



THE LOWER MISSISSIPPI RIVER DELTA IN THE
FALL AND WINTER

By
SIDNEY GAUTHREUX, JR.

Cameron has long been regarded as the place to see birds in Louisiana. I agree with this in large part, but I have one reservation. This reservation is made because there is an area in southeastern Louisiana that, until recently, was comparatively unworked by resident ornithologists. Serious field work was resumed in the Lower Mississippi River Delta in the fall of 1957, with little or no work in the area for a quarter of a century before. Workers of the caliber of Oberholser and Burleigh visited the area during the thirties, but failed to record the interesting species that have recently occurred in the Lower Mississippi River Delta. The area is extensive but not as extensive as the grasslands of southwestern Louisiana. I have concentrated on that part of the Delta between West and East Pointe a la Hache and where the River meets the Gulf of Mexico. Much of the field work since 1957 has been restricted to locations along Louisiana State Route 23 from Pointe a la Hache to Venice. A boat is needed to work the localities along the River south of the town of Venice. With sufficient notice, Delta National Wildlife Refuge, about 7 miles below Venice, can send up a boat to bring observers to the Refuge. The Refuge boats are not always available for this purpose, and again careful planning is urged. Arrangements can be made by letter or by telephone. A telephone call should be made in

New Orleans, since all calls placed to the Refuge at Venice or any other town in the area goes through the New Orleans operator.

Much of the Lower Delta below West and East Pointe a la Hache, before the devastating freezes of January 1961 and 1962, was the state's most important citrus lands. An observer visiting the area may still see denuded, gray citrus trees that were once a rich, dark green spotted with yellows and oranges. Many of the groves have been replanted, but some landowners have replanted vegetable crops. Solid ground in the region is restricted to the natural levees of the Mississippi River. The few hundred yards of natural levees on each side of the River give way to salt and brackish marsh. The strips of woodlands in the area are composed of hackberry, oak, and willow. Palmettoes and ferns during the warmer months cover the ground in the woods. Fields are scarce in the area because citrus groves and vegetable crops occupy most of the open land. Roseau Cane (*Phragmites communis*) is among the most common plants in the region.

Fall and winter are the seasons to visit this area if one has in mind stragglers and accidentals. I dare say no other place in the state has housed more exotics in the last few years than this region. Magnificent Frigatebirds have been seen over Fort

Jackson in November when chilled observers were covered with sweaters and coats. Cattle Egrets are very abundant in the area, despite the general scarcity of cattle. One can find this species along canals; it is often encountered along the edge of Hwy.23. Records of White-winged Doves from the area have increased in the last two years. This species may be found sitting or flying along the edge of the highway. All flocks of doves in the area must be checked carefully if this species is to be recorded. Most of the records come from the Boothville-Venice area, but this species has been found at Buras and Pilottown. Ground Doves are also a regular visitor to the Delta region. They are best seen along the less-traveled dirt and shell roads. The Groove-billed Ani can also be seen throughout the area. I have seen them in thick stands of Roseau Cane. For the last few years two horses on the edge of the highway near the Boothville-Venice water tower have marked the spot where this species has been seen on several occasions. In the winter Chuck-wills-widows can be flushed from thick underbrush in the small woods of the area.

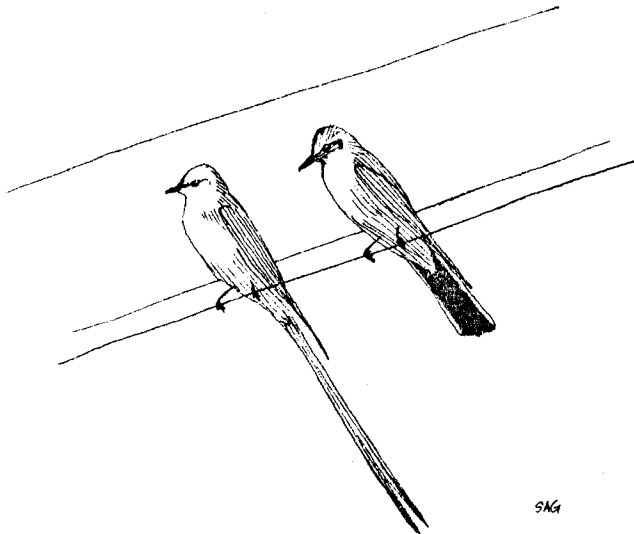
Western Kingbirds and Scissor-tailed Flycatchers are abundant from late September through late November in the area. Flocks of Scissor-tailed Flycatchers have wintered in the vicinity of Fort Jackson and the swamp to the west of the Fort. Within one week two Wied's Crested Flycatchers were recorded within five miles of each other in the area in late November and early December. The first was recorded in a small woods in the town of Venice; the other was in a woods

at Boothville. These were the first records for the state. Vermilion Flycatchers have visited the region on two occasions. One was seen along the edge of a canal west of Venice, the other occurred in the swamp opposite Fort Jackson. In 1957 a Sage Thrasher was found in a field planted with small orange trees in the town of Venice. In the same field along a canal covered with willow trees, a strange, small bird escaped collection. It could not be identified by the competent observers who saw it clearly.

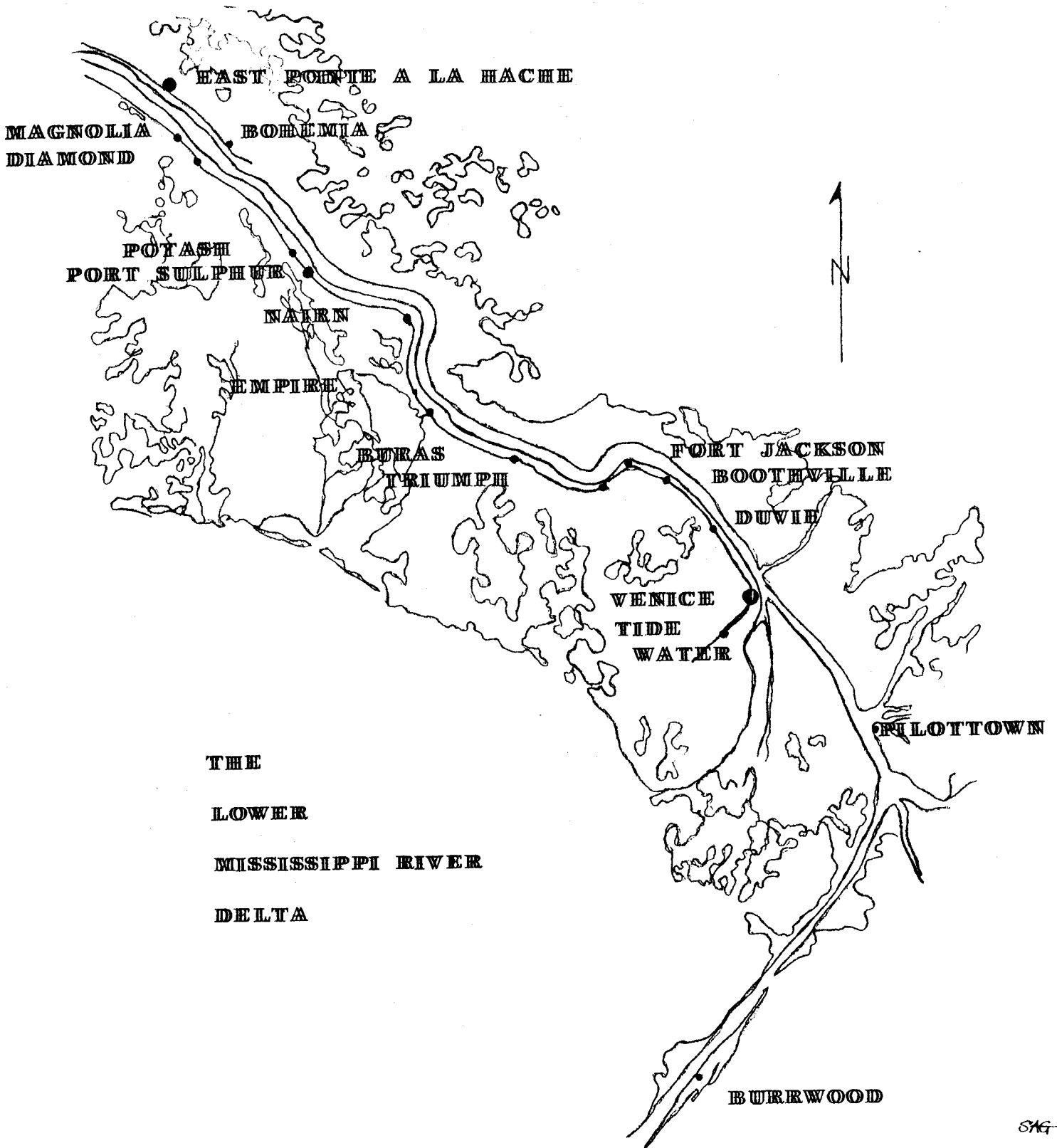
The list of vireos and warblers wintering in the area has grown. They include Philadelphia, Warbling, White-eyed and Solitary Vireos, Black and white, Orange-crowned, Parula, Magnolia, Myrtle, Audubon's, Black-throated Gray, Black-throated Green, Yellow-throated, Pine, Prairie, Palm and Wilson's Warblers. Ovenbirds, Yellowthroats, Yellow-breasted Chats, and Redstarts have been recorded during the winter months. Perhaps the most exciting warblers that wintered in the area were the Lucy's and the MacGillivray's Warblers. The Lucy's was collected in a small field 50x100 feet in size near Boothville. The MacGillivray's was taken in a blackberry bramble on the edge of a small oak woods at Triumph.

Bullock's Orioles occur every fall and winter in the region. I am certain that any oriole encountered in the area from late October on will be this species. They are best located by their chattering call notes. Indigo Buntings and Painted Buntings are occasional visitors during the winter. These birds frequent the orange groves bordered by fields. They have been seen at Venice and Boothville. Dickcissels have been seen with large flocks of House Sparrows in the winter. The Clay-colored Sparrow has been reported but once in the area. This was a bird seen at Pilottown in late September. Lark Sparrows can be found wintering in the area; they are encountered along the edge of the highway and in disturbed fields.

The supply of stragglers and accidentals has by no means been exhausted in this region. Every trip to the Lower Mississippi River Delta adds more valuable information to the knowledge of Louisiana birds. One can only wonder what the next record will be from this exciting area. The season is at hand!



MAP OF LOWER MISSISSIPPI RIVER DELTA REGION



BIRDING IN HONDURAS

by
BURT MONROE, JR.

If you have never had the good fortune to bird in the American tropics, you cannot fully realize what a delightful experience it is. If you have been so lucky, then you will understand what a remarkable country Honduras is in relation to its bird-life. Within the boundaries of this Central American republic, roughly the size of the state of Michigan, have been recorded more than 770 species of birds. In the centrally located Lake Jojoa area, with its range of habitats from lake marsh to grasslands, from humid lowland rain forest to lofty cloud forest on Cerro Santa Barbara, more than 400 species have been listed.

For several years now I have been working on the avifauna of Honduras, but it was not until this past year that I was able to conduct my own field work there. Accompanied by my wife Rose, and by J. Alan Feduccia of L.S.U. during the fall and early winter I spent the better part of a year visiting most parts of this country. We traveled more than 10,000 miles within its boundaries during this time.

Some of the bird experiences were memorable, indeed. Perhaps the most impressive of them all was the first encounter with the Quetzal, royal bird of the Mayan civilization. Alan and I were attempting to find an easy route up the magnificent Cerro Santa Barbara, second highest mountain in the country, around 9500 feet in elevation. As we reached 5000 feet in a lovely stand of virgin cloud forest, with trees over 100 feet tall, we happened upon a band of four males. Two of them were equipped with a fine set of upper tail-coverts, the brilliant metallic green feathers fully three times as long as the body. Such a sight cannot be appreciated unless actually witnessed.

Not far from the second largest town, San Pedro Sula, lies an oil-palm plantation of the United Fruit Company known as San Alejo. Inland from the palms the mountains rise up to several thousand feet and are clothed in a fine stand of humid rain for-

est, maintained in its natural state to preserve the watershed for the fruit company. By driving a jeep back along the trail, one is able to observe rare sights without even getting out of the vehicle. The edges of the forests are teeming with male White-collared Manakins, beautiful little birds of black, yellow and white coloration. The males perform a peculiar courtship display, including clearing of a "dancing" area several feet in diameter on the forest floor. In this display area the males hop around in a jerky fashion snapping their wings. The sound produced by the wings is really incredible for such a small bird, sounding just like a rifle shot. In fact, during the height of the display, the forest sounds much like a Fourth of July celebration.

During our Honduran trip we witnessed perhaps the greatest hawk migration I have ever seen anywhere. During late October, on the Pacific slope of Honduras along the Pan-American Highway, we noticed daily migrations of hawks, including numbers of Broad-winged and Swainson's Hawks. One day, on which we witnessed the largest movement, we estimated that there were between six and ten thousand Broad-wings and around a thousand Swainson's involved. During the same week we located a fine shorebird area nearby and added six species of this order to the Honduran list in three days. Rose and I revisited the area in February and noted large northerly movements of Scissor-tailed Flycatchers and Western Kingbirds. On the peak day there were at least 800 Scissor-tails seen.

Honduras is not a tourist country. Travel is rather difficult; for example, only 140 miles of roads are paved, all but 45 of this being the Pan-American Highway. Nevertheless, Honduras is superb for birding. There are fine areas adjacent to the main towns (Tegucigalpa, the capital, and San Pedro Sula). In Tegucigalpa itself, Great Swallow-tailed Swifts may be seen daily hawking insects over the city. This bird was long thought to be found only in Guatemala, and to be one of the rarest of swifts,

Choluteca Valley - located in the mountains near San Marcos. They found them on the ridge de Colon on the Atlantic slope.

but it is perhaps the commonest of those found in highland areas. A short drive from the capital (some 16 miles along an all-weather gravel road) will take one to 7000 feet in a nice stand of cloud forest at San Juancito. And, as mentioned earlier, the excellent migrations described can be seen along the Pan-American Highway in the proper season.

I could go on and on about experiences in Honduras, but birding there is one thing that must be actually seen to be enjoyed. One thing always impresses you about the tropics; once you have gone birding there, you know that you will not be satisfied until you can return and see more of this wonderful panorama of nature.

NEWS OF MEMBERS

This has been an eventful year for Sidney Gauthreaux, Jr., the man who has been art editor for this year's editions of the LOS News. In chronological order the big events have been graduation from LSUNO, teaching biology labs at that school the summer session after graduation, marriage to Kay Cazenavette on August 24th in New Orleans, and entering LSU for graduate work in ornithology this fall. Congratulations, Sidney, and best wishes to Kay. We will be looking forward to meeting her in Cameron.

Father Dorn from Alabama, in New Orleans to attend Sid's wedding, from all reports was in top shape.

John O'Neill, a zoology major at the University of Oklahoma, has just returned from a third summer in Peru collecting for the LSU Museum of Zoology. He brought back many bird specimens, including Harpy Eagles. Specimens of the Eagles are very rare.

Dr. Hugh Land, who showed pictures of his work in Guatemala, visited that country this summer with some of his students.

Earle Green, the first president of LOS, Horace Jeter, a former president, and Mary Lewis, the present president, all together on a one day sea trip (Audubon Society) in California. No lifers for anyone but the incumbent.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

LIFE MEMBERS

- Mr. James B. Avant
2005 Star Street, West Monroe, La.
Dr. Thomas R. Howell
15450 Milldale Drive, Los Angeles, Cal.

REGULAR MEMBERS

- Mr. Joseph H. Beter, Jr.
5804 Elysian Fields Ave., New Orleans, La.
Mr. Paul N. Bourque
P.O. Box 82, Avery Island, La.
Mr. Louis M. Collier
5431 St. Ferdinand Drive, New Orleans, La.
Lt. Colonel Joseph Demarco
744 Carol Marie Drive
Apt. 3, Baton Rouge 6, La.
Mr. E. Dyble
1524 Broadmoor Ct., Baton Rouge 15, La.
Mrs. W. M. Elston
139 Pennsylvania
Shreveport, Louisiana 71105
Mrs. Dorothy Ellis
Route 1, St. Amant, La.
Mrs. Annie Ferguson
706 Rescue St., Rayville, La. 71269
Mrs. Thomas S. Gunby
Bonnie Boeuf Farm, Rayville, La.
Miss Gail Frances Hardin
P.O. Box 6837, University Station
Baton Rouge, La. 70803
Mr. and Mrs. E. D. Hornbaker
1601 Drehr Ave., Baton Rouge, La. 70808
Mr. George Horton, Professor of Biology
University of Tennessee, Martin Branch
Martin, Tennessee
Mr. David George Huckaby
Museum of Natural Science
Baton Rouge, La. 70803
Mr. Kenneth Le Blanc
Box 260, L.C. Rte., Chauvin, La.
Mrs. J. W. Norvell
821 Boulevard, Shreveport, La.
Miss Addis M. Mire
Rte. 1, Box 23, Sorrento, La.
Mr. John Patton O'Neill
10723 Beinhorn Rd.
Houston 24, Texas
Mrs. Dorothy Pokorney
3366 Fairwoods Drive
Baton Rouge 5, La.
Mrs. Ruth Nell St. Amant
St. Amant, La.
Mr. Edward M. Simmons
Avery Island, La. 70513

LETTERS FROM MEMBERS

This is a new column which may end with this issue--depending on the interest and response from the membership. What do you think of Dr. Land's suggestions? Are you personally willing to invest the time, energy, and money to implement any of them? Are enough people in LOS interested to make further exploration of any of the ideas worth-while? Let us hear from you in writing and in person at the fall meeting in Cameron.

Dear Editor of LOS News:

During my first year in the LOS I could not help but notice and be disappointed by the relative inactivity of the Society. Last year there were two fine meetings but each was preceded and followed by nothing. For fifty week ends there were no group activities. I have talked with the few members I know well; all agreed they would be willing and eager to attend additional meetings. The club has many fine members that I would like to know but probably never will with only two meetings a year.

Therefore, I would like to bring these suggestions before the club for possible discussion at the fall meeting:

1) In addition to the regular meetings at Cameron I would like to see several additional meetings during the year. Why not have outings along the Mississippi in West Feliciana, Audubon's old stomping ground, or at the Paul J. Rainey Wildlife Sanctuary, the Delta Wildlife Refuge, Avery Island, the Singer Preserve, etc.? We should be meeting once a year in the pine forests to enjoy the unique birds found there. As a group we should be able to sample inexpensively some of the offshore islands. If we could appoint a committee of people familiar with various parts of Louisiana many good areas could be uncovered and explored. Of course living conditions might be primitive in some areas but it is under such conditions that the best of friends are made. Most of us can wield a pretty good frying pan if put to it. Obviously everyone would not be able to attend all the meetings but the Society is large enough now that a good group could be assembled in almost any part of the state.

2) I would like to see an increase in the scientific efforts of the Society in such areas as:

- a) Banding--why not undertake a regular banding program under LOS auspices?
- b) Conservation--many of the species of birds that are currently threatened with extinction in the United States are found in Louisiana. Why don't we do what we can to study each one?
- c) Nesting--nest counts and breeding bird studies made in successive years can help show population fluctuations.
- d) Special projects--how about a bluebird nesting project? We could sell boxes to cooperators at cost and see how many bluebirds we could have nesting at the end of a year. Many of the Society members are helping in the LSU migration studies as individuals. This is the sort of project where any careful observer, even without experience, can contribute valuable knowledge.

3) I would like to see LOS undertake a program designed to educate young and old in the ways of nature and the value of conserving our natural resources. We need a club headquarters possibly with a room for a small museum to attract young people. The hours of work could be volunteer and the room or rooms paid for by donations. Most of us know someone of a philanthropic bend who might want to help.

4) I would like to see us negotiate for a sanctuary. I am not thinking here of vast tracts of land but initially a wood lot and field with a stream through it and a fence around it, a place where the neophyte could get a simple introduction to nature. A few acres, leased or borrowed, could be the beginning.

5) If we were to increase our activities the LOS News would have to be changed to a monthly to handle announcements and reports and higher dues would probably be required. (Editor's note: considerably more cooperation from members in writing articles, and in sending in news items would be necessary if we published monthly. It is difficult to obtain material for quarterly issues.)

This list is not all that could be done and many of the suggestions are not the best possible, but I would like to see us at least undertake some of these activities or similar ones. Audubon once called Louisiana his "favorite portion of the union" in reference to its bird life. We ought to do more to instill this feeling in others, and, for that matter, in ourselves.

Sincerely,
Hugh C. Land

NEW SECRETARY-TREASURER OF LOS

Mrs. Ralph (Barbara) Bodman, 9555 Jefferson Highway, Baton Rouge, La., 70809, has accepted the office of secretary-treasurer of LOS. All pertinent communications should be sent to her. LOS appreciates Mrs. Bodman's acceptance of this demanding job.

CHANGES OF ADDRESS

Mr. Wally Bednarz
Lake Toxaway, North Carolina

Mr. Sidney Gauthreaux, Jr.
3255 Highland Road,
Baton Rouge, La., 70802

Mr. Horace Jeter
2485 Chestnut Street, Apt. 205
San Francisco, Cal., 94123

SUGGESTIONS FOR OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

The 1964 officers and directors for LOS will be elected at the Cameron meeting. Sid Gauthreaux, Jr., chairman of the Nominating Committee, has requested that members send him the names of individuals who would serve the Society effectively as officers and directors. Suggestions should be sent immediately to

Mr. Sidney Gauthreaux, Jr.
3255 Highland Road
Baton Rouge, La., 70802

As LOS grows larger it is increasingly difficult for the Nominating Committee to know all members of LOS and to select the best slate of officers and directors to present to the membership. Think over your preference for these positions and help the committee out with suggestions!

FALL MEETING IN CAMERON

December 7th and December 8th

Mark your calendar now! The fall meeting to be held in Cameron on December 7th and December 8th should be one of the most exciting in years. MUSEUM SAFARI, the movie based on the Eugene Dupont-LSU expedition of 1962 in Africa will be the major attraction of the formal meeting. Burt Munroe of LSU was the ornithologist with the expedition. The film, commercially produced, in color, with sound effects and narration, tells the story of the experiences of the expedition members and of the mammals and birds found by them. Dr. Lowery's enthusiasm and excitement when discussing the film will surely be shared by all LOS members when viewing it.

At the business meeting, prior to the showing of the film, there will be opportunity to talk over Dr. Land's proposals that are presented on pages 6 and 7 of this issue of LOS News. Come prepared with your thoughts on these vital matters.

Dinner, as usual, at Fred's at 7:00 P.M. on Saturday, ~~November 30th~~ ^{December 7th}. A card will be sent to you before the meeting for dinner reservations. Please return promptly.

Room reservations can be made at Broussard's Motel, Cameron Hotel, or the Gulf Motel. See you in Cameron.

