

## President's Message



Shelia Hargis TOS President.

Hello TOS friends. I hope you had a good summer and got to see some southbound migrants this fall. I was planning to send an email or two to keep you up-to-date on what's been happening, but those emails didn't happen. My silence might make you think that not much was happening, but that is not the case. We, the Board and the Meeting Planning Committee, were very busy!

The Board is very excited to announce that we purchased 81.1 acres which will expand our Magic Ridge Sanctuary by about 40% and protect a critical piece of land in the area. Thank you to Byron Stone for leading our efforts on this major project. Keep reading to learn much more about Magic Ridge and our latest land acquisition effort. We were fortunate to be able to pay for this purchase outright, but it has depleted our resources significantly. Our annual appeal this year will focus on replenishing those funds. Please donate as much as you can so that we can continue to respond quickly to opportunities to protect land for our birds.



TOS Board members visiting our soon-to-be new property on Zimmerman Road. Photo credit: Judy Kestner

In addition to saving land, we found time to put together a fun and informative winter 2019 meeting for you. The meeting will be January 24 – 27. We are partnering with the Galveston Island Nature Tourism Council, and it has been my pleasure to work closely with Julie Ann Brown, Alice Anne O'Donnell, Greg Whitaker, Kendra Kocab and Catherine Winans on the many details that it takes to

put on a meeting. Julie Ann, Alice Anne and Greg are the masterminds behind FeatherFest, so you may know them if you've attended that festival. They are amazing and made the work look easy! All the juicy registration information is provided later in the newsletter. Plan to join us in Galveston in January 2019!

And we're already hard at work planning our spring 2019 meeting, May 2 – 5. We will be in San Antonio, and our hosts will be Bexar Audubon and San Antonio Audubon. I met with eight very enthusiastic representatives of these organizations on October 17, and they had many great ideas. The meeting is shaping up to be wonderful. Yep, you better plan to join us in San Antonio in May 2019!



Initial planning meeting for San Antonio TOS meeting. Clockwise from bottom left: Sara Beesley (National Audubon), Karen Moulder, Mariann Golden, Robin Stevens, Christine Turnbull, Sandi Wheeler, Patsy Ingle, and Karen Stevenson. Photo credit: Shelia Hargis

On the administrative side of things, we said goodbye to Anthony Hewetson as TOS Region 1 Director. Anthony resigned due to work demands but will continue to lead Century Club field trips at our meetings and create the checklist for each meeting and analyze the data after the meetings. Thank you, Anthony, for your Board service and your willingness to continue to contribute to TOS.

An administrative accomplishment during the summer was the Board approval of our Meeting Policy. Now I know that most of you will not find this exciting, but I think you will be excited by what this makes possible. Having this policy in place will provide direction and consistency in the development of future meetings. We're already seeing benefits from having it as we put the Galveston meeting together and as we start putting the San Antonio meeting together. No more reinventing the wheel! Exciting, huh? Thank you to TOS Vice President and Region 5 Director Jimma Byrd for creating this document.

On October 13, I joined the Houston Audubon/TOS sanctuary work day in High Island. Due to the low volunteer turnout, we all stayed together and worked at Boy Scout Woods, but I stopped by to check on things at Hooks Woods

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afterward. You might remember from my column in the summer newsletter that I found four young armadillos the last time I visited. I didn't see them this time, but I found my first ever owl pellets! Not quite as exciting as baby armadillos, but I was still very excited. Unfortunately, I also found an animal leg trap that someone had put out on the property. This upset me greatly! I would really like to have a volunteer who can check on the property regularly. If you live nearby or visit High Island regularly and are willing to keep an eye on things, please let me know.

On the evening of October 18, I attended the Travis Audubon monthly meeting. Rebekah Rylander, PhD candidate at Texas State University, presented "A family affair!—The social structure and reproductive strategies of the Black-crested Titmouse". Surprisingly, there are pretty big gaps in our understanding of Black-crested Titmice, and Rebekah's research is closing some of those gaps. Highlights for me: titmice are site loyal; pairs stay together; the heaviest son will stay with his parents until he mates; then he will set up a territory very near his parent's territory; and groups are very likely family members. I now feel like I understand "my" titmice much better thanks to Rebekah. TOS provided

Rebekah a grant earlier this year to further her research, so I was especially proud of Rebekah and TOS!



Rebekah and her titmice. Photo credit: Shelia Hargis

Thank you to all who contributed to this newsletter. Enjoy reading it and have a wonderful and exciting Christmas Bird Count season. See you soon in Galveston!

—Shelia Hargis, TOS President

## TOS Winter Meeting 2019 – Galveston, TX

I keep thinking that there is no way we can continue to reach the very high bar set by our past meetings, but we've done it again for our winter meeting! The meeting will be January 24 – 27, 2019. We will be headquartered in Galveston, and we have partnered with the Galveston Island Nature Tourism Council to offer many exciting field trips and interesting speakers. Now, you may be thinking, "Oh, I've birded a lot around Galveston, I can sit this one out." It's totally understandable why you might think that, but sitting this one out would be a big mistake! I'm guessing most of your birding in this area has been during spring migration, so you're familiar with those birds and those locations. But, do you know the winter birds and the good winter birding locations? And don't you want to learn about this area from local birders who really know the area? This meeting will be a different experience and one you will not want to miss.

Field trips will provide opportunities to bird favorite locations such as Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge, Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge, Bolivar Peninsula, Brazos Bend State Park as well as less well-known locations around Galveston and properties that you can't visit without special arrangements. And as if that is not exciting enough, you also have the opportunity to join Kathy Adams Clark for a photography field trip, work on your shorebird ID skills with Gary Clark, and work on your gull ID skills with Cin-Ty Lee. For our hard-core county listers, you can choose from two Century Club trips on Friday and Saturday. And for our Big Day competitive types, Richard Gibbons will be your guide as you see how many species you can find on the Bolivar Peninsula and learn some tips for future Big Day competitions. How is that for a line-up?

The counties that we'll be visiting are Brazoria, Chambers, Fort Bend, Galveston, Hardin and Liberty. A checklist showing the expected species for these counties in January is available at <https://tinyurl.com/TOSGalvestonChecklist>.

Our headquarters will be The Holiday Inn Resort Galveston On The Beach. Everything, including breakfast, will happen there. Field trips will leave from this location.

We have afternoon presentations scheduled in addition to the evening presentations. On Friday afternoon, you'll get to hear about interesting bird research being done in the area. Your presence will show your support for students and researchers doing important research on our birds. On Saturday afternoon, you can improve your gull ID skills with Cin-Ty Lee as your instructor. Not that anyone needs help ID'ing gulls, right? Please try to work it into your schedule to attend both days!

Some field trips involve a lot of driving to get to the location, so expect really early departure times for those trips. Be prepared to carpool to minimize the number of vehicles and maximize the likelihood of spotting birds along the way. Bring walkie-talkies if you have them. They are especially useful for trips that involve movement between locations or long drive times. Be prepared for cold and wet weather. That means dressing in layers and having rain coats, umbrellas and rubber boots handy if you need them.

Online registration will open in late November or early December. Watch for an email from us letting you know exactly when it will open. I highly recommend you register early since field trips are likely going to fill up. If you find that a field trip that you really want is full, go ahead and



register for your second choice, but then email Judy Kestner and request to be put on the wait list for your first choice. Judy's email is [tosmember@yahoo.com](mailto:tosmember@yahoo.com). The registration fee will increase on January 10, and registration will close on January 17. Don't wait!

Join me for the fun in Galveston in January!

Shelia Hargis

## Hotel Information

### Holiday Inn Resort Galveston On The Beach



The Holiday Inn Resort Galveston On The Beach will be the headquarters for the Winter Meeting. All TOS events will be held at the hotel and field trips will depart from its parking areas. The hotel is located at 5002 Seawall Boulevard. Every guest room has a private balcony overlooking the Gulf of Mexico and includes a microwave and mini fridge. The property has a restaurant and lounge and is in easy walking distance to a wide variety of dining options.

The hotel is holding a block of 50 rooms for TOS guests. The blended group rate for a three-night stay beginning Thursday, January 24<sup>th</sup> is \$129 per night. Reservations may be made by calling the Reservation Department at 800-465-4329 and identifying yourself as being with Texas Ornithological Society. Your confirmation will state that there is a daily parking fee. That fee will be waived at the property level when you check into the hotel. **These rooms will be held only until January 4, 2019.** Any cancellations must be made prior to 6:00 PM on January 22, 2019 to avoid a one-night room charge.

A continental breakfast will be available at the hotel Friday, Saturday and Sunday mornings for all TOS Members and field trip leaders from 5:00 AM until 7:00 AM.

## Meeting Agenda

All meeting events will be held at The Holiday Inn Resort Galveston On The Beach, 5002 Seawall Blvd, Galveston, TX.

### Thursday, January 24

- 3:30-5:30 PM Board Meeting
- 4:00-7:00 PM Registration/T-Shirt sales
- 6:30-7:00 PM Welcome/ Introductions/Announcements
- 7:00-8:00 PM Speakers: Fred Collins & Bob Honig – *Birding Then & Now in Galveston*

### Friday, January 25

- 5:00-7:00 AM Continental Breakfast, including hot eggs
- 5:15-8:00 AM Box Lunch Pick-up and Field Trip Departures
- 5:30 AM-5:00 PM Field Trips
- 4:00-7:00 PM Registration
- 4:00-5:00 PM 1<sup>st</sup> Speaker: Anna Vallery – *Assessment of Shorebird and Wading Bird Populations in Galveston Bay Using Unmanned Aerial Vehicles*  
2<sup>nd</sup> Speaker: Amanda D. Hackney – *Is this beach big enough for the both of us? Human Disturbance and Wintering Piping Plover on the Upper Texas Coast*  
3<sup>rd</sup> Speaker: Rachael Glazner – *Comparing Expectations of a Habitat Suitability Model for Wading Birds to Field Observations Acquired Using Drone Technology*
- 6:15-7:00 PM Announcements/Field Trip Reports
- 7:00-8:00 PM Speaker: Glenn Olsen – *Winged Winter Wonders: Who Are They?*

### Saturday, January 26

- 5:00-7:00 AM Continental Breakfast, including hot eggs
- 4:45-7:30 AM Box Lunch Pick-up and Field Trip Departures
- 5:00 AM-5:00 PM Field Trips
- 4:00-5:00 PM Speaker: Cin-Ty Lee – *Know Your Gulls*
- 5:00-6:00 PM Social Time (cash bar will be available)
- 6:00-7:00 PM Dinner/Banquet
- 6:45-7:30 PM Announcements/Field Trip Reports
- 7:30-8:30 PM Keynote Speaker: Richard Gibbons – *How Birds and Citizen Scientists Can Save the World*

### Sunday, January 27

- 5:00-7:00 AM Continental Breakfast, including hot eggs
- 5:15-7:30 AM Box Lunch Pick-up and Field Trip Departures
- 5:30 AM-3 PM Field Trips

## Registration Information

Registration is online at the Texas Ornithological Society's website, [www.texasbirds.org](http://www.texasbirds.org). Registration will open in late November or early December. To receive an email with the exact date, be sure your email address is included in your TOS account information. Once registration opens, there will be directions on the website to assist you.

If you do not have access to the internet, you may call Judy Kestner at 361-387-7329 or Frances Cerbins at 512-372-9039 for assistance with registration. If you don't get an answer, leave a message and Judy or Frances will call you back when they are available. The registration fee increases on January 10, and registration closes on January 17. (Refunds will be given if cancellation occurs before January 17 and no cost has been incurred by TOS. No refunds will be given if cancellation occurs after January 17. If you have to cancel your registration, contact Catherine Winans at catherinewinans@yahoo.com.)

- Registration Fee: \$75 TOS members  
 \$100 Non-TOS members (includes a one-year membership)  
 \$20 late fee after January 9
- Box lunches: \$15
- Saturday Banquet: \$38

## Box Lunches Available Friday, Saturday, and Sunday Mornings

Box lunch selections for each day:

- Smoked Turkey, Provolone Cheese on Wheat Bread, Bag of Chips, Choice of Soda or Bottled Water
- Honey Ham, Cheddar Cheese on White Bread, Bag of Chips, Choice of Soda or Bottled Water
- Portobello Mushroom Wrap, Bag of Chips, Choice of Soda or Bottled Water

All lunches come with pickle, whole fruit, cookie, and assorted condiments.

## Saturday Banquet Menu

The sit-down dinner entrée choices:

- Pan Seared Flounder with Lemon Butter
- Roast Beef with Mushroom Demi-Glace
- Eggplant Parmesan

Dinners will include Garden Green Salad with Grape Tomatoes, Cucumbers, and Carrots served with Ranch or Italian Dressing, Green Beans, Oven Roasted Potatoes, Freshly Baked Bread with Butter, New York Cheesecake with Fresh Strawberries, Coffee and Iced Tea.

\*\*If you have dietary restrictions and need more specific information, email Shelia at Shelia.hargis@gmail.com with your questions. Shelia has all sorts of dietary restrictions, so she will be able to relate and get answers to your questions.

## Speakers

### Thursday Eve

**Title:** Birding Then & Now in Galveston

**Presenters:** Fred Collins, Bob Honig

**Description:** How has Galveston area birding changed in 50 years? Relying on the Houston Ornithology Group's 1967-68 guide entitled "Good Birding Trips," Fred's firsthand perspective, and Bob's analysis of satellite imagery, they will



Fred Collins

explore changes over time at some field trip locations birders may visit during the TOS winter meeting.

**Bio:** Houston native Fred Collins made his first year list in 1962 and has kept one every year since. He earned a B.S. in Wildlife Science and attended graduate school at Texas A&M, where he studied wintering Wilson's

Snipes. From 1994 to 2002 he served as Director of Russ Pitman Park's Nature Discovery Center. Since 2002 he has been Regional Park Manager for Harris County Precinct 3, where he developed and is currently director of both Kleb Woods Nature Center and Cypress Top Historic Park. He sits on advisory boards for Houston Audubon and the Katy Prairie Conservancy, and he is Compiler of the Cypress Creek, TX CBC. As a member of the Texas State Historical Association and a life member of TOS and the Southwestern Association of Naturalists, Fred continues his passion for birding Texas and learning about the history of both its wildlife and its people. He and his wife live on 100 acres of the Katy Prairie with 4 dogs, 9 horses, 100 free-ranging chickens, and 50



Bob Honig

parrots. While the nest isn't exactly empty, their two sons have long since fledged.

**Bio:** Bob Honig has spent many years observing and studying natural history, particularly birds, dragonflies, and damselflies. He serves on the Advisory Board of the Katy Prairie Conservancy,

after 25 years on its Board of Directors. He is a past Chairman of the Ornithology Group of Houston's Outdoor Nature Club and a former Compiler of the Buffalo Bayou and Brazos Bend, TX Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs). As an environmental consultant he has addressed such diverse issues as endangered species, wetlands, archaeology, recycling, and sustainability. His work has taken him throughout North America and has included environmental surveys in Bolivia and the Algerian Sahara. Bob has led - often with his wife, Maggie - numerous field trips/tours throughout Texas, Glacier National Park, and the Asa Wright Nature Centre in Trinidad and Tobago; and they have been part of Earthwatch expeditions to study Costa Rican caterpillars and their parasitoids, sustainable watershed management in California, and Flammulated Owls in Utah.

### Friday Afternoon

#### Scientific Presentation #1

**Title:** Assessment of Shorebird and Wading Bird Populations in Galveston Bay Using Unmanned Aerial Vehicles

(Authors: Anna Vallery, George Guillen, Mustafa Mokrech) University of Houston – Clear Lake, The Environmental Institute of Houston

**Presenter:** Anna Vallery, Houston Audubon

**Description:** Galveston Bay is utilized by close to 75% of the U.S. bird species as either a permanent or seasonal habitat, including a variety of shorebirds, wading birds, and migrant waterfowl (Galveston Bay Foundation). Studying these water-dependent birds, specifically in Galveston Bay, can be difficult due to the size and complexity of this estuary and the logistics of surveying intertidal habitat. Traditional methods for surveying shorebird and wading bird populations can disturb foraging birds, causing a surveyor bias in what data is collected. New techniques that utilize Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) technology, however, have the potential to make conducting large-scale surveys of intertidal areas possible both safely and with less expense and effort than ground surveys and/or manned aerial surveys. Our objectives include exploring the use of UAV technology to survey shorebird and wading bird populations in Galveston Bay and comparing it to conventional survey methods. We also aim to determine best methods of practice for utilizing this technology in future studies of shorebirds and wading birds by assessing disturbance potential. This includes applying new technology, such as Full Motion Video in the ArcGIS platform, for analysis of the collected data.

**Bio:** Anna Vallery is a Conservation Specialist at Houston Audubon, working as a sanctuary manager, the Natives Nursery manager, with the Bird-Friendly Communities Program, and with Houston Audubon's citizen science efforts. Anna just completed her master's in April, graduating with a degree in Environmental Science – Biology from the University of Houston – Clear Lake. During her time at UHCL, she worked as a Research Assistant with the Environmental Institute of Houston, helping with projects from fisheries and water quality to her own research in avian ecology. Anna's thesis covered foraging preferences of coastal avian species in Bastrop Bay as well as developing methodology for using unmanned aerial vehicles for surveying waterbirds. In her free time, Anna loves traveling and spending time exploring the outdoors with her dogs.

### Scientific Presentation #2

**Title:** Is this beach big enough for the both of us? Human Disturbance and Wintering Piping Plover on the Upper Texas Coast

**Presenter:** Amanda D. Hackney, Black Cat GIS and Biological Services, Houston, Tx

**Description:** The Texas coast is vital wintering habitat for a variety of shorebird species. The Piping Plover population is highly dependent on Texas; USFWS estimates that between roughly 40-60% of all Piping Plover migrate through or winter in the state. Utilization of an area by Piping Plover for foraging or roosting is related to disturbance associated with human activity. We are conducting surveys of wintering Piping Plover (PIPL) on Gulf beach owned by the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge on the Bolivar Peninsula. Surveys will be completed from fall 2018 through

late spring 2019. Surveys are conducted along linear Gulf beaches and back-beach habitats. The beach survey route was divided and surveyed into six 1 kilometer transects to capture density of birds and recreational use in each transect. Additionally, detailed habitat maps of the project area were created to examine the effects of habitat mosaics on PIPL use. Expected results will be combined with current data being collected coast-wide and will aid in a standardized analysis to better inform management of this federally threatened species. We expect results will establish additional baseline data in the upper Texas coast which currently lacks the level of detail that exists on plover populations in the Mid and Lower Texas Coast.

**Bio:** Amanda Hackney teaches Environmental Science at Lee College in Baytown, and runs her consulting business- Black Cat GIS and Biological Services. A native of Nacogdoches, Texas, she majored in Wildlife and Fisheries Science at Louisiana State University. In 2010, she received her Master's degree from Clemson University in Wildlife Biology with research focused on spatially modeling diamondback terrapin nest predation risk. Previously she has been employed by the USFWS Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge, Fort Worth Zoo Education Department, and Audubon Texas as their Coastal Program Manager and later as Senior Coastal Conservation Biologist. Ms. Hackney has over 10 years of experience in the natural resources and GIS fields; focusing on coastal waterbirds, coastal restoration projects, conservation education programs, GIS analyses of colonial waterbird rookeries and coastal erosion. Amanda is happiest outdoors, preferably on a horse or on the water.

### Scientific Presentation #3

**Title:** Comparing Expectations of a Habitat Suitability Model for Wading Birds to Field Observations Acquired Using Drone Technology

**Presenter:** Rachael Glazner, Ph.D. Candidate, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Texas A&M University

**Description:** Coastal wetlands serve as important foraging habitats for wading birds. Various factors can affect the quality of these habitats, including the development of roads and buildings near the wetland, distance of the wetland to the bird's nest, as well as size and fragmentation of the wetland. A habitat suitability model was created to investigate how these factors affect the quality of four foraging habitats found in Galveston County, Texas. The results of this model were then compared to field observations collected using an unmanned aerial vehicle. Differences between expected and observed observations are discussed, as well as suggestions for future surveys and models.

**Bio:** Rachael Glazner is a Ph.D. Candidate in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at Texas A&M University. Her research interests include understanding the effects of vegetation type on predator-prey interactions on the Texas coast. She is originally from New Hampshire, where she received a B.S. in Biology from Plymouth State University. Her experience with bird-related science includes studying wading bird foraging habitats in Galveston County, as well



as briefly serving as a Coastal Bird Intern for the Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program, where she assisted with surveys of shorebirds in Port Aransas, Texas. Rachael has enjoyed birding across the country, from spotting puffins on the coast of Alaska to watching her favorite bird in Texas, the Roseate Spoonbill. She is very excited for the opportunity to share her love of birds with the TOS community!

**Friday Eve**

**Title:** Winged Winter Wonders: Who Are They?

**Presenter:** Glenn Olsen

**Description:** The upper Texas coast is world renowned for the amazing spring migration of songbirds and shorebirds. What is less known and under-appreciated is how fantastic the upper coast is for winter birding! We will explore what makes the upper Texas coast a great winter birding location and discuss some of the sought after birds that “may” be seen during our meeting.

Some of these birds may be common wintering species and usually seen while others may be more difficult to find, although common. Still others are irregular, such as the Tundra Swan and Pacific Loon but we need to be alert for one as they are rare and few in number but possible. The Pacific Loon can easily be overlooked or mistaken as a common loon, especially at a distance. Then, there are others, such as the mythical Black Rail that require persistence, determination and a lot of luck to get a glimpse of these rare birds. This presentation will share details of the habitat, occurrence, and behavior of these and several other exciting birds where winter on the upper coast offers an excellent and



*Glenn Olsen*

frequently an unrivaled opportunity to see them in Texas.

**Bio:** Glenn leads natural history and birding tours with GOBirding Ecotours to the hottest birding locations in the U.S., exotic locales such as the Galapagos Islands, the Amazon Rainforest, Ecuador, Costa Rica, and Honduras. His tours

include aspects of the culture, ecology and natural history of the region. Glenn’s classes at Rice University’s Glasscock School of Continuing Studies encompass the identification of birds, gardening for birds, butterflies and pollinators, sustainable landscaping, native plants and other nature related subjects. At Houston Audubon his classes focus on the identification of the many birds found in Texas. Glenn has completed the Master Naturalist course and gives classes for the program.

He has served on the board of Houston Audubon as Vice President of Education and as President of both the Houston Chapter and the statewide organization of the Native Plant Society of Texas. Glenn has led field trips and/or given presentations for the Texas Ornithological Society, Houston Audubon, Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival, Galveston FeatherFest, Rockport HummerBird Festival, the

Native Plant Society of Texas, WildScapes Workshops, the Katy Prairie Conservancy, Houston Arboretum, and others. Contact Glenn at h.glenn.olsen@gmail.com or 832-517-2478.

**Saturday Afternoon**

**Title:** Know Your Gulls

**Presenter:** Cin-Ty Lee

**Description:** This presentation will focus on the basics of gull identification, with an emphasis on the gulls of the Gulf Coast.



*Cin-Ty Lee*

Pair this presentation with Cin-Ty Lee’s Wintering Gulls field trip on Sunday for the perfect combo!

**Bio:** Cin-Ty Lee is a professor of geology at Rice University. He has been birding for thirty years and has written numerous identification articles, such as on pewees, dowitchers, orioles and

pipits. He teaches ornithology at Rice University. He has been birding in Texas for 16 years and regularly leads bird walks for beginners and experts.

**Saturday Night Keynote**

**Title:** How Birds and Citizen Scientists Can Save the World

**Presenter:** Richard Gibbons

**Description:** Birds have long served as harbingers for humanity. Many of our most important environmental laws were influenced by the decline of birds. Amateur birdwatchers continue to gather data for the two most important bird monitoring projects, the Christmas Bird Count and the Breeding Bird Survey. Now, new projects exploring migration, population trends, and so much more are taking advantage of the groundbreaking eBird program and new technologies. In these changing times, citizen scientists are sharing their passion for nature and gathering the data to inform meaningful management practices and policies. Ultimately, public opinion will be the driver of the societal changes needed to meet the challenges of an ever more populated planet and a rapidly changing climate. Bird species will ebb and flow with a changing climate and an enthusiastic group of amateurs and scientists will have the tools and data to develop compelling cases to move toward sustainability.



*Richard Gibbons*

**Bio:** Richard Gibbons is the Conservation Director for Houston Audubon and a Research Associate of the LSU Museum of Natural Science. He has worked as an ornithologist for more than two decades along the

Gulf Coast and throughout the Americas. Richard works with

the Houston Audubon team to manage and restore habitat in Houston Audubon’s 17 nature sanctuaries, including the famed High Island and Bolivar Flats sanctuaries. Richard develops and manages monitoring programs and advocates for birds and conservation in Houston Audubon’s 11-county service area.

Prior to moving to Houston six years ago, Richard worked at Louisiana State University’s Museum of Natural Science coordinating citizen science projects while earning his PhD studying birds, wetlands, and climate change in Peru’s high Andes.

## Field Trips

Number	Field Trip & Description	County	Difficulty	Hours	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
1	<b>Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge &amp; Rollover Pass</b> Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge, located on the mainland side of East Galveston Bay, is an important winter stopover for a variety of waterfowl, sparrows, and raptors. The 37,000-acre coastal refuge contains vast expanses of brackish and fresh water marsh, flooded soil units and prairie bordering the Bay – welcoming habitat to a wide range of migratory and resident coastal specialty birds. We will enjoy the excellent viewing available on park roads, trails and boardwalks. Potential sightings include Seaside Sparrow, Nelson’s Sparrow, Sedge and Marsh Wrens, Northern Harrier, White-tailed Kite, Osprey, Crested Caracara, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, various teal and other ducks, both cormorants, Boat-tailed Grackle, a variety of rails, herons and egrets and thousands of Snow and White-fronted Geese. On the return trip, we will stop at Rollover Pass and bird the Bay. Sightings should include several species of gulls, terns, shorebirds, herons and egrets as well as both species of pelicans and cormorants. Potential sightings include American Oystercatcher, Black Skimmer, Black-bellied Plover and Clapper Rail.	Chambers	Easy	5:30am-3:00pm	X	X	X
2	<b>Birds of Moody Gardens</b> Join Moody Gardens biologists on a guided walking tour of the 240-acre Moody Gardens complex, inside and out. On the grounds, likely sightings include Peregrine Falcon, Common Loon, Red-breasted Merganser, Spotted Sandpiper, Neotropic and Double-crested Cormorants, and a variety of small shorebirds, herons and egrets. Gain access to the Rainforest and Aquarium exhibits where you’ll encounter more than 50 species of tropical Rainforest birds and 7 species of penguins. We’ll then take a short drive to the 170-acre Moody Gardens Golf Course, driving carts to four of the more scenic and birdy habitats the course has to offer. Potential sightings include Osprey, Blue-winged and Green-winged Teal, Ruddy Duck, Long-billed Curlew, and Sandhill Crane. (Note: Breakfast ends at 7:00am.)	Galveston	Easy	7:30am-2:00pm	X	X	X
3	<b>Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge, Surfside, Bryan Beach &amp; Quintana.</b> The trip begins early traveling west along the Seawall (Hwy 3005) and over the San Luis Pass Bridge. This is the beginning of the Blue Water Highway and continues on to Surfside and Freeport. Following a rest stop, we’ll continue on to the Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge (BNWR), which is designated as an Internationally Significant Shorebird site. BNWR contains more water than land within its 44,000+ acres including bay waters, salt water marshes, fresh and salt water estuaries, mud flats, ponds, and winding bayous. These provide ideal wintering grounds for raptors, shorebirds, and thousands of migratory waterfowl. Once in the Refuge, we will enjoy the boardwalk and trails before taking the auto tour with frequent stops at birdy areas. Potential sightings include Common Yellowthroat, Seaside and Swamp Sparrows, Osprey, Northern Harrier, White-tailed Kite, Crested Caracara, possibly Snow, Ross’s and White-fronted Geese, Lesser Scaup, Northern Shoveler, Blue-winged, Green-winged and possibly Cinnamon Teal, Northern Pintail, Pied-billed Grebe, Common Gallinule, Sora, Clapper Rail and American Bittern. On the return, we will stop at the jetties, Quintana, and Bryan Beach. Although Quintana is best known as a birding magnet during spring migration, it can also be worth visiting in other seasons including winter. With habitat ranging from brackish and salt water wetlands to scrubby uplands and dunes, to beaches and bays, a wide variety of species can be seen. Potential sightings include several duck species, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Brown and White Pelicans, Neotropic and Double-crested Cormorants, Caspian, Royal and Forster’s Terns, Least and Western Sandpipers, Piping, Snowy, Semipalmated and Black-bellied Plovers, Dunlin, Sanderling, Ruddy Turnstone, Horned Lark, and a variety of herons and egrets. The beach and jetties offer chances for rare gulls and an opportunity to study wintering gulls, terns, shorebirds, and various ducks.	Brazoria	Easy	6:30am- mid-afternoon	X	X	X

4	<p><b>Bolivar Sampler - Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary (BFSS), Horseshoe Marsh, Rollover Pass.</b> Bolivar is one of our favorite coastal hotspots! This well-known Peninsula features various habitats including sand flats, coastal prairies, jetties, tidal sloughs and wooded lots, as well as historic Fort Travis. We will explore French Town Road north of the ferry landing to bird Horseshoe Marsh. Following the Bolivar Loop, we will cross Hwy 87 to Fort Travis and the surrounding marshes. Leaving Fort Travis, we will follow the feeder road that will take us to the south jetty, the western boundary of the BFSS. A short walk on the jetty provides excellent views of hundreds of feeding shorebirds. Returning to Hwy 87, a short drive takes us to Retillon Road, the beach, and BFSS, designated a Globally Important Bird Area. It's known as one of the finest migratory locations in North America for shorebirds, terns, herons, and egrets. It is a designated habitat for the protection of endangered Piping Plover. Potential sightings include up to five species of plovers, several species of terns, at least five species of gulls, Peregrine Falcon, Northern Harrier, Crested Caracara, White-tailed Kite, Marbled Godwit, dowitchers, Long-billed Curlew, Red Knot, Marsh Wren, and Seaside Sparrow. Leaving Bolivar Flats, we will continue our birding adventure east to Rollover Pass. Side trips will be made looking for wintering sparrows, ducks, hawks, rare gulls, terns and shorebirds. Likely trip birds include White-tailed Kite, Crested Caracara, Red-tailed Hawk, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Brown and White Pelicans, Neotropic and Double-crested Cormorants, Bonaparte's and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Dunlin, Sanderling, Ruddy Turnstone, Least and Western Sandpiper, Piping, Snowy, Semipalmated and Black-bellied Plovers, Horned Lark and a variety of herons and egrets.</p>	Galveston	Easy/Moderate	6:30am- mid-afternoon	X	X	X
5	<p><b>Brazos Bend State Park.</b> This beautiful state park is nearly 4,800 acres along the Brazos River, and contains land in the floodplain, with magnificent moss-covered and vine-draped live oak woodlands surrounding fresh water marshes and tall grass prairie. This diverse habitat is a haven for migratory waterfowl, wading birds, and raptors. We'll hike along the trails through oak woodlands and around the lakes, and visit the observation tower. Potential sightings include Common Gallinule, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Wood Duck, Blue-winged Teal, Neotropic and Double-crested Cormorants, American Bittern, Belted Kingfisher, Black Vulture, Northern Harrier, Red-shouldered Hawk, Vermilion Flycatcher, Pileated Woodpecker, Common Yellowthroat, Boat-tailed Grackle, Swamp Sparrow, Sedge and Marsh Wrens, Anhinga, Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned Night-Herons, and a variety of wintering sparrows, egrets and herons.</p>	Fort Bend	Easy	5:45am- mid-afternoon	X		
6	<p><b>Galveston's Sampler - East Beach to 61st Street .</b> Galveston is renowned for its many birding hotspots. This trip will explore the city from the tip on the east end of the Seawall to the 61st Street Bridge over Offats Bayou. We will begin at the east end of the Seawall with a drive down Boddeker Drive to the East End flats. This accreting beach is bordered by the Houston Ship Channel, South jetty, and the Gulf of Mexico. A portion of this area is a designated Piping Plover habitat. This extensive shoreline of beaches, sand flats, coastal marshes, ponds, lagoons, and sand dunes provide habitat for over 50 species of wintering and resident birds. The water's edge can be active with peeps, plovers, Reddish Egret, herons, Willet, Dunlin, dowitchers, Ruddy Turnstone, pelicans, terns and gulls. Nelson's and Seaside Sparrows may be found hiding in the marsh areas. More easily seen are Savannah Sparrow, Horned Lark, Piping and Snowy Plovers. On the west side of Boddeker Drive is the 686-acre East End Lagoon Nature Preserve (EELNP) owned by the city of Galveston. The small ponds on the south side of the Seawall and the EELNP are home to Osprey, Peregrine Falcon, Northern Harrier, rails, ducks, American Coot, Pied-billed Grebe, and herons. Leaving the east end of the Seawall, a short trip takes us to Corp Woods where we can see wintering songbirds, sparrows, herons, hawks, and Common Grackle. Following a rest stop at the ferry landing, other possible hotspots are Pelican Island, 51st Street ponds, and Kempner Park. This is an urban park with picnic tables, a resident pair of Red-shouldered Hawks, a Cooper's Hawk, a Downy Woodpecker and occasional winter songbirds. Our last stop will be the 61st Street Jamail Park and Boat Ramp to look for loons and Bonaparte's Gull. Our local leaders know these hotspots well and will consider tide, weather, and what was seen during the Christmas Bird Count and by local scouts prior to the meeting. Targets: Galveston's own city bird, the Reddish Egret and the resident Mottled Duck. If there are rare gulls, uncommon sparrows, or wintering songbirds, your leaders will find them on this trip!</p>	Galveston	Easy	7:00am- mid-afternoon	X	X	X
7	<p><b>Galveston's West End Sampler - 61st Street to Jamaica Beach.</b> Explore the west end of the Island on this fast-paced adventure. This trip includes many of the Island's favorite hotspots – 61st Street Jamail Park and Boat Ramp, Moody Garden retention ponds and coastal marshes on Offats Bayou, old Sea Arama property south of the airport, Beach Pocket Parks 1 and 2, ponds at 7 ½ Mile Road, 8 Mile Road and Sportsman Road, Settegast Road, and if time permits, Lafitte's Cove Nature Preserve and the Galveston Island State Park. These ever-popular birding areas include a variety of habitats – Offats Bayou, West Galveston Bay, coastal wetlands, brackish estuaries, ponds, beaches and bays, agricultural fields, and manicured golf courses. Expected species to be seen include up to a dozen species of waterfowl, a dozen species of shorebirds, a dozen species of gulls and terns, half a dozen species each of raptors and herons/egrets. Species of note may include Bonaparte's Gull, White-tailed Kite, American Avocet, Red-breasted Merganser, Ring-necked Duck, Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Ruddy Duck, Redhead Duck, Clapper Rail, Black Skimmer, Roseate Spoonbill, American Oystercatcher, Long-billed Curlew, Marbled Godwit, Sandhill Crane, and Wilson's Snipe. Our local leaders know these birding spots well and will consider the weather, tides, and whatever they have seen on the Christmas Bird Count or scouting just prior to the meeting to decide what to view and where to go. This trip is not fixed rigidly in advance but is more of a birding adventure. You'll go where the birds are!</p>	Galveston	Easy	7:00am- mid-afternoon		X	X



8	<p><b>Galveston Island State Park &amp; Lafitte’s Cove Nature Preserve.</b> Galveston Island State Park is the last undeveloped land on the Island that allows public access to both beach and bay waters. It protects 2,000 acres of unique, upper Gulf Coast barrier island eco-system, featuring beaches, prairies, wetlands, and lagoons. This important habitat is crucial to the life cycles of many ocean species of invertebrates, fish, reptiles, mammals, and more than 300 species of birds. Potential sightings include Osprey, White-tailed Kite, Northern Harrier, Barn Owl, American Kestrel, Merlin, White Pelican, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Mottled Duck, Northern Shoveler, Blue-winged Teal, Lesser Scaup, Pied-billed Grebe, Clapper Rail, Long-billed Curlew, Wilson’s Snipe, and a variety of “peeps,” terns, herons, and egrets. The 32-acre Lafitte’s Cove Nature Preserve is owned by the city of Galveston. A small lake is on the southern edge of the forest and a boardwalk over freshwater marsh to the south leads into the large oak mott. Lafitte’s Cove becomes a crossroad for enormous numbers of birds throughout the year. Winter time lacks the warblers and other songbird migrants but has many waterbirds and a few interesting land birds over winter. The boardwalks provide excellent viewing and photography of waterfowl including Mottled Duck, American Wigeon, Gadwall, Northern Shoveler, and Blue and Green-winged Teal. Wintering land birds on the property may include Blue-headed Vireo, kinglets, sparrow, wrens, Eastern Phoebe, Hermit Thrush, and wintering warblers like Yellow-rumped, Wilson’s, and Common Yellowthroat. The Preserve is home to a pair of breeding Great Horned Owls.</p>	Galveston	Easy/Moderate	6:45am- mid-afternoon	X	X	X
9	<p><b>Greet the Dawn at Virginia Point - The John M. O’Quinn I-45 Estuary Corridor and Virginia Point Preserve.</b> This location is not normally publicly accessible. Virginia Point is a historic peninsula located across Galveston Bay comprising the wonderful 3,000 acres of mainland bay margin which SCENIC GALVESTON, Inc. (SG) has acquired for permanent conservation protection. Visitors coming into or out of Galveston on I-45 (the O’Quinn Estuary Corridor) see the results of this non-profit’s work on both flanks, and those areas are open to the public. Our trip will begin at a freshwater pond located off a private road into northern Virginia Point. Over coffee, you will appreciate the dawn songs (including rails, and sometimes Black Rail), then watch flyovers until the sun comes up. We should see/hear 30-40 species before leaving the pond site. We will then explore a primitive trail in the Virginia Point Prairie. This has freshwater adjacencies and a very productive oak motte at the end. It’s a mile or so one way and can be shortened at any juncture. Please note the trail, while mowed, is a strenuous and uneven walk. Thereafter, time and tide permitting, we will head through the O’Quinn Corridor, with birding/rest stop(s) at SG’s Reitan Point pavilion and productive mud flats in the I-45 marshes, to the open bay shoreline of Virginia Point, where SG constructed a living shoreline breakwater project in 2016 and began a new saltmarsh planting in 2018. Apart from the birdy breakwaters, this shoreline walk has good views into a managed SG coastal salt prairie with attendant winter grassland species. Mud shoes or rubber boots are ideal. Expected specialty birds include Seaside, Nelson’s, LeConte’s and other wintering prairie sparrows; two to three species of rails with a possibility of hearing a Black Rail. Virginia Point also hosts nesting White-tail Kite and Great Kiskadee; winter raptor here can be excellent. The Virginia Point mainland sector of the Galveston Christmas Bird Count averages 100 coastal species; this trip will largely duplicate SG’s typical CBC run, with same leaders. The trip will be adapted to ‘day-of’ field conditions, and may contain some off-agenda surprises.</p>	Galveston	Moderate	5:45am- mid-afternoon	X		X
10	<p><b>Nature Conservancy’s Texas City Prairie Preserve.</b> The Nature Conservancy’s Texas City Prairie Preserve is 2,303 acres of coastal prairie at the intersection of urban expanse and rural beauty. The coastal grasslands found here are vital to the natural resilience of the Gulf Coast. Prairies and marshlands act as a natural buffer during storms and hurricanes, absorbing and dispersing water from storm surges and floods. The sponge-like qualities of the prairie are also important for filtering the freshwater that flows into the Gulf of Mexico. Normally, only 40 acres of this preserve are open to the public. With the permission of preserve staff, we will bird through grassland prairie and wetlands, on to the large dike that protects Texas City. The wetlands support migratory and year-round populations of waterfowl, shorebirds and wading birds and the preserve provides a home for wintering and migrating grassland songbirds. Birds such as the Brown Pelican, White Ibis, Peregrine Falcon, White-tailed Hawk, Forster’s Tern, and Seaside Sparrow routinely inhabit the preserve. Various species of ducks, gulls, herons, egrets, terns, raptors, shorebirds, and flycatchers can also be viewed here. While traveling through the preserve you will also see many of our native plants include big and little bluestem, yellow indiagrass, switchgrass, eastern gammagrass, gulf cordgrass and the rare coastal gayfeather. Targets: American &amp; Sprague’s Pipits, Seaside Sparrow, Marsh Wren, American Oystercatcher, Common Loon, Red-breasted Merganser, White-tailed Hawk, White-tailed Kite, wintering waterfowl, and Monk Parakeet.</p>	Galveston	Moderate	5:45am- mid-afternoon	X	X	
11	<p><b>Dawn Patrol at the Sweetwater Preserve Plus Surrounding Hotspots.</b> The trip will begin on Galveston Bay Foundation’s Sweetwater Preserve with unforgettable views of 100-200 Sandhill Cranes taking flight from their protected marsh roost. Watch them as they awake, stretch, dance, stroll, vocalize and take flight in groups as small as three and as large as 20-30. They will be joined by flights of hundreds of local marsh birds. Roseate Spoonbill, ibis, herons, ducks, grebes, rails, sparrows, cormorants, hawks, Osprey, and sandpipers along with the Sandhill Cranes will demonstrate the diversity and beauty of winter marsh birds, bay ducks and American Oystercatcher. From there we will bird the leader’s favorite hotspots including freshwater ponds, coastal marshes, bay waters and the beach. We will see a number of species of ducks and hawks, White-tailed Kite, and get closer looks at sandpipers, gulls, terns and American Oystercatcher. The areas we will visit provide habitat for terns, gulls, Piping, Snowy and Black-bellied Plovers, American Avocet, Marbled Godwit, and Long-billed Curlew.</p>	Galveston	Easy	6:15am- mid-afternoon		X	X

12	<p><b>Texas City Dike and Surrounding Ponds &amp; Marshes.</b> This is your opportunity to explore “the other side” of Galveston Bay. We head over the causeway to explore birding areas on the Mainland side of Galveston Bay in the Tiki Island, Texas City, and La Marque areas. Birding locations will include freshwater ponds that provide easy observation of wintering waterfowl and shorebirds. We then continue to the Texas City Dike, one of the world’s longest man-made piers, extending over five miles into East Galveston Bay. Recreational areas along the Dike and Skyline Drive provide excellent vantage points to see birds in a true marine environment. Potential sightings include Peregrine Falcon, Cooper’s, Sharp-shinned and Red-shouldered Hawks, Common Loon, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, Eared Grebe, Black Skimmer, Lesser Black-backed, Bonaparte’s and other gulls, Caspian, Royal, Forster’s (and possibly other?) Terns, Long-billed Curlew, Snowy, Piping, Semipalmated, and Black-bellied Plovers, Least and Western Sandpipers, Dunlin, Ruddy Turnstone, Sanderling, Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned Night-Herons, Loggerhead Shrike, Vermillion Flycatcher, Savannah Sparrow, American Pipit and a variety of herons and egrets.</p>	Galveston	Easy	6:45am- mid-afternoon	X	X	X
13	<p><b>Practice with a Pro Photo Field Trip with Kathy Adams Clark.</b> Practice your bird photography skills at Appfel East Beach Park. Kathy Adams Clark, professional nature photographer, will be on hand to answer questions about techniques and equipment. Subjects will include Laughing, Ring-billed, and Herring Gulls with the possibility of Bonaparte’s and other rare wintering gulls. Black-bellied Plover, Willet, Western Sandpiper, and other shorebirds probable. Bring camera with lens in the range of 300mm to 600mm. Tripod and flash are helpful but not required. Prepare for some walking but no major hikes are planned. Come dressed for the weather.</p>	Galveston	Easy	8:00am-11:30am	X		
14	<p><b>Winter Shorebird Identification.</b> Practice your shorebird identification skills at Appfel East Beach Park. Naturalist Gary Clark will be your guide on this trip to offer tips on identification. Sightings will include Laughing, Ring-billed, and Herring Gulls with the possibility of Bonaparte’s and other rare wintering gulls. Black-bellied Plover, Willet, Western Sandpiper, and other shorebirds probable. Larks and sparrows are possible in the dunes. Spotting scope and tripod are helpful but not required. Prepare for some walking in sand and along the shoreline. Come dressed for the weather. (Note: Breakfast ends at 7:00am.)</p>	Galveston	Easy	7:30am-1:00pm	X		
15	<p><b>Bolivar Big Day with Richard Gibbons.</b> Experience the excitement of a big day on the Bolivar Peninsula with Richard Gibbons, Houston Audubon’s Conservation Director. Richard has regularly birded the Bolivar Peninsula for the last six years directing monitoring and land management projects such as the Beach-nesting Bird program, coastal bird surveys, Houston Audubon field trips, and helping with area Christmas Bird Counts. This will be a fast-paced day of birding as we will try to find more than 80 species of birds! Key to a successful day is to quickly identify the easily found species and search for the secretive and difficult to find uncommon species, e.g. Nelson’s and LeConte’s sparrows. For a species to be counted, two birders other than the leader must see the bird. Richard will try to have each new bird seen by as many participants as time permits. The trip count will begin and end on the Bolivar-Galveston ferry. Some of the areas to be covered are described and expected species are detailed in the Bolivar Sampler. The trip will begin at the ferry landing, and explore north and south sides of Hwy 87 at Bolivar. This includes Horseshoe Marsh, Ft. Travis, North Jetty, city of Port Bolivar, Rettilon Road, Bolivar Beach, and Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary. Returning to Hwy 87, the trip will continue east to Crystal Beach and Rollover Pass. Famous (Bob’s Road) and not so famous side roads will be taken to bird the adjacent ponds, saltmarshes, and agricultural fields. Hwy 87 runs through diverse habitats, from golf courses and oilfields, to saltmarshes and agricultural fields. This birdy habitat is interspersed between Intracoastal Waterway, development, and Gulf beaches. Richard is an experienced field trip leader. He will not just call out the names of the birds spotted, but will explain the key points he uses to identify the bird as well as try to locate the bird for others. Keep in mind, it’s a big day so set expectations accordingly! He will share his love of shorebirds and what Houston Audubon is doing to protect the coastal habitat. Be prepared to walk in wet and uneven areas.</p>	Galveston	Easy/Moderate	6:30am-mid-afternoon		X	
16	<p><b>Wintering Gulls with Cin-Ty Lee.</b> This field trip will focus on finding and identifying gulls along the Upper Texas Coast. Possible destinations are East Beach, Texas City Dike, and the Bolivar Peninsula. Join this field trip if you want to find a rarity or if you want to get a brief crash course on gull identification. Cin-Ty Lee’s Saturday afternoon presentation, Know Your Gulls, is the perfect combo for this trip!</p>	Galveston	Easy	7:00am-mid-afternoon			X
17	<p><b>Brazoria County Century Club Trip.</b> Century Club trips are fast paced outings trying to maximize the number of species within the county. Not much time for lingering looks so prepare to move briskly from spot to spot. Extensive driving to/from sites, and roadside birding. We will start at dawn at Bobcat Woods at San Bernard NWR looking for wintering passerines and water birds at the nearby Wolfweed Moist Soil Unit and Reservoir. After checking other parts of the refuge we move to Quintana to look for saltwater shorebirds and gulls. We will likely then make a quick check of Surfside on our way to Brazoria NWR to look for more ducks and shorebirds. Expectations include Snow, Ross’s, &amp; White-fronted Goose, Sandhill Crane, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Nelson’s Sparrow (will take a little luck), and hopefully some wintering rarities found on the CBC.</p>	Brazoria	Easy	5:30am-5:00pm	X		

18	<b>Fort Bend County Century Club Trip.</b> Century Club trips are fast paced outings trying to maximize the number of species within the county. Not much time for lingering looks so prepare to move briskly from spot to spot. Extensive driving to/from sites, and roadside birding. We will start at first light at the 40-Acre Lake Tower at Brazos Bend SP looking for waders and blackbirds leaving the roost. After working other areas of the park for wintering passerines, we will move to Davis Estates Road for ducks and gulls. We will finish working prairie areas and farm fields for shorebirds and geese. Expectations will include Canvasback, American Bittern, Sandhill Crane, Pileated Woodpecker, Vermilion Flycatcher, LeConte's Sparrow (tricky to get good views) and hopefully some staked goodies. (Note: You will have to furnish your own breakfast.)	Fort Bend	Easy	5:00am-5:00pm		X	
19	<b>Hardin County Century Club Trip.</b> Century Club trips are fast paced outings trying to maximize the number of species within the county. Not much time for lingering looks so prepare to move briskly from spot to spot. Extensive driving to/from sites, and roadside birding. We'll be driving about 2 hours before first birding stop. We'll explore regional water holes, towns, forests and open habitats as we attempt to get 60-80 species in Hardin County. With some diligence we might get Hairy Woodpecker, Fish Crow, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Winter Wren and Henslow's Sparrow.	Hardin	Easy	5:30am-5:00pm	X		
20	<b>Liberty County Century Club Trip.</b> Century Club trips are fast paced outings trying to maximize the number of species within the county. Not much time for long looks so prepare to move briskly from spot to spot. Extensive driving to/from sites and roadside birding. We'll be driving about 1.5 hours before first birding stop. We'll explore regional water holes, towns, forests and open habitats as we attempt to get 60-80 species in Liberty County. With some luck we may find Wood Duck, Fish Crow, Red-headed Woodpecker, White-tailed Kite, and Dark-eyed Junco.	Liberty	Easy	6:00am-4:00pm		X	

## Saying Goodbye to Anthony “Fat Tony” Hewetson (But not really!)

When TOS President, Shelia Hargis, asked me to write an article thanking Anthony for his years of service to the Board, I thought “huh?” What do I know about Anthony? I started thinking about it, and came up with the following:

1. He wears a cool bucket hat,
2. He likes beer and wine ;),

3. He works at the university level with cadavers--or something, and
4. He's an awesome birder.



At the Spring Meeting in Alpine, Anthony was recognized for being the first and so far the only birder to see at least 100 birds in all 254 Texas counties as a part of the Century Club competition. Speaking of competitions, each year Anthony and his birding friends come up with ways to compete against each other in their neck of the woods. Anthony never fails to keep us updated via Texbirds of their exploits and progress in their various competitions. I find these posts fascinating as the counties he birds in are nowhere near my usual birding haunts. His posts are valuable information for some future bird excursions.

Anthony served on the TOS Board as Director of Region 1 for many years. How many? I don't know, and neither does he. I just know that he has been a Board Member since I met him in 2012 (aka the Steve Gross soirees).

The good news is that although Anthony is resigning his position from the Board due to an increasingly heavy workload, he will continue to be a valuable asset to the organization. Anthony uses his expertise of having seen at least 100 birds in all 254 Texas counties to lead Century Club trips during our Winter and Spring Meetings. Also, Anthony is the one who creates those giant checklists for each of our meetings so we can keep track of the species each field trip encounters. He then analyzes the data from each checklist and writes up his findings for our newsletter.

Anthony's contributions to TOS extend far beyond his service to the Board, and we hope that he will have time to continue to help for many years to come.

*Susan Foster*



## MAGIC RIDGE

It was the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of a late April cold front. Reports from Port O'Connor indicated a major grounding was in progress. Brent Ortego headed to the Magic Ridge TOS Bird Sanctuary to determine if any migrants were grounded there. Birding began just as the sun started to peak over the horizon near the first road to the left in the sanctuary.



*Photo credit: Brent Ortego*

Brent noticed a few birds singing and hummers zipping through the bushes during the first half hour. “Then I watched with wonder as hundreds of migrants were flying through and just over the top of brush as they fought the north wind heading to their breeding grounds. This was my moment of “Magic” for the site.”

Brent ended up tallying 13 Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, 3 species of flycatchers, 3 species of vireos, Barn Swallow, 2 species of wrens, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, 3 species of thrush, Long-billed Thrasher, catbird, mockingbird, 179 individuals of 15 warbler species, 2 species of tanagers, N. Cardinal, Blue Grosbeak, 143 Indigo Buntings, 10 Painted Buntings, 1 Lazuli Bunting, 3 species of sparrows which included Clay-colored, Dickcissel and a variety of waterbirds. What Brent tallied was just a sample of what was passing through during that magical morning and they put on a display of many colors in the brush.

Fighting the north wind, the migrants seemed to stream from the Powderhorn Ranch, following the line of brush which bordered the bay. Internal migration compasses aligned with the shoreline of Lavaca Bay.

**TOS acquired the Magic Ridge Bird Sanctuary with funding from bird clubs, many birders, industry and conservation groups. Work for acquisition, planning and management were mostly conducted by local volunteers from the Port Lavaca, Port O'Connor and Victoria areas. This article updates progress on the Sanctuary.**

**NAME**—Magic Ridge originated from one of the earlier birders in the area, Doris Wyman, pegging the name Magic Road because unusual birds would show up “like Magic” in the area. Maybe during one of your future visits to the sanctuary, “Magic” will happen for you.



*TOS Magic Ridge Bird Sanctuary (outlined in red) Photo credit: Brent Ortego*

**HABITAT**—The Ridge is made up mostly of thorn scrub on top of a former shell beach. Uplands are bordered on the east by tidal marshes which support brackish plant communities. Hypersaline tidal flats border on the west. These flats catch water from local rains and storm tides, but do not have adequate daily tidal exchange to reduce salinities. The property in the southwest corner of the Sanctuary is mostly grasslands that are turning into brush.

Zimmerman Road is known for its wild flowers and many people visit it during the spring. Mountain Laurel, Spanish Daggers, blue bonnet, and a large variety of forbs color the road.



*Photo credit: Brent Ortego*

**HISTORY**—The Indianola area surrounding Magic Ridge was the site of one of the earlier seaports in Texas. The port was destroyed by two hurricanes during the 1800’s and was abandoned. Most of the original port has been washed away and is now covered by the bay. Due to poor surveys (fueled by land speculation) in the area, Zimmerman Road, which bisects Magic Ridge, was not laid out per the plats. The road does lead to one of two cemeteries in the area, with some graves dating back to the 1800’s.

**ACQUISITION**—The Sanctuary began with the purchase of the 71-acre Bastian Tract (surrounding the cemetery) in 2000. TOS added the 9-acre Nash Tract which is near the entrance to Zimmerman Road in 2001. Next, TOS started looking at additional properties to purchase. TOS explored the possibility of buying several different land holdings bordering the sanctuary, but most owners wanted much more money than market value. TOS ended up working with the Doremus heirs who owned over 100 acres bordering the west side of the Nash Tract and finally acquired it in 2005 thanks to help and persistence of local realtor Russell Cain. Carter Smith who was working for the Texas Nature Conservancy at the time helped TOS negotiate with the landowners and follow appropriate acquisition procedures.

As TOS became the largest landowner on Zimmerman Road, it sought to acquire in-holdings that would arrest future development. TOS was able to acquire various lots by direct purchase from landowners, auction at Sheriff’s sales when land was forfeited for failure to pay taxes, and donations.

**FUNDING**—Money for acquisition started as a Challenge for birders to match the \$15,000 Mark Elwonger, Lily Engles, Brent Ortego, Brush Freeman, and Petra & Ladd Hockey gave for the project. Birders love land, and 290 generous donors doubled our original donation. Thirteen bird groups chipped in \$11,000.

With a quality project to develop a local bird sanctuary, TOS was able to obtain grants from industry and local foundations. Alcoa, Dow and Formosa donated \$25,000. The Therese Hershey Foundation and the Trull Foundation each gave TOS a grant for the first purchase and later gave us another grant for additional land.

TOS was also successful at obtaining public conservation grants. TOS obtained a Texas Parks and Wildlife Department \$80,000 Conservation Action Grant (license plate funds), and a \$50,000 North American Wetland Conservation Act grant. Both grants had to be spent within the year they were awarded. Sadly, TOS had to return them because of complications in purchase of the properties which we sought.

TOS eventually purchased the Doremus property which is shown as the “golf grounds” on plats. This tract is the largest holding and includes the tidal flats and uplands bordering FM 316. Realtor Russell Cain worked with TOS for years closing this deal, complicated by owners dying during the process.

**BIRDS**—Wetlands provide foraging for an increasing number of Whooping Cranes, and a large population of wading birds in the area. Hypersaline tidal flats serve as breeding areas for Wilson’s Plover and Least Tern, and foraging for thousands of shorebirds. Thorn-scrub ridge supports Curve-billed and Long-billed Thrashers—which are



Photo credit: Brent Ortego

on the eastern end of their ranges—and provides a woodland route for neotropical migrants during their passage.

**eBird** lists 286 species for the Magic Ridge Hotspot. Unusual bird reports for the Sanctuary are:

2	Groove-billed Ani	Brush Freeman	10/15/04
1	Greater Roadrunner	Thomas Haase	7/09/18
1	Lesser Nighthawk	Jeff Mundy	4/18/10
1	Anna’s Hummingbird	Brush Freeman	11/07/02
X	Black Rail	many	
8	Whooping Crane	Brush Freeman	10/26/05
1	Piping Plover	Brent Ortego	5/16/15
33	Wilson’s Plover	Brent Ortego	4/01/18
4500	Lesser Yellowlegs	Steve Taylor	4/18/14
45	Least Tern	Sonny Bratz	7/03/15
20	Reddish Egret	Sonny Bratz	6/13/15
1	Glossy Ibis	Steve Taylor	4/18/14
2	Harris’s Hawk	Susan Foster	11/17/12
1	Ferruginous Hawk	Brush Freeman	1/09/05
185	E. Kingbird	Bob Friedrichs	5/03/16
120	Scissor-tailed Flycatcher	Brent Ortego	4/01/00
1	Bell’s Vireo	Bob Friedrichs	5/03/16
3	Bewick’s Wren	Blaine Carnes	2/14/17
19	Curve-billed Thrasher	Brush Freeman	2/05/13
1	Sprague’s Pipit	Brent Ortego	11/28/99
3	Cassin’s Sparrow	Mark Wilson	5/06/11
2	Clay-colored Sparrow	Adam Wood	1/26/08
1	Black-throated Sparrow	Deborah Valdez	1/26/08



1	Lark Bunting	Brush Freeman	2/21/14
2	Green-tailed Towhee	David Fleming	12/28/11
70	Yellow-breasted Chat	Brush Freeman	9/03/00
20	Orchard Oriole	Fred Collins	4/17/09
9	N. Waterthrush	Brent Ortego	4/26/05
49	Tennessee Warbler	Brent Ortego	4/26/05
49	Nashville Warbler	Brent Ortego	4/26/05
16	American Redstart	Bob Friedrichs	5/03/16
1	Tropical Parula	Brush Freeman	9/03/05
21	Magnolia Warbler	Bob Friedrichs	5/03/16
52	Yellow Warbler	Bob Friedrichs	5/03/16
12	Black-throated Green Warbler	Brent Ortego	4/26/05
10	Pyrrhuloxia	David Fleming	12/28/11
1	Lazuli Bunting	Brent Ortego	4/26/05
143	Indigo Bunting	Brent Ortego	4/26/05

**MANAGEMENT**—Planted 40 live oaks, 14 fruiting mulberries, and 6 cedar elms on the Nash Tract in 2005. Constructed an irrigation system with a tie-in to public water supplies to provide water for the trees and 3 bird baths. Established trails connecting all features. Calhoun County Precinct One helped with the project by providing one dump truck load of mulch.

*It is nice to have friendly neighbors. We bought the trees, recruited a crew, obtained tools and showed up to start planting. It did not take us long to figure out that digging holes in shell with shovels was not going to work. We made a call to James Brown who is a local rancher and fortunately he had a back-hoe and operator nearby to provide us some assistance.*

Maintenance of the trails and water system was stewarded by Diane Nunley and her assistants.

**ROADSIDE TRASH**—Zimmerman Road is public and is used by local residents, anglers, birders, visitors to the cemetery and nature enthusiasts. Trash is deposited along the roads by usual methods and does not typically accumulate rapidly. Much of the trash along the road can be handled by visiting birders if they bring a garbage bag with them and pick up the few items that are seen. Larger items will be removed on scheduled work days.

### RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

For over a decade in the early 2000's, no additional property was acquired by TOS for Magic Ridge, even though a number of undeveloped inholdings remained. Some small properties were offered for sale by individual owners, but it was difficult to discern whether asking prices were reasonable, and the TOS board did not have a specific plan to address further acquisitions. At a board meeting in September, 2015, however, during a discussion of sanctuary needs and

priorities, the board was polled about whether additional sanctuary properties should be acquired by TOS. The opinion was unanimous that if additional properties become available near existing TOS sanctuaries, the acquisition of such properties should be seriously considered.

During a workday at Magic Ridge in March of 2017, local resident Mary Belle Meitzen approached then-president Byron Stone to discuss the possible donation of her lots (located along Zimmerman Road) to TOS. Byron told her that TOS would do whatever we could to facilitate such a transfer, and she and her husband did in fact donate their property to TOS later that year. During preparations for the 2017 sanctuary work day, Allan Berger not only helped make most of the arrangements, but he also drafted a tentative management plan for the sanctuary. Local interest was evident at the workday, as over 20 local residents turned out to help clean up the property, make minor repairs, and to learn more about the TOS sanctuary.

Developing a plan for additional property acquisition at Magic Ridge was a daunting task, however, because of continued escalation of real and speculative property values along the central coast, and also because of the large number of mostly small inholdings with numerous different owners. In May of 2018, however, we were alerted by TOS neighbor and friend Kay Rogers that a large property had just been offered for sale by a local realtor. The TOS board was convened via conference call, and the decision was made to attempt to acquire this large piece of property to augment current holdings at Magic Ridge. Current President Shelia Hargis and Immediate Past-President Byron Stone were authorized by the Executive Committee to initiate negotiations for the property.



*The red X marks the general area of the new property. Photo credit: Google and Shelia Hargis*





New property is the highest point in the area. Photo credit: Shelia Hargis

This is an exciting time for Magic Ridge. A deal has been reached, and the board has decided to purchase this property with funds that have accumulated over the years because of prudent management of TOS finances. Once this property is acquired, the Magic Ridge sanctuary will be expanded by over 40%, and an additional 80+ acres of



Board Members (Gailon Brehm, Jimma Byrd, Byron Stone and Daniel Hodges) contemplating the new property from another angle. Photo credit: Shelia Hargis

increasingly valuable coastal scrub and wetland will be set aside as habit for migratory, breeding, wintering and roosting birds.

Stay tuned for announcements about work days and additional birding opportunities at Magic Ridge in the near future.

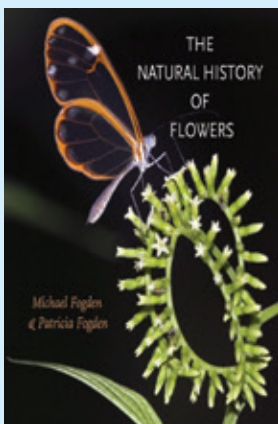
*Brent Ortego, Byron Stone, Mark Elwonger, Diane Nunley, Brush Freeman, Petra Hockey*

## Book Review

### *The Natural History of Flowers*

Authors: Michael Fogden & Patricia Fogden

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From the title of this book one would expect a more or less scientific treatment of the history of flowering plants, with special attention to their evolution and place in the larger natural picture. Instead, what one finds is a lot of beautiful pictures, pertinent to the text, but not so much the topic of natural history. One gets the feeling, substantiated by the fact that the authors are “acclaimed photographers,” not botanists, that this book is an excuse for

exhibiting a lot of pretty photographs, not for an explanation of the place of flowering plants in nature throughout their history. The book is on the verge of being a coffee table book.

This is not to say the book is short on describing many fascinating and informative facts about flowers and their various “syndromes.” For example, it was an “Aha moment” to realize that tumbleweeds evolved their dehiscent, nomadic behavior as a means to disperse seeds. The book is full of interesting facts like this. It’s worth reading just to pick up these gems.

Pollinators and their role in present day germination schemes is a particularly well-treated subject, although it would be nice to understand how pollination syndromes changed and evolved over the natural history of both pollinators and flowering plants. Only Chapter 13 offers a very few paragraphs about coevolution.

A single chapter, Chapter 3, focuses on the title subject matter. Granting that, more time is spent furthering the ills of the Anthropocene era and the catastrophic anthropogenic global warming meme than on natural history. Further, the authors have bought into the CAGW and GMO/organic meme big time, without any attempt to balance their opinions with sound science.

One-third of the book, Chapter 14, is a general catalog of a select set of neotropical plant families, with no particular relevance to natural history. North American readers will be disappointed to find that the families chosen are largely foreign to them. Only a few, including *Fabaceae* and *Solonaceae*, have local color. No doubt, the book was not intended exclusively for American readers, but given it is published by the TAMU Press, one suspects the readership would lean in that direction. Including families more common to the Americas would have sustained better interest.

Perhaps the highlight of the book is the large number of strikingly beautiful photographs. The quality of the imagery and the choice of paper are exceptional.

*John Huecksteadt  
Fredericksburg, TX*

## Regional Reports

### Region 2—North Central Texas

**Rare bird summary**—With thanks to Ross Rasmussen, I can share that 25 species of notable rare or unexpected birds were reported in North Central Texas during Spring 2018 (March -May). These birds were either unexpected or were observed in unusually high numbers or at out-of-season times. Of these, the **Best Sightings** were:

- Clark's Grebe (*Tarrant County*)
- Little Gull (*Denton, Tarrant Counties*)
- Great Kiskadee (*Rains, Tarrant Counties*)
- Worm-eating Warbler (*Hill County*)
- Black-headed Grosbeak (*Ellis, Dallas Counties*)
- Henslow's Sparrow (*Collin, Dallas Counties*)
- Red Crossbill (*Hardeman, Dallas Counties*)

Ross's full report can be read by subscribers to *North American Birds* (a publication of the American Birding Association).

—Gailon Brehm

### Region 5—Edwards Plateau Report

I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome our newest members to TOS. We want you to know how glad we are you've joined us! You'll meet some knowledgeable, generous and gracious people who enjoy birding with others while improving their own skills. No matter your stage of learning, you'll find a warm welcome here.

I hope you'll make plans to attend the next bi-annual meeting in Galveston. The meetings are a great chance to explore different locales, meet new friends, and find out what TOS is all about. You can sign up for field trips to places that are not generally accessible to the public or visit known hotspots. By attending the presentations offered, you're sure to learn some cool new facts about birds.

So, welcome to the state birding group! Please don't be shy about introducing yourself and sharing your own expertise. We are a member led group and anxious to learn all we can from you and how to make this an even more vibrant organization.

—Jimma Byrd

### Region 6 Report

By the time you read this, the recipient of the second annual (I hope) scholarship to Victor Emanuel Nature Tours Camp Chiricahua Birding Camp in southeast Arizona, provided by Williamson Audubon Group of Georgetown, Texas, will have been announced. Camp Chiricahua is VENT's flagship summertime birding camp. VENT youth camps present a rare opportunity for young naturalists to be in the field with their peers and expert leaders. Next summer's session will be July 10-19, 2019.

This year's scholarship winner is Tobias Yoder, a seventeen year old from Round Rock, Texas. Tobias attended Round Rock High School, and is currently enrolled in the Texas A&M Engineering Academy. He has been a mentor for three at-risk middle school students, belongs to

YES which supports the homeless populations and serves the community, served with Mobile Loaves and Fishes helping the homeless population in Austin, has a photo in the 2018 Audubon Photography Awards top 100 photos of the year, is a member of the National Honor Society, has a second degree black belt, has a 5.4 high school GPA, and received a 5 (the highest possible score) on the AP Chemistry and World History exams. Also, Tobias is the cousin and birding partner of Will Hilscher, last year's WAG sponsored camper.

Concerned about the future of birding? Don't be.

— Daniel Hodges

### Region 7 Director Report

This has been a long-term goal of Monte Mucho Audubon Society in Laredo, Texas – to build its future capacity for its own organization, get more youth involved, and increase birding awareness and knowledge among the Laredo student population. Laredo Independent School District has given our Audubon chapter permission to start birding clubs. It will be a long-term project to support a club in every middle and high schools. The following list of schools will be the first to organize a birding club.

- Harmony Science Academy High School
- Christen Middle School
- Cigarroa Middle School
- Lamar Middle School
- Memorial Middle School

The Muscovy Duck Project phase #1, continues in Zapata County. More ranches in this region are needing site surveys. Nesting boxes are being built and will require installation scheduling.

Laredo Bird Festival schedule is February 6-9, 2018. New ranch properties are being added every year.

—Raul Delgado

### Region 8 Director Report

Our Winter Meeting Partners—The TOS Winter Meeting will be in Galveston this January, and TOS is fortunate to be partnering with the Galveston Island Nature Tourism Council (GINTC). If you have ever enjoyed FeatherFest in the spring, you have seen what GINTC can do, so the winter meeting is sure to be an excellent event for TOS members. In addition to hosting birding and nature events in Galveston, GINTC works to protect the island's resources and to educate residents and visitors about the nature that surrounds them. Most recently, they helped raise money to have an Eskimo Curlew memorial sculpture from The Lost Bird Project erected on Galveston Island. The last confirmed sighting of a living Eskimo Curlew was from Galveston Island in 1962, and the memorial will serve as a reminder about the importance of conservation.

Sim's Bayou Raptor Center—In 2019, Houston Audubon will be celebrating 50 years of bird conservation on the upper Texas coast. The organization owns and manages nearly 3500 acres spread across 17 different sanctuaries. Their Sims Bayou

## Regional Reports (continued)



Urban Nature Center in southeast Houston is home to the Houston Audubon Education Department and will soon reopen as a raptor and education center. The education staff currently works with 8 non-releasable raptors, which are showcased in bird conservation programs across the region. In 2019 they will move into the new facility at the nature center,

which should be ready for the public by February. Check the Houston Audubon website for more details in 2019: [www.houstonaudubon.org](http://www.houstonaudubon.org)

Rare and Unusual Sightings—One of the most unusual

sightings in our region was Western Red-billed Hornbill in Harris County on October 1. The presumed exotic escapee was originally found by visiting Spotted Skunk researcher Clint Perkins. It was later seen and photographed by John Berner at the corner of Jack Rd. & Warren Ranch Rd. Other notable sightings include:

- White-tipped Dove, San Bernard NWR, August (10-15)—heard only
- Sabine's Gull, Smith Point, September 21
- Great Black-backed Gull, Galveston Island SP, October 4
- Brown Booby, Calhoun Co, Harris Co, and Galveston Co, various dates
- Ringed Kingfisher, Sienna Plantation in Fort Bend Co, September 2
- Yellow-green Vireo, Sabine Woods, July 24

Kendra Kocab

## MBTA incidental take situation worsens; formal regulation to be proposed

For months, it has been rumored that the USFWS would propose a formal regulation stating that the MBTA does not cover incidental take.

Well, rumor no more.

The USFWS is about to propose a formal regulation to codify its current position that incidental take is not covered. In the fall semi-annual regulatory agenda published on 17 October 2018, the USFWS list of regulatory matters included this entry:

*The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposes to establish regulations that define the scope of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA or Act) as it applies to conduct resulting in the injury or death of migratory birds protected by the Act. This rule would codify the legal opinion in the Department of the Interior Solicitor's Opinion M-37050 that incidental take resulting from an otherwise lawful activity is not prohibited under the MBTA.*

Does the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) include the take of protected bird species as a result of otherwise lawful activity? No one knows. The statute is silent on the subject. The proponents of this 100-year old law were concerned about indiscriminate slaughter of birds for their plumes, used by the millinery trade. They were also concerned about harvest limits on game birds. In short, they were not thinking about incidental take.

In the early 1990s, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) became concerned about the impact of incidental take on migratory birds but knowing that there was legal uncertainty, never moved to formally regulate incidental take. Instead, the USFWS engaged with certain industries to encourage them to adopt practices to reduce the extent

of incidental take. The first of these efforts was the Avian Power Line Interaction Committee. Together, the industry and the USFWS compiled a set of best practices and the USFWS gave industry members time to implement those practices. Only if a company refused to implement those practices would the USFWS sue under the MBTA. The companies, for their part, came to the table because they faced the same uncertainty—what if the courts would hold them liable for incidental take?

Over time, some industries were more cooperative than others. In some cases, the USFWS imposed penalties for incidental take and these cases reached the federal courts. Some of the courts decided that the MBTA covers incidental take. Some courts decided to the contrary. And there things stand, ready for a Supreme Court showdown. (Editorial note: yes, you may and probably should take a drink or two as the enormity of that inevitable train wreck crosses your mind).

During the second Obama term, some in DOI made an attempt to incorporate the incidental take policy into formal regulation, going so far as to issue a notice of intent to publish a programmatic environmental impact statement and a regulation defining take to include incidental take. However, the White House apparently did not support this effort and it never came to fruition.

At the same time, some industries began pushing back. In particular, Duke Energy, which had been fined \$1million and placed on five years probation for killing birds at a wind energy facility, persuaded Congress to include in an appropriations bill a provision to prohibit the USFWS from prosecuting incidental take. Worse, the company and its





industry allies succeeded in persuading a South Carolina congressman to sponsor a free-standing bill to amend the MBTA to exclude incidental take from criminal liability (both efforts failed).

Meanwhile, back at the Department of the Interior, the Office of the Solicitor was persuaded at the 11 & 11/12th hour of the Obama Administration (10 January 2017) to issue an “M-Opinion” stating that the MBTA does cover incidental take. Which the new Administration promptly withdrew (20 January 2017). And then on 22 December 2017 issued a new M-Opinion stating that the MBTA does not cover incidental take. Several conservation organizations and eight states filed suit challenging that last M-Opinion. (All are still in the earliest stages; watch for updates).

And now it has come to this. For months, it has been rumored that the USFWS would propose a formal regulation stating that the MBTA does not cover incidental take. A regulation is much, much hard to reverse than is an M-Opinion.

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Worse and worse.

The USFWS had a flabby carrot and a very small stick to work with, given the legal uncertainty about incidental take, but the way things are going, it is likely to lose even that leverage. Permanently.

**Author:** Ellen Paul, Ornithological Council. *This news and analysis are provided by the Ornithological Council, a consortium supported by 11 ornithological societies. Join or renew your membership in your ornithological society if you value the services these societies provide to you, including Ornithology Exchange and the Ornithological Council.*



**Balcones Songbird Festival**  
*Keeping the Hill Country Wild*

**19th Annual Event**  
**April 26-28, 2019**

*The only nesting place of the*  
**Endangered Species Golden-cheeked Warbler**

**Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge**  
**in the Texas Hill Country**

**BalconesSongbirdFestival.org**

## Your Recycling Gets Recycled, Right? Maybe, or Maybe Not

Plastics and papers from dozens of American cities and towns are being dumped in landfills after China stopped recycling most “foreign garbage.”

Oregon is serious about recycling. Its residents are accustomed to dutifully separating milk cartons, yogurt containers, cereal boxes and kombucha bottles from their trash to divert them from the landfill. But this year, because of a far-reaching rule change in China, some of the recyclables are ending up in the local dump anyway.

In recent months, in fact, thousands of tons of material left curbside for recycling in dozens of American cities and towns—including several in Oregon—have gone to landfills.

In the past, the municipalities would have shipped much of their used paper, plastics and other scrap materials to China for processing. But as part of a [broad antipollution campaign](#), China announced last summer that it no longer wanted to import “foreign garbage.” Since Jan. 1 it has [banned imports of various types of plastic and paper](#), and tightened standards for materials it does accept.

While some waste managers already send their recyclable materials to be processed domestically, or are shipping more to other countries, others have been unable to find a substitute for the Chinese market. “All of a sudden, material being collected on the street doesn’t have a place to go,” said Pete Keller, vice president of recycling and sustainability at Republic Services, one of the largest waste managers in the country.

China’s stricter requirements also mean that loads of recycling are more likely to be considered contaminated if they contain materials that are not recyclable. That has compounded a problem that waste managers call wishful or aspirational recycling: people setting aside items for recycling because they believe or hope they are recyclable, even when they aren’t.

In the Pacific Northwest, Republic has diverted more than 2,000 tons of paper to landfills since the Chinese ban came into effect, Mr. Keller said. The company has been unable to move that material to a market “at any price or cost,” he said. Though Republic is dumping only a small portion of its total inventory so far—the company handles over five million tons of recyclables nationwide each year—it sent little to no paper to landfills last year.

But for smaller companies, like Rogue Disposal and Recycling, which serves much of Oregon, the Chinese ban has upended operations. Rogue sent all its recycling to landfills for the first few months of the year, said Garry Penning, a spokesman.

Western states, which have relied the most on Chinese recycling plants, have been hit especially hard. In some areas—like Eugene, Ore., and parts of Idaho, Washington, Alaska and Hawaii—local officials and garbage haulers will no longer accept certain items for recycling, in some cases refusing most plastics, glass and certain types of paper. Instead, they say, customers should throw these items in the trash.

Theresa Byrne, who lives in Salem, Ore., said the city took too long to inform residents that most plastics and egg and milk cartons were now considered garbage. “I was

angry,” she said. “I believe in recycling.”

Other communities, like Grants Pass, Ore., home to about 37,000 people, are continuing to encourage their residents to recycle as usual, but the materials are winding up in landfills anyway. Local waste managers said they were concerned that if they told residents to stop recycling, it could be hard to get them to start again.

It is “difficult with the public to turn the spigot on and off,” said Brian Fuller, a waste manager with the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality.

The fallout has spread beyond the West Coast. Ben Harvey, the president of E.L. Harvey & Sons, a recycling company based in Westborough, Mass., said that he had around 6,000 tons of paper and cardboard piling up, when he would normally have a couple hundred tons stockpiled. The bales are filling almost half of his 80,000-square-foot facility.

“It’s really impacted our day-to-day operations,” Mr. Harvey said. “It’s stifling me.”

Recyclers in Canada, Australia, Britain, Germany and other parts of Europe have also [scrambled to find alternatives](#).

Still, across much of the United States, including most major cities, recycling is continuing as usual. Countries like India, Vietnam and Indonesia are importing more of the materials that are not processed domestically. And some waste companies have responded to China’s ban by stockpiling material while looking for new processors, or hoping that China reconsiders its policy.

Americans recycle roughly 66 million tons of material each year, according to [the most recent figures from the Environmental Protection Agency](#), about one-third of which is exported. The majority of those exports once went to China, said David Biderman, the executive director of the Solid Waste Association of North America, a research and advocacy group.

But American scrap exports to China fell by about 35 percent in the first two months of this year, after the ban was implemented, said Joseph Pickard, chief economist for the Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries, a trade group.

“It’s a huge concern, because China has just been such a dominant overseas market for us,” Mr. Pickard said.

In particular, exports of scrap plastic to China, valued at more than \$300 million in 2015, totaled just \$7.6 million in the first quarter of this year, down 90 percent from a year earlier, Mr. Pickard said. Other countries have stepped in to accept more plastics, but total scrap plastic exports are still down by 40 percent this year, he said.

“There is a significant disruption occurring to U.S. recycling programs,” Mr. Biderman said. “The concern is if this is the new normal.”

Curbside recycling is typically hauled by a private company to a sorting plant, where marketable goods are separated out. Companies or local governments then sell the goods to domestic or overseas processors. Some states and cities prohibit these companies from dumping plastic, paper and cardboard, but some local officials—including in [Oregon](#), [Massachusetts](#) and various municipalities in [Washington State](#)—have granted waivers so that unmarketable materials can be sent to the landfill.

Recycling companies “used to get paid” by selling off

recyclable materials, said Peter Spendelow, a policy analyst for the Department of Environmental Quality in Oregon. "Now they're paying to have someone take it away."

In some places, including parts of Idaho, Maine and Pennsylvania, waste managers are continuing to recycle but are passing higher costs on to customers, or are considering doing so.

"There are some states and some markets where mixed paper is at a negative value," said Brent Bell, vice president of recycling at Waste Management, which handles 10 million tons of recycling per year. "We'll let our customers make that decision, if they'd like to pay more and continue to recycle or to pay less and have it go to landfill."

Mr. Spendelow said companies in rural areas, which tend to have higher expenses to get their materials to market, were being hit particularly hard. "They're literally taking trucks straight to the landfill," he said.

Will Posegate, the chief operations officer for Garten Services, which processes recycling for a number of counties in Oregon, said his company had tried to stockpile recyclables but eventually used a waiver to dump roughly 900 tons. "The warehouse builds up so much that it's unsafe," he said.

In California, officials are concerned that improperly stored bales of paper could become hazards during wildfire season, said Zoe Heller, the policy director for the state's recycling department.

While China has entirely banned 24 materials, including post-consumer plastic and mixed paper, it has also demanded that other materials, such as cardboard and scrap metal, be only 0.5 percent impure. Even a small amount of food scraps or other rubbish, if undetected, can ruin a batch of recycling.

Some waste managers say that China's new contamination standards are impossible to meet, while others are trying to clean up their recycling streams by slowing down their processing facilities, limiting the types of materials they accept or trying to better educate customers on what belongs in the recycling bin.

Mr. Bell, the Waste Management executive, said he had seen everything from Christmas lights to animal carcasses to artillery shells come through the company's recycling facilities. "Most of our facilities get a bowling ball every day or two," he said.

Some materials can ruin a load, he said, while others pose fire or health hazards and can force facilities to slow their operations and in some cases temporarily shut down. (And a bowling ball could do serious damage to the equipment.)

Approximately 25 percent of all recycling picked up by Waste Management is contaminated to the point that it is sent to landfills, Mr. Bell said.

Recyclers have always disposed of some of their materials. But the percentage has climbed as China and other buyers of recyclable material have ratcheted up quality standards.

Most contamination, Mr. Bell said, happens when people try to recycle materials they shouldn't. Disposable coffee cups—which are usually lined with a thin film that makes them liquid-proof but challenging and expensive to reprocess—are an example. Unwashed plastics can also cause contamination.

"If we don't get it clean, we're not going to be able to market it, and if we can't market it unfortunately it's going to go to the landfill," said Mr. Penning, the Rogue spokesman. In March, Rogue told customers to put everything in the trash except for corrugated cardboard, milk jugs, newspapers and tin and aluminum cans, which the company is finding domestic markets for, Mr. Penning said.

Rogue customers who make mistakes might see an "Oops" sticker the next time they check their recycling bin, he said.

In Eugene, similar restrictions have been imposed by the waste company Sanipac. These have not sat well with some residents. "Eugene is a very green city and people love their recycling here," said Diane Peterson, a resident. "There are a lot of things like yogurt containers that we get all the time, and now we can't recycle them."

Leah Geocaris, another Eugene resident, said the change had prompted her to try to consume less overall. "On the one hand, I hate it, because I don't want stuff to end up in landfill," she said. "On the other hand, it's a wake-up call."

"Recycling is the third R," she said. "You have to reduce and reuse first."

*Livia AlbeckRipka is a freelance journalist covering the environment. She is a former James Reston reporting fellow at The Times. @livia\_ar*

A version of this article appears in print on May 30, 2018, on Page B1 of the New York edition with the headline

## **DON'T JUST RECYCLE, REDUCE AND REUSE**

### **High Island Sanctuary Work Days**

Would you like to get some good exercise and at the same time help improve the bird sanctuaries in High Island? If so, join us for the monthly work days at Hooks Woods and Houston Audubon sanctuaries. The work days are the second Saturday of each month, from October through March, and are a collaboration between TOS and Houston Audubon. Pete Deichmann of Houston Audubon coordinates the work days. To learn more about this volunteer opportunity and to sign up, visit <https://houstonaudubon.org/ways-to-help/volunteer/coastal.html>. Thank you!

### **Spring 2019 TOS Meeting**

Mark your calendars for May 2 – 5, 2019 for our spring 2019 TOS meeting. The meeting will be in San Antonio with Bexar Audubon and San Antonio Audubon hosting us. Work is already underway, and the meeting is shaping up to be great! All the details will be in the next newsletter.

### **TOSNEWS Staff**

Jack Eitnear ....Editor      Bron Rorex ..... Copy Editor  
Judy Kestner.....Advertising      Jimma Byrd ..... Proofreader  
Susan Foster-Chair/Publication Committee

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### NEW TOS Tee Shirt available

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## NEW Birding & Photo Events!

  
**April 11-14, 2019**  
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