

# A History of the Origin and First Decade of the Texas Ornithological Society, 1953–1963

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## Abstract

The Texas Ornithological Society was organized on February 14, 1953, at Austin, Texas, as a result of the promotional efforts of Charles McNeese and his fellow enthusiasts in the Outdoor Nature Club of Houston. The original purposes of the society included the observation, study and conservation of the birds of Texas and the stimulation of fellowship among ornithologists of Texas and the Southwest.

The society is administered by an executive board consisting of the officers and eight regional directors. The scissor-tailed flycatcher was chosen in 1956 as the official bird, with the emblem of the society being a flying scissor-tail superimposed on a map of the state of Texas. Field trips have been an important part of the activities of the society since its origination.

The official publication of the society during its first decade was a monthly newsletter providing news of members, the results of Christmas bird counts, migration reports and other information regarding birds. In 1955, the Charles H. McNeese Library of Ornithology was established as a memorial to the first president of the society. Conservation was also a major emphasis of the early society with support given for protection of the white-winged dove, golden eagle and Harris' hawk, as well as other wildlife species.

## Charles Harold McNeese

The formation and successful management of an organization is often due to the vision and leadership of a single person and a few dedicated co-workers. Indeed, this was particularly true for the Texas Ornithological Society, which was first conceived and promoted by Charles McNeese and his fellow enthusiasts.

Charles McNeese was born on August 22, 1892, in Bellaire, Ohio. He was the youngest of the five children of John and Maggie McNeese. The fam-



*Charles H. McNeese  
Initiator and First President  
of Texas Ornithological Society*

ily lived in Bellaire until their move in 1914 to Oklahoma City, where Charles enlisted in the Oklahoma National Guard. In 1916, his unit was mobilized and sent to the Mexican Border near San Benito, Texas. In early 1917, he was discharged at Fort Sill, only to be recalled and sent to Texas for officer

training at Leon Springs. Following this training, he was sent to France where he saw eight months of combat duty and was promoted to captain before returning home in 1918.

McNeese graduated from the University of Oklahoma in 1920 with a major in geology, and soon afterward he was employed by Continental Oil Company. He married Hazel Steele, and in 1925, they moved to Ponca City, Oklahoma. With the outbreak of World War II, McNeese was appointed to the Fuel Section of the Office of Price Administration. In March 1942, he was called to active duty and, in the summer of 1943, was sent to Guadalcanal. In October, he returned to Temple, Texas, for medical treatment before being transferred to Camp Wolters near Mineral Wells. In May 1944, following his discharge as a lieutenant-colonel, McNeese resumed his position as a valuation engineer with Continental Oil Company. In 1950, his wife died, and in the following year he was transferred to Houston.<sup>1</sup>

How and when McNeese became interested in birds is unknown. It is known only that by the late 1940s he had become an avid birder and was active in the Oklahoma Ornithological Society, which was founded in 1950. In 1953, he became a member of the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU).

Shortly after his transfer to Houston in 1951, McNeese joined the Outdoor Nature Club. Finding here a num-

ber of other persons interested in birds, he and his new friends set out to organize an "Ornithology Group" within the club. On April 11, 1952, the group was formally organized with the election of McNeese as chairman; Francis MacMahon, vice-chairman for projects; Noel Pettingell, vice-chairman for field trips; Frank Graham Watson, editor-recorder; and Carrie Holcomb, secretary-treasurer.<sup>2</sup>

### *Laying the Groundwork*

The Ornithology Group became immediately active through local field trips that served to unify the members. In an effort to make contact with birders from other parts of the state, a field trip was conducted to Del Rio where the Houston contingent was joined by a party from Midland that included John and Margret Galley, Harold and Frances Williams and Don Curry. The success of this excursion led to another extended trip where the Houstonians made the acquaintance of Luther Goldman, manager of the Laguna Atascosa and Santa Ana refuges in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.<sup>3</sup> Although the discussions on these field trips are unknown, it is probable that a state bird organization was often the topic of conversation.

During late September, it was decided to test the sentiment concerning the formation of a state society and, accordingly, on October 4, 1952, Charles McNeese sent a letter to 120 ornithologists and birders throughout the state inviting them to express their thoughts on the subject. Twenty-eight persons responded to this letter with expressions of support and specific suggestions.<sup>4</sup> Marshal Johnston counseled that conservation efforts should not be restricted to birds, but should include animals as well as plants. Johnston also suggested that the state should be divided into faunal and floristic regions with each region having a chairman or director. In contrast, Kent Rylander focused attention on the need for a bulletin and the advisability of having regular meetings. Several persons also sent the names of additional

birders who they thought should be contacted. One respondent noted that Connie Hagar had not been informed and that if this eminent birder had heard nothing then many others did not yet know of the proposed society.<sup>5</sup>

During October 20–25, Charles McNeese and Frank Watson attended the AOU convention at Baton Rouge where they met with other Texans in attendance. At this time, it was agreed to meet in conjunction with the Texas Academy of Science, which was to convene in Fort Worth in December. However, when it was later learned that the agenda of the Academy was full, the decision was made to hold an informal planning session.<sup>6</sup>

On November 25, 1952, McNeese mailed a second letter to the birders and ornithologists informing them of the planning session that was to be held on the evening of December 5 at the Colonial Cafeteria near the campus of Texas Christian University. This meeting, chaired by Everett T. Dawson of the Texas Game and Fish Commission, was attended by 24 people who engaged in lively discussion. Pauline James reported that Texas was one of the few states without a state bird organization. As a historical aside, Joe Heiser noted that a year or two earlier he had discussed the idea of a state society or perhaps a branch of the AOU with Leonard Wing, George Petrides, George Williams and Charles Hamilton, but no action had been taken. Several of the people present felt that they could not commit their local groups but expressed their individual willingness to participate. The meeting ended with general support for the proposed society, but no additional plans were made.<sup>7</sup>

### *Organization of the Society*

On December 16, 1952, Everett Dawson notified Charles McNeese that he had made arrangements for a meeting room at the Commodore Perry Hotel in Austin. Very little took place after this time until January 17, 1953, when McNeese mailed a letter "To All Interested Ornithologists" informing them

that the long-awaited organizational meeting would take place in Austin during the afternoon of Saturday, April 14, 1953. Recipients of the letter were requested to be thinking of potential officers for the society, particularly the president whom McNeese thought should be someone "connected with ornithology in a professional way."

Fifty-eight persons attended the organizational meeting. E. T. Dawson hosted the group and officiated until Charles McNeese was selected as temporary chairman. The first business undertaken was the adoption of a constitution followed by the election of officers. The constitution of the new society declared that its objective was to promote the discovery and dissemination of knowledge of birds; to encourage the observation, study and conservation of the birds of Texas; and to stimulate fellowship among ornithologists of Texas and the Southwest by an annual meeting and field trip. All persons engaged in the observation of birds or interested in their study and protection were eligible for membership. Individuals who became members prior to May 14, 1953, were considered charter members. Forty-five of those present on February 14 became members at that time.<sup>8</sup>

Time was to prove that the constitution that had been adopted would not serve the best interests of the society. The amendment procedure was difficult, and since the document contained no by-laws section, even minor changes required the full amendment process. In addition, the yearly election of officers did not provide the continuity of leadership necessary to carry out long-range objectives. The ongoing correction of these deficiencies occupied the attention of the society for the next five years.

### *Slate of Officers*

The original leadership of TOS consisted entirely of lay people. Charles McNeese was elected president. Supporting McNeese was a slate of officers, two of whom, Frank Watson

and Carrie Holcomb, would later serve as presidents of the society.

Vice-President William Deans Anderson had been a country schoolteacher in Alberta, Canada, before moving to Austin where he owned a general contracting firm. Anderson had no special interest in birds until he began construction of the Texas Game and Fish marine laboratory at Rockport. While working on this project, he often stayed at the cottages owned by Jack and Connie Hagar. On one occasion, Jack Bowman, a marine biologist, asked him to go on a field trip to the second chain of islands. While the rest of the party searched for invertebrates, he and the captain looked at birds. One bird that particularly interested Anderson was identified by the captain as a flamingo. When this information was shared with Connie Hagar, she told him that the bird was actually a reddish egret, and she then proceeded to give him some instruction on how to identify birds. As the year progressed, Anderson became more interested in ornithology and often went birding with Connie, building a friendship that he and his wife, Agatha, continued for many years. Anderson was a member of both the Wilson Ornithological Society (1950)

and the AOU (1952). Because of the demands of his work, he was reluctant to become an officer, but was encouraged by Magnolia Greene, of Austin, who was very enthusiastic about the organization of the society.<sup>9</sup>

Secretary-Treasurer Bascom Bryan Watson was born on September 17, 1896, in Tatum, Rusk County, Texas, the third son of William and Johnnie Murphy Watson. About 1914, Watson moved to Tyler where he later worked for the Cotton Belt Railroad and as a private accountant. In March 1950, Watson and six other men successfully petitioned the city commission of Tyler to designate Langley Island in Lake Tyler as a wildlife and bird sanctuary. This decision was contested with the result that the Tyler Audubon Soci-

ety was formed to develop and preserve the sanctuary. Watson's dedication to conservation and his skill as an accountant were undoubtedly the major factors leading to his election as secretary-treasurer. He died on February 16, 1977, and was buried in Tyler.<sup>10</sup>

Corresponding Secretary Carrie Holcomb brought to the society a deep love of birds and well-developed clerical and management skills. She was born near Frankston in Anderson County, Texas, on October 11, 1897, the sixth child of John Cass and Ella Morgan Holcomb. Her father had a



*Carrie Holcomb*  
*Corresponding Secretary and Sixth President*  
*of Texas Ornithological Society*

peach orchard near Frankston, and it was there that Carrie was first exposed to birds. In later years, she often admonished the local children not to shoot birds with their BB guns and slingshots. Carrie began her career in 1917 as a clerk for the General Claims Agent of International and Great Northern Railroad in Palestine. The I&GN was later purchased by the Missouri Pacific, and Carrie moved to their new headquarters in Houston where she joined the Outdoor Nature Club and later became a member of the AOU. In 1962, after 45 years of service, she retired and returned to Frankston where she lived until her death on August 18, 1972. Carrie often observed that birding was a great leveler of

mankind since all people were equal in their enjoyment of birds.<sup>11</sup>

Editor-Recorder Frank Graham Watson had been involved in ornithology for many years. In 1934, he became a member of the Cooper Ornithological Society and in later years joined the AOU (1936) and the Wilson Ornithological Society (1937). In 1940, he published extensive observations on the behavior of the white-tailed kite in the San Joaquin delta of California. After arriving in Texas, he served as the compiler of the 1952 Houston Christmas Bird Count and was the reporter for Audubon Field Notes from the South Texas Region. Watson served as the second president of TOS until his transfer to the New York office of Shell Oil Company. His last known address was at North Pecos Station in Denver, Colorado, in 1979.<sup>12</sup>

### *Activities During the First Year*

Efforts during the first year were directed toward perfecting the administrative structure of the society. McNeese first enlarged the executive committee by appointing John Galley of Midland, Irby Davis from Harlingen and Jessie Maye Smith from Fort Worth as members-at-large.<sup>13</sup> McNeese then moved to appoint E. T. Dawson to chair the committee to divide the state into regions. In making his recommendations, Dawson relied heavily on a map prepared by B. B. Watson that divided the state into 10 regions. McNeese complimented Dawson's work but offered his personal opinion that the number of regions should be reduced from 10 to six. John Galley was even more conservative, believing that the state should be divided only into southern, eastern, central and western regions.<sup>14</sup> The final decision was for eight regions, and a map showing their limits was published in the December newsletter.

Revision of the constitution was delegated to Jessie Maye Smith who organized a committee in the Fort Worth

*Officers of the Texas Ornithological Society, February 1953–April 1963*

TERM	POSITION	OFFICER
1953–1954	President	Charles McNeese
	Vice-President	W. D. Anderson
	Secretary-Treasurer	B. B. Watson
	Corresponding Secretary	Carrie Holcomb
	Editor-Recorder	Frank Watson
	<i>Organizational Meeting: Austin (1953)</i>	
1954–1955	President	Charles McNeese
	Vice-President	Frank Watson
	Secretary-Treasurer	Eula W. Adams
	Corresponding Secretary	Carrie Holcomb
	Editor-Recorder	Edgar Kincaid
	<i>Annual Meeting: Fort Worth (1954)</i>	
1955–1956	President	Frank Watson*
	Vice-President	John Galley
	Secretary-Treasurer	Eula W. Adams
	Corresponding Secretary	Carrie Holcomb
	Editor-Recorder	Edgar Kincaid
	<i>Annual Meeting: Texas A&amp;M (1955)</i>	
1956–1957	President	John Galley
	Vice-President	Bert W. Lindsay
	Secretary-Treasurer	Carrie Holcomb
	Corresponding Secretary	Frances Williams
	Editor-Recorder	Edgar Kincaid
	<i>Annual Meeting: MO-Ranch (1956)</i>	
1957–1958	President	Clarence Cottam
	Vice-President	Warren Pulich
	Secretary-Treasurer	Carrie Holcomb
	Corresponding Secretary	M. K. Rylander
	Editor-Recorder	Anne LeSassier
	<i>Annual Meeting: Austin (1957)</i>	
1958–1959	President	A. Earle Jourde
	Vice-President	Carrie Holcomb
	Secretary-Treasurer	Norah O'Neil
	Corresponding Secretary	Dorothy Kerr
	Editor	Anne LeSassier
	<i>Annual Meeting: Corpus Christi (1958)</i>	
1959–1961	President	Carrie Holcomb
	Vice-President	Edgar Kincaid
	Secretary	Ruth Moorman
	Treasurer	George S. Adams
	Editor	Anne LeSassier
	<i>Annual Meetings: Tyler (1959), San Benito (1960)</i>	
1961–1963	President	M. A. Yramategui
	Vice-President	Edgar Kincaid
	Secretary	Ruth Moorman
	Treasurer	George S. Adams,**
	Editor	Carroll E. Kiblinger
	Anne LeSassier,***	
	Norma Oates	
	<i>Annual Meetings: San Antonio (1961), MO-Ranch (1962)</i>	

\* Frank Watson resigned as president on September 30, 1955, and John Galley became acting president.

\*\* George S. Adams resigned September 1961 and was replaced by C. E. Kiblinger.

\*\*\* Anne LeSassier resigned November 1961 and was replaced by Norma Oates.

area consisting of Eula W. Adams, chairman, Katie Casstevens and R. E. Hardwicke. Proposed revisions included division of the state into regions and the appointment of a director from each region who would also serve on the executive committee. Membership and Publicity, Field Trip, and Conservation Committees were also proposed with the president having authority to appoint chairmen.<sup>15</sup>

Membership increased dramatically, and by May 14 the charter membership roll listed 325 members, of which 307 resided in Texas and 17 in 14 other states. One member lived in Canada. Richard O. Albert, who later served as president of the society, learned of TOS while living in Florida. Included as charter members were such eminent ornithologists and naturalists as Alexander Sprunt IV, William B. Stallcup, George H. Lowrey, Roger Tory Peterson, Harry C. Oberholser, George M. Sutton, James H. Zimmerman and Roy Bedichek.<sup>16</sup>

Twelve issues of the newsletter were published during 1953. Major articles included summaries of Texas and Mexican Christmas Counts, as well as the Audubon Field Notes from South Texas. The activities of various bird and nature clubs were regular features. Results of field trips were published as was the news of members, particularly those on vacation who sent reports of their bird sightings. Research notes included a nesting record for the zone-tailed hawk, observations on the peregrine falcon and a summer record for the white-throated sparrow. Noel Pettingell and Frank Watson also published an informative note on the "History of Christmas Counts in Texas."

On February 20–21, 1954, the society held its first annual meeting at the Fort Worth Children's Museum where Frank Watson was elected vice-president, Eula W. Adams secretary-treasurer and Edgar Kincaid editor-recorder. McNeese and Holcomb were re-elected to their original offices. The number of votes required to approve the proposed constitutional

revisions had not been received at the time of the annual meeting, and therefore, no action was taken to appoint regional directors or committee chairmen. However, by April 1, the revisions had been approved, and McNeese named Peggy Acord, W. D. Anderson, Keith L. Dixon, John Galley, Janice B. Lacey, Frances A. Wier, Eula Whitehouse and Irby Davis as regional directors. Manuel Armand Yramategui was appointed as chairman of the conservation committee.

### *Involvement in Conservation Issues*

Edgar Kincaid enthusiastically used his position as editor to set the tone for TOS involvement in conservation issues. According to Kincaid the "observation and study of birds are the greatest of all possible joys, but the plain truth is that there must be some birds before observation and study can proceed."<sup>17</sup> A significant portion of the July 1954 newsletter was devoted to the need for a closed season to allow recovery of

the white-winged dove. M. A. Yramategui also addressed this issue through letters to the Texas Game and Fish Commission and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Responding to the recommendations of its field biologists and the concerns of conservationists, the Game and Fish Commission approved a closed season on white-wings. Kincaid was elated but philosophical about this decision, observing that "the season might have been closed even if the TOS had taken no action." In defense of the actions of the society, he further noted that "conservation, like war, is far too important a matter to leave strictly to the professionals." McNeese, however, recognized the political value of the situation and immediately penned a letter to the commissioners

congratulating them on their decision and offering the cooperation and expertise of the society on future issues.<sup>18</sup>

The establishment of a working relationship with the Fish and Game Commission was soon to bear fruit. For some months, the commissioners had considered sponsoring the publication of Roger Tory Peterson's proposed Field Guide to the Birds of Texas, but the prospects for approval were not favorable. McNeese, Yramategui and other TOS members actively promoted the guide, maintaining that it would be of great value in spreading knowledge and appreciation of birds. In October 1954, the commission approved the project, the

Edward Fritz, chairman, Charles McNeese, Peggy Acord, Magnolia Greene, L. G. Huey, W. W. Wimberly and several other conservationists was also formed at this time. Efforts by TOS to obtain protection for the golden eagle continued for several years. An important ally in the cause was West Texas rancher and TOS member Clay Miller, who gave favorable testimony before a senate subcommittee on June 26, 1962.<sup>20</sup> On October 24, 1962, the Golden Eagle Act was passed to provide protection for this misunderstood and persecuted species. Even so, TOS then found itself engaged in a struggle to ensure that the regulatory aspects of the law would

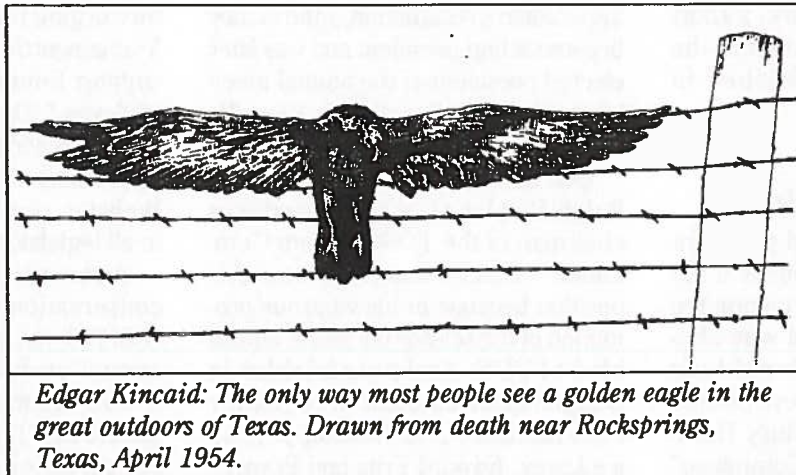
properly protect the eagles.

### *Death of Charles McNeese*

The second annual meeting of the society, held on February 26-27, 1955, featured Roger Tory Peterson as the banquet speaker. McNeese had met earlier with Peterson at the Audubon Convention in New York City and had personally

encouraged him to come to Texas.<sup>21</sup> Peterson needed assistance with his field guide, and McNeese felt that the membership would be inspired by his presence. McNeese did not, however, live to experience this event for he succumbed to a heart attack while preparing to attend the meeting.

McNeese considered conservation to be the principal purpose of the society. His last advice was that "controversial projects should be shunned or approached through an educational program. [TOS] should build a reputation in [its] action that will foster the confidence of the public."<sup>22</sup> McNeese was eulogized at the business session as being "the principal initiator of the Texas Ornithological Society." The loss of his leadership was a heavy blow, for, as Kincaid later noted,



*Edgar Kincaid: The only way most people see a golden eagle in the great outdoors of Texas. Drawn from death near Rocksprings, Texas, April 1954.*

consensus of insiders being that the recommendations by TOS had been the deciding factor.<sup>19</sup> Even so, a contract was not signed until March 1957 with final publication in 1960. The extent of TOS involvement in production of the field guide may be judged by the fact that two-thirds of the 62 persons acknowledged in its preface for technical assistance were members of the society. Peterson was particularly complimentary of Edgar Kincaid for his advice on which records were "unsanitary," a term coined by Kincaid to describe their questionable nature.

In November 1954, Kincaid featured the plight of the golden eagle, illustrating his editorial with a field sketch of a dead eagle hung from a fence. A special Golden Eagle Committee composed of TOS members

McNeese's activities had ranged "all the way from rescuing one of the officers from jail to obtaining the most famous birder in the known universe to provide the program for the second annual meeting."<sup>23</sup>

Edward Fritz's proposal for a permanent memorial to McNeese was realized in May 1955 with the formation of the "McNeese Library of Ornithology." The nucleus of the library consisted of books donated by McNeese's son, Charles Richard, with Ruth Stamm of Houston serving as the first administrator of the collection. Stamm later moved to Oklahoma, and in June 1956, Norma Oates agreed to serve as librarian-historian for the society. Through Norma's work, a short history of TOS was included in the Yearbook that was published in November 1956.<sup>24</sup>

### *Selection of Official Bird and Emblem*

Frank Watson was elected president and John Galley vice-president at the second annual meeting. A committee to select an official bird was also formed with chairman Edward Fritz assisted by Margret Galley, Connie Hagar, Bess Reid and Mary Belle Keefer. The "Official Bird Committee" wasted no time in generating interest in the bird-selection contest, but the final rules were not published until August 1955. There were two categories of participation: an essay contest and a simple nomination. For the essay contest, a 100-word essay in support of the nominated species was required; a simple nomination required only the submission of the name of a bird. J. Frank Dobie, Peter Koch, General Ralph Meyer and Hubert Mewhinney served as judges of the essay contest that featured binoculars as first prize and a Peterson field guide as second prize. The scissor-tailed flycatcher was finally chosen as the official bird although it was also the official bird of the Oklahoma Ornithological Society. Murray Marshall of Dallas won first place for his essay on the whooping crane, and Victor Emanuel won sec-

ond for his essay on Sennett's white-tailed hawk.<sup>25</sup>

In June 1955, a second constitutional review committee proposed that the purposes of the society be expanded to include establishment of a "library and wildlife sanctuaries as the society's means permit." Wildlife sanctuaries were an immediate concern for on August 22, 1955, Frank Watson informed the executive committee of his contact with an individual who wished to donate his farm for use in conservation and education. The executive committee favored this acquisition, but during September 1955, Watson was transferred to New York and the project died on the vine.<sup>26</sup> Following Watson's resignation, John Galley became acting-president and was later elected president at the annual meeting held at MO Ranch near Kerrville on March 17-18, 1956.

One of Galley's first acts was to ask Ralph Bickler of Austin to serve as chairman of the TOS Emblem Committee.<sup>27</sup> Bickler was chosen for this position because of his vigorous promotion of the scissor-tail as the official bird of TOS. Assisting Bickler in designing the emblem were Johnny Faye Barnette, C. E. Hudson, Jr., Janice Lacey, Edward Fritz and Frances Williams.

Bickler's basic design was a flying scissor-tail over an outline map of Texas. The figure of the scissor-tail was adapted from a painting made for the Texas Game and Fish Commission by artist Orville O. Rice.<sup>28</sup> The proposed design appeared first on the outside cover of the 1956 yearbook and was approved by the membership at the April 1957 meeting. Beginning with the June 1957 newsletter, the "scissor-tail over Texas" appeared regularly in the upper left corner of the title page.

### *Protection of the Harris' hawk*

Efforts to remove the Harris' hawk from the list of protected species first came to the attention of conservationists on March 18, 1957, when a public hearing was held on H.B. 723. Speak-

ing in support of the bill was its sponsor, Eligio De La Garza, and J. W. Jackson, a bird importer and quail raiser from the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The arguments of opponents were to no avail and the bill was reported to the full house.<sup>29</sup>

Conservationists and birders throughout the state were quick to respond to this affront to their sensibilities. On March 21, Armand Yramategui circulated a TOS position paper outlining the history of the bill, the facts relating to the feeding habits of the Harris' hawk, and suggested substitute legislation. The following day, Yramategui mailed a second letter to all members of the Texas legislature urging them to oppose H.B. 723. Yramategui then solicited and received support from the Sportsmen's Clubs of Texas.<sup>30</sup> The Travis Audubon Society also joined the fray on April 1 when its president and TOS member, Fred Webster, circulated a position paper to all legislators.

An emergency meeting of the TOS conservation committee to discuss H.B. 723 was held during the society's annual meeting at Austin on April 5-7. At this meeting, a resolution was passed that Travis Audubon Society's conservation chairman (Margaret Louise Hill) be appointed to represent TOS on the Harris' hawk issue and other conservation matters. This recommendation was later modified by the board to allow the president to appoint any Austin TOS member of his choosing to act as the society's representative.

By mid-April, De La Garza had rewritten his bill, but it was still considered unacceptable. Influential support came from Roy Bedichek, who contributed a sensitive and persuasive essay favoring the continued protection of the Harris' hawk. The result of this sustained opposition was that De La Garza finally relented and withdrew his bill. The defeat of H.B. 723 was a clear victory for TOS through the leadership of Armand Yramategui, Fred Webster, Margaret Louise Hill and Roy Bedichek.

## *Dissatisfaction within the Ranks*

The fourth annual meeting, held in Austin on April 5–7, 1957, promised to be an exciting event since the guest of honor was the venerable Harry Oberholser. However, at the board meeting preceding the banquet, two board members unexpectedly expressed their dissatisfaction with the functioning of the society, particularly at the regional level. It was then proposed that the regions be abolished and that the regional directors should not be included in the executive committee.

The proposal to abolish the regions was rejected by the executive committee. However, seeking to resolve this crisis, John Galley was appointed to chair a committee on constitutional revision. Recommendations of this committee included the separation of the constitution and by-laws, listing the duties of regional directors in the constitution and giving the president power to appoint directors in the event of a vacancy. It was further recommended that the offices of secretary-treasurer and corresponding secretary be replaced with the offices of secretary and treasurer, and that the office of editor-recorder be separated with the position of recorder being appointive.<sup>31</sup> Approval of these revisions was given at the next annual meeting, and the new constitution was published in the 1958 Yearbook. At the November 1958 meeting of the executive committee, it was further proposed and accepted that the term of office for officers and regional directors be extended to two years instead of one. Thus, after five years of ongoing revision, the constitution and by-laws finally assumed a form similar to the present-day document.

## *Field trips*

The original constitution states that one purpose of the society is to “stimulate fellowship . . . by an annual meeting and field trip.” The society’s first field trip was held on May 9–10, 1953, to various areas, including Bandera,

the Ney Bat Cave at Rocksprings and the Devil’s Sinkhole. Fifty-two persons participated at various stages of the trip which was led by Edgar Kincaid. Among the species seen on this trip were the golden-cheeked warbler, black-capped vireo and cave swallow.<sup>32</sup>

A project to promote appreciation of an endangered species resulted from the society’s trip to Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in November 1953. The difficulty in seeing the whooping cranes from the newly constructed observation tower prompted McNeese to write to Joe Taylor of the Bausch & Lomb Company describing the need for a scope for use by visitors. Responding to this need, Taylor donated a 30-power scope to TOS for permanent use at the refuge.<sup>33</sup>

Rockport was a favorite location for field trips. The first trip to this area was held in the fall of 1953, and by the third trip in 1955, a total of 155 persons were in attendance. In 1958, at the annual meeting in Corpus Christi, there were five different trips to locations within a few hours driving distance. Regional trips were also occasionally held (e.g., during October 1959, Region I sponsored a trip to Black Mesa, Oklahoma, and Region V conducted a field trip to Somerset).

Field trips often combined both entertainment and education. The Thanksgiving trip to Galveston in 1959 featured day-long excursions to four different locations. On the first evening the entertainment was provided by members who showed their personal slides of birds and birds’ nests. The second evening consisted of a lecture and movie by Dr. Ernest P. Edwards on the “Great Lakes and North Woods.”

By 1961, many members were eager for adventures further afield. To satisfy this need, a trip to El Salto, San Luis Potosi, Mexico, was conducted on December 26–28. Twenty-eight persons participated, and the results were published in the March and April 1962 newsletters. Not to neglect the oceanic habitat, a pelagic trip jointly sponsored with the Ornithology Group of

the Outdoor Nature Club was taken in February 1963.

## *Publications of the society*

The monthly newsletter served as the major organ of communication during the first decade. In the first newsletter published in March 1953, editor Frank Watson promised to “publish whatever will further the objectives of the society.” This was further detailed as news of members and local societies, as well as observations on the distribution, nesting and behavior of birds. The first Christmas counts were included in the June 1953 newsletter and published thereafter as space allowed. The first migration report was included in the 1954 newsletter, and in 1957, 1958 and 1959, the spring and fall migration data were published as separate issues.

The newsletter often included reports of special interest (e.g., the issues of November and December 1960 were devoted entirely to Virgilio Biaggi’s thesis on the birds of Culbertson County). The newsletter of April 1961 consisted of a condensed version of Frank Fitch’s thesis on the life history and ecology of the scissor-tailed flycatcher. David J. Slavik’s breeding bird data were published as the “TOS Texas Breeding Bird Survey, 1962, Parts I, II, and III.” In March 1963, the newsletter included an article by John Lieftinck on “The Birds of Frandolig Island.”

Short articles were often published on a particular species: the golden eagle (Feb. 1958), whooping crane (Feb.–March 1959), common night-hawk (Nov. 1959), Cassin’s sparrow (Dec. 1960), golden-cheeked warbler (May 1962), black-capped vireo (Sept. 1962), fulvous tree duck (Nov. 1962) and the buff-bellied hummingbird (Jan. 1963). Birding reports from new locations, particularly state parks and recreation areas, were also published on a regular basis.

Two “Occasional Papers” were published during the early years of the society. Occasional Paper Number 1, “Checklist of Bird Species of the Rio

Grande Delta of Texas" by Irby Davis, was published as a separate issue in March 1955. Occasional Paper Number 2, "Automobile Predation" by Clarence Brown, was included in the November 1955 newsletter.

Yearbooks also provided a means for supplying information to members. The first yearbook published in 1956 included a list of officers, a short history of the society, a membership roll, fold-out map showing the state regions, a copy of the constitution, annual financial report, and the names and addresses of Texas nature clubs. Subsequent yearbooks published in 1958 and 1962 contained basically the same information.

In mid-1955, TOS member Col. L. R. Wolfe, who was then in the final stages of preparing his "Checklist of the Birds of Texas," requested permission from Edgar Kincaid and Frank Watson to use the TOS state map to show the distribution of species.<sup>34</sup> Wolfe originally planned to publish his checklist privately, but in November 1955, he again wrote to Kincaid asking if the society might be interested in publishing the checklist as an "Occasional Paper." Wolfe also suggested that he would even finance the project, wishing only to recover his expenses. This offer was later rejected by the executive board on the basis that the society could not furnish financial aid.<sup>35</sup> Wolfe proceeded with his original plan, and the checklist was published in 1956.

In late 1956, E. T. Dawson of the Game and Fish Commission requested that TOS prepare a reference checklist of Texas birds for the use of schoolchildren and the general public. This request was approved in January 1957, and Clarence Cottam was appointed chairman of the committee to prepare the list. However, when Cottam was elected president in April 1957, he appointed John Galley to head the committee. The checklist was finally completed in the spring of 1959 and was turned over to Dawson with the anticipation that it would soon be published.<sup>36</sup> Dawson, however,

retired later in the year, and during this transition the checklist was downgraded in priority, perhaps because of the availability of Wolfe's checklist and the publication in 1960 of Peterson's *Field Guide to the Birds of Texas*. In any event, the checklist was never published.

TOS members were also involved in the publication of Oberholser's *The Bird Life of Texas*. Oberholser was a charter member of the society, and in 1956 he was elected as its first honorary member. In November 1961, Verna Hooks McLean donated \$50,000 to the University of Texas Press to help finance publication of Oberholser's manuscript. This gift was given in honor of her mother, Corrie Herring [Mrs. Joseph Lamar] Hooks, of Beaumont, who was a charter member of TOS.<sup>37</sup> The original plan was that Oberholser, who was then 92 years old, would have general supervision over the publication process, but that an editor would do most of the work. Edgar Kincaid was later chosen as the editor of a committee composed of Clarence Cottam, Robert Selander and John W. Aldrich.<sup>38</sup> In April 1962, less than a year before her death, Carrie Hooks was elected an honorary member of the society. Oberholser died in December 1963, and his book was finally published in 1974. During the later years that Oberholser spent in updating the manuscript and in the 12 years spent in editing, TOS members provided both natural history data and technical assistance.

### *Conservation Platform*

During its first five years, the society dealt with conservation issues without benefit of an overall plan of action. Even so, effective support was given for protection of the white-winged dove, golden eagle, Harris' hawk and the American alligator. Other issues supported included leasing the bird islands on the Texas coast to the National Audubon Society, the acquisition of land on Padre Island for a national park, regulatory authority for the Game and Fish Commission, and

protection for nongame species and all birds of prey. Actions opposed included military use of the Wichita National Wildlife Refuge, establishment of a photoflash bombing range near Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, and the diversion of Game and Fish funds to other state programs.

By mid-1958, the conservation committee was reorganized with Margaret Louise Hill as chairman assisted by Robert Darnall, Edward Fritz, W. C. Royall, Jr., Floyd Davidson, Mrs. Teal Adkins and Roy Middleton. This committee immediately set to work composing a "Nature Conservation Platform," which it presented to the executive committee. This document, which consisted of eight approved objectives and five positions that were opposed, set the general course for future actions.<sup>39</sup> Other activities during 1958 included efforts to acquire a sanctuary on Copano Bay and renewed support for regulatory authority to the Game and Fish Commission. The prospect of acquiring a sanctuary prompted the society to consider incorporation, a goal that was finally achieved in 1964.

Opposition to the disposal of radioactive waste in the Gulf of Mexico was expressed at the 1959 annual meeting in Tyler. At the local level, individual property owners were encouraged to preserve areas used by threatened birds and to promote the designation of cemeteries, parks and entire towns as bird sanctuaries. To achieve this objective, a model ordinance showing how to declare a city a bird sanctuary was published in the June 1961 newsletter. Carrie Holcomb pioneered this effort by having her hometown of Frankston designated as a sanctuary. In September 1960, a special Sanctuary Committee was formed as the result of a donation for that purpose.

Legislation prohibiting shell dredging near live oyster reefs and bird nesting islands was supported during 1961. In that same year, Governor Price Daniel appointed TOS members Mrs. Teal Adkins and Armand Yramategui



to a special committee to study the Padre Island issue. At that time Adkins was serving as the chairman of the Conservation Department of the Texas Federation of Women's Clubs and Yramategui as president of the Texas Conservation Council.<sup>40</sup>

In April 1963, the executive committee resolved to recommend Clarence Cottam, past president of TOS, for appointment to the State Board of Parks and Wildlife. Margaret Louise Hill then wrote to Governor Connally urging the appointment of Cottam. When an affirmative answer was not forthcoming, Hill again wrote to the Governor, lecturing him on the shortcomings of a system dominated by "political expediency." In a dramatic challenge, Hill noted that "Texas has long needed a governor with the courage to say not 'Damn the torpedos,' but 'Damn political expediency. I will do what is best for Texas, not just best for my friends, campaign contributors, political hacks, etc.' I hope you [Gov. Connally] are this man!"<sup>41</sup> With this challenge ringing in the ears of the chief executive, TOS ended its first decade of involvement in protecting the flora and fauna of the Lone Star State.<sup>42</sup>

### Acknowledgments

Many different people influenced the writing of this history. Kent Rylander first introduced me to TOS while I was a graduate student. W. D. and Agatha Anderson shared their remembrances and provided a set of early newsletters and other archival materials. Noel Pettingell, Ted Eubanks, Jr., John Tveten and Maxine Davis provided suggestions and background information. John S. Tomer, historian of the Oklahoma Ornithological Society, helped make contact with the descendants of Charles McNeese. James A. McNeese, Jr., Sara C. Lutz and Daniel L. McNeese provided biographical information and photographs. I am indebted to Lt. Col. Horrell H. Smith for biographical information and the photograph of Carrie Holcomb. Steve Runnels made available the archives

of the society, and Robert Benson provided the encouragement to complete the research. This study was supported by a Summer Development Leave provided by the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor.

### Notes

1. Biographical information for C. H. McNeese was obtained from the following sources: Census of Belmont County, Ohio, Bellaire City, ED 16, sheet 19, line 79; Notes on McNeese's military record provided by J. A. McNeese, Jr.; Letter from C. H. McNeese to James A. McNeese dated in France, Feb. 15, 1918; Records of the University of Oklahoma Alumni Association; "McNeese is Named to Position in OPA," *Ponca City News*, Sept. 1, 1941; "Japs Will Fall Quickly After Nazi Defeat, McNeese Says," *Ponca City News*, Dec. 30, 1943; "McNeese Returns to Job at Conoco," *Ponca City News*, May 7, 1944; C. H. McNeese, "There's Plenty of Oil," *Red Triangle*, Continental Oil Company, Sept. 1944; "Charles McNeese Dies at Houston," *Ponca City News*, Feb. 27, 1955, p. 10-A; "Charles McNeese's Services Are Held," *Ponca City News*, Feb. 28, 1955, p. 5; "McNeese Rites Scheduled Today," unidentified newspaper clipping, Feb. 28, 1955; "Charles H. McNeese," unidentified newspaper clipping, Feb. 28, 1955.
2. *The Spoonbill*, July 1952.
3. These field trips are described in *The Spoonbill*, July 1952 and Sept. 1952.
4. The number of persons for the first mailing is found in a letter from McNeese to Carl Buchheister, Feb. 24, 1954. A manuscript with the names of the respondents to this letter is found in the TOS archives.
5. Johnston to McNeese, Oct. 16, 1952; Rylander to McNeese, undated; Edith Winford to McNeese, Oct. 30, 1952.
6. *The Spoonbill*, Nov. 1952. Also, see "State Bird Organization Letter," No. 2, Nov. 25, 1952.
7. The minutes of the meeting found in the TOS archives were prepared by J. M. Heiser.
8. Details of this organizational meeting may be found in "Bird Watchers Here to Form Society," *Austin American-Statesman*, Feb. 15, 1953, p. A-9, col. 3, and in the TOS newsletters for March and April 1953.
9. Interview with W. D. and Agatha Anderson, June 21, 1988.
10. Biographical information for B. B. Watson from "B. B. Watson Services Set," *Tyler Courier-Times*, Feb. 16, 1977, p. 7, col. 2; 1900 Census of Rusk County, Texas, ED 83, sheet 19, line 49; Texas Death Certificate #1108; and letters from Watson to Charles McNeese dated Oct. 17, 1952, and Feb. 28, 1953.
11. Biographical information for Carrie Holcomb from "Carrie Holcomb," *Palestine Herald-Press*, Aug. 20, 1972; Interview with Lt. Col. Horrell H. Smith, Sept. 19, 1988; 1900 Census of Anderson County, Texas, ED 17, sheet 3; and Texas Death Certificate #62466.
12. Watson's observations on the white-tailed kite were published in *The Condor*, 42:295-304.
13. These members-at-large are first listed in the newsletter of July 29, 1953, where they are erroneously described as "regional directors."
14. Correspondence regarding the division of the state into regions includes the following: McNeese to Dawson, May 14, 1953; Dawson to McNeese, Aug. 20, 1953; McNeese to Executive Board, Sept. 3, 1953; and Galley to Dawson, Sept. 7, 1953.
15. Proposed revisions of the constitution are given in the newsletter of Dec. 1953.
16. The charter membership roll is given in the newsletter of July 29, 1953.
17. TOS newsletter, July 1954.
18. Letter from McNeese to Walter W. Lecher of the Texas Game and Fish Commission dated July 20, 1954, and reprinted in the TOS newsletter of Aug. 1954.
19. Undated manuscript of McNeese's "President's Report for 1954."
20. TOS newsletter, July 1962.
21. Letters from McNeese to Peterson, Nov. 24, 1954, and Dec. 28, 1954.
22. Undated manuscript of McNeese's "President's Report for 1954."
23. TOS newsletter, March 1955.
24. Oates to John Galley, June 8, 1956, and Sept. 25, 1956.
25. The official bird and essay winners were decided at the Annual Meeting in March, and the results published in the TOS newsletter for April 1956.
26. Letters from Watson to Officers and Regional Directors, Aug. 22, 1955, and Watson to John Galley, Oct. 1, 1955.

27. Galley to Bickler, May 17, 1956, and Bickler to Galley, May 24, 1956.
28. Rice offered several suggestions on the design of the emblem, one of which was the use of the slogan "For the Growth of Knowledge" (Rice to Bickler, July 19, 1956).
29. The details of this bill were reported to the society as an addendum to the newsletter of March 18, 1957.
30. Letter from Yramategui to Cecil Reid of the Sportsmen's Clubs of Texas dated March 23, 1957, and Bert Lindsay to Reid, March 29, 1957.
31. These constitutional revisions were reported to the Executive Committee in a mimeographed document dated Nov. 9, 1957.
32. A description of this field trip is included in the newsletter of June 1953.
33. McNeese to Taylor, Dec. 17, 1954, and Jan. 6, 1955.
34. Wolfe to E. T. Dawson, July 23, 1955, and Wolfe to Watson, August 31, 1955.
35. Minutes of the Executive Committee for March 17, 1956.
36. TOS newsletter, June 1959.
37. TOS newsletter, January 1962.
38. Preface to *The Bird Life of Texas*, p. xii.
39. TOS newsletter, November 1958.
40. TOS newsletter, November 1961.
41. Hill to Connally, July 29, 1963.
42. TOS was not successful in getting Governor Connally to appoint Cotnam to the Commission.

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