trails and areas: Devil's Hall Trail, Guadalupe Peak Trail, McKittrick Canyon, Smith Springs Loop Trail (one-way traffic), Frijole Ranch Area (Ranch House will remain closed), and Salt Basin Dunes Area

This is a positive step and we hope to see both of the campgrounds, the restrooms, back-country access, Dog Canyon, Williams Ranch, and the visitor center re-open as well.

See: <https://www.nps.gov/gumo/guadalupe-mountains-national-park-covid-19-status-updates.htm>

24th Great Texas Birding Classic

For the first time ever, this spring event has moved to the fall due to the public health crisis. Coinciding with the fall migration, the GTBC is perfect for novice birders and nature lovers who want to get outside and take part in the competition.

Tournament Dates: October 1-31, 2020
(your choice of day)

[Registration](#) Deadline: September 14, 2020

[Conservation Grant](#) Deadline: October 1, 2020

<https://tpwd.texas.gov/events/great-texas-birding-classic>



ICF Birding Webinars

The International Crane Foundation's 2020 From the Field webinar series take place live at 11am CST on Thursdays; Please register in advance, online (free). They are also recorded for future viewing:

<https://www.savingcranes.org/from-field-webinar-series/>

Upcoming ICF webinars (will run through January 2021):

Sept 17: **“Turning Threats Into Opportunities – A Global Review of Threats to Cranes and How We Are Resolving Them,”** by Asia Program Manager Jane Austin, Grants Officer Claire Mirande, Research Wildlife Biologist (Emeritus) at the USGS Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center) and Rich Beilfuss (ICF President and CEO)



Sept 24: **Rearing and Release of Whooping Cranes**, with Senior Aviculturist Marianne Wellington, North America Program Crane Analyst Hillary Thompson, and Louisiana Department and Wildlife and Fisheries staff Sara Zimorski and Eva Szyszkoski

Oct 1: **Education, Outreach and Conservation Leadership**, with Whooping Crane Outreach Coordinator Lizzie Condon and Education Program Coordinator Ben Lam

Oct 8: **Prairie Primer and Restoration**, with Crane Project Manager Andy Gossens

Oct 29: **Crane Matchmaking and Socialization**, with Assistant Curator of Birds, Cyndie Gitter

Nov 5: **California and Western Cranes**, with crane enthusiast and International Crane Foundation volunteer Paul Tebbel

Nov 12: **How Cranes Coexist With Nomads and Livestock on Fragile Landscapes in Mongolia**, with Research Associate Nyamba Batbayar and Director of Conservation Networking Claire Mirande

Nov 19: Crane art topic, with Kim Russell, Illustrator

A few of the past ICF webinars, available on ICF's YouTube channel

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLv7xse_8iVaPfK1yNIXy2pfwPUZY1Oxn5

- **Slow but a Win – Local Community Engagement to Secure Cranes and Wetlands in Uganda**, by East Africa Regional Manager Adalbert Aine-omucunguzi (Sept 10)
- **Mysteries of the Cranes of Australia and New Guinea**, by ICF Co-founder George Archibald and Tim Nevard, Co-founder of the Wildlife Conservancy of Tropical Queensland (now Forever Wild) and an Adjunct Professor at James Cook University. (Aug 27)
- **Sandhill Cranes – Who, What, Where and Why?**, by Anne Lacy and Andy Gossens (Aug 20)
- **Understanding the Future of the Agriculturally Dependent Blue Crane in the Western Cape South Africa**, by Christie Anne Craig (Aug 13)
- **Conservation Technology – Fun with Databases and Maps to Ensure a Future for Cranes Around the World**, by ICF's Geospatial & Information Services Manager Dorn Moore (Aug 6)
- **Conserving Whooping Cranes and Their African Cousins, the Wattled Crane**, by Drakensberg Coordinator Lara Jordan and South African Regional Manager Tanya Smith

Upcoming Ornithology Group meetings (Monday evenings, on Zoom for the time being)

Oct 5 – Program: “Peeps and Pipers” (shorebirds), by Glenn Olsen

Nov 2 – Program: “Birding in Tasmania,” by Teresa Connell & Billi Wagner

Dec 7 – Program: “Birds and More in Southeast Asia,” by Kendra Kocab

Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary Open Days (Saturdays) in Fall 2020:

September 26, October 24 (OG birding), December 5

Ornithology Group - www.OrnithologyGroup.org

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| Chair | Nina Rach | Nina.Rach@yahoo.com |
| Vice-chair (Programs) | - Open | |
| Field Trips | - Open | |
| Secretary | Jean Greenhalgh | Jeanbrit01@yahoo.com |
| Treasurer | Harlan Evans | HarlanJ42@sbcglobal.net |
| Membership | Michael Honel | MichaelHonel@sbcglobal.net |
| The Spoonbill Editor | - Open! – temporarily Nina - | Nina.Rach@yahoo.com |
| ONC Board Rep. | Tira Overstreet | Oddbird47@comcast.net |

Trivia Q answer:

Red-billed Quelea, aka **Red-billed Weaver**, *Quelea quelea*, is the most common wild bird in the world. It's a small (up to 4.7-inch-long), sparrow-like, seed-eating, migratory bird native to sub-Saharan Africa. World population of these passerines in the Weaver family (Ploceidae) is ~1.5 billion birds. They form vast flocks and communal breeding colonies in the millions, weaving nests with roofs.

This species was first named in 1758 by Swedish zoologist Carl Linnaeus, in the 10th edition of his *Systema Naturae*, as a bunting, *Emberiza quelea*. <https://www.gbif.org/species/2493987>

It was reassigned to the new genus *Quelea*, in 1850, by German ornithologist and botanist Ludwig Reichenbach (1793-1879). www.gbif.org/species/2493986

Three subspecies:

1. *Quelea quelea quelea*, in West Africa, the northern and western-most population, from Mauritania and Senegal east to Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad.
2. *Q.q. Aethiopica*, in East Africa, across Ethiopia, Sudan, Kenya, and Tanzania
3. *Q.q. Lathamii*, in southern Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, and South Africa.