

# L.O.S. NEWS

The Newsletter of the Louisiana Ornithological Society

No. 124

Monroe, Louisiana

15 July 1988



## MINUTES OF THE REGULAR SPRING MEETING OF THE LOUISIANA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY APRIL 30, 1988

President Bruce Crider called the meeting to order at 8:25 PM. Thanks were tendered to Marianna Tanner for her indispensable and indefatigable help in arranging the meeting.

Planned LOS-sponsored trips to Churchill, Manitoba; Arizona, and Costa Rica were announced.

President Crider noted the Fortieth Anniversary of the Louisiana Ornithological Society, and the availability of appropriate gift items and the last chance to buy tickets for the raffle of an original drawing by Doug Pratt.

John McBride was nominated by the Nominating Committee, and elected without opposition, to fill the unexpired term of Shirley Huss for the north Louisiana seat on the Board of Directors of the LOS.

The checklist was called; 196 species were reported.

The raffle was held for Doug Pratt's sketch which was won by Brad McPherson. Two mugs were also raffled off.

Clifford Tillman presented a check for \$250.00 from Natchez Audubon for the Holleyman Sanctuary.

The highlight of the meeting was an excellent and informative talk by Dr. Frank Moore of University of Southern Mississippi about his research on migratory passerines on the northern coast of the Gulf of Mexico.

The meeting adjourned at 10:05.

## NATIONAL HIGHS FOR THE 87th CBC

Compiled by Brent Ortego

A total of 621 listed forms (594 species plus 1 hybrid and 26 infraforms) was accepted for the National High (NH) summary of the 87th Christmas Bird Count (CBC) results (Am. Birds 41:579-1307) for the 49 non-tropical states and Canada.

California led everybody with 143 NHs. Texas followed with a distant 98. Florida had 91, Arizona 65 and Louisiana 43 (These 5 states produced 72% of the NHs.).

The top NH producing count circle was Santa Barbara, CA, with 16. Sabine, LA, and Freeport, TX, followed closely with 14 each, and Atascosa Highlands and Elfrida, AZ, had 12 each.

New CBC areas made a big splash. Coastal Tip, TX, led the group with 7. It was followed by Arcata, CA, Buenos Aires, AZ, and Catahoula, LA, with 4 each.

Louisiana CBCs earning NHs were Sabine 14, Creole 7, Pine Prairie 6, Catahoula 4, Johnsons Bayou, Tensas River and Venice 3 each, and Baton Rouge, St. Tammany, Grand Isle, New Orleans, and Reserve 1 each.

SUMMARY: (Bold Name = New CBC species; number = new all-time high count)  
Am. White Pelican - 3,324 (Cr), Olivaceous Cormorant - 2,304 (Sa), Great Blue Heron - 567 (Sa), Great Egret - 950 (Cr), Snowy Egret - 666 (Sa), Little Blue

Heron - 590 (Ve), White Ibis - 9,870 (PP), White-faced Ibis - 5,111 (PP), Plegadis, sp. - 10,524 (Cr), Roseate Spoonbill - 1,535 (Sa), Wood Duck - 470 (TR), Mottled Duck - 495 (JB), Blue-winged Teal - 3,074 (Sa), Canvasback - 43,785 (Ca), Ring-necked Duck - 82,500 (Ca), Lesser Scaup - 66,000 (Ca), Ruddy Duck - 23,600 (Ca), King Rail - 107 (JB), Sora - 158 (Cr), Com. Moorhen - 2,957 (JB), Short-billed Dowitcher - 5,701 (Cr), Caspian Tern - 218 (Sa), Barred Owl - 87 (TR), Lesser Nighthawk - 1 (ST), nighthawk, sp. - 3 (Cr), Rufous Hummingbird - 4 (Re), Yellow-bellied Sapsucker - 127 (TR), Fish Crow - 22,098 (NO), House Wren - 145 (Sa), Wood Thrush - 1 (GI,SA), Eur. Starling - 10,010,000 (PP), Red-eyed Vireo - 1 (Sa), Orange-crowned Warbler - 162 (Sa), Yellow-rumped Warbler - 8,464 (Sa), Magnolia Warbler - 1 (Sa), Bay-breasted Warbler - 1 (Sa), waterthrush, sp. - 5 (Ve), Summer Tanager - 2 (BR), Blue Grosbeak - 1 (Ve), Swamp Sparrow - 1,284 (Sa), Red-winged Blackbird - 50,403,530 (PP), Boat-tailed Grackle - 18,602 (Cr), Brown-headed Cowbird - 38,201,300 (PP), Total Birds - 108,687,741 (PP).

#### BOOK REVIEW

##### Eastern Birds (an Audubon Handbook).

John Farrand, Jr. 1988 (actual date of publication, Sept., 1987). McGraw-Hill. xvii + 495pp. ISBN 0-07-019976-0, flexible plastic cover, \$13.50. A companion volume by the same author covers western birds.

This field guide, aimed at the novice birder, is based on the techniques of photographic illustrations, and grouping of species according to various similarities as discerned by the author, rather than a taxonomic scheme. The book gets off to a bad start with a prominent heading to the introduction, "A New Approach to Birding". As veteran birders know, these are not new ideas. Reviews of the earlier "Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Birds

(Eastern Region)" by Bull and Farrand, and its western counterpart by Udvardy, also using photographic illustrations and non-taxonomic groupings, were highly critical [Auk 95(1):201-202, 1978, by Guy Tudor; Wilson Bull. 90(2):325-327, 1978, by George A. Hall]. These reviews thoughtfully argue the case for artistic renditions in field guides, as opposed to photographs, so my remarks will be brief, and directed toward beginning birders, since even a fledgling ornithologist will have outgrown this book.

Illustrating an identification guide with photographs seems appealing, but it doesn't work very well, because one, or a few, photographs are subject to the vagaries of light and reproduction, and all too often "miss the point" on important field marks. Examples in this guide are many, but the waterthrushes on page 326 and 327 will suffice. They appear to be entirely different in their appearance, and thus easy to identify (how I wish this were so!). The problem is that the plate of the Northern Waterthrush is reproduced with an inaccurate orange color.

Many of the photographs (Farrand says there are 1,354) are excellent, but many others are awful, such as the Brown-headed Nuthatch (top of page 313), the perched Golden Eagle (page 217), the soaring Red-tailed Hawk (page 237) etc, etc. In my copy, the blues are too bright, making Bluebird and Blue Grosbeak merely strange looking, but introducing really serious errors in the colors of Oporornis warblers. Photographs can be used effectively, as has been done in "Master Guide to Birding", edited by Farrand. However, the Master Guide is a supplement for persons who have passed the novice stage in their ability to recognize birds in the field.

Louisiana birders will quickly note that Brewer's Blackbird and Eared Grebe are not illustrated, and the field marks given for Plegadis ibises are far inferior to those in the revised edition of the "Geo" guide. Louisiana is omitted from the breeding range of the Bald Eagle (a problem shared with Peterson's

guide). Eskimo Curlew is omitted altogether. The sequence of families and species is only approximately phylogenetic. Farrand attempts to place birds together "according to similarities such as habitats, lookalikes, and related species". This results in Black and White Warbler being placed between Ladder-backed Woodpecker and White-breasted Nuthatch. What a terrible introduction to science for a youngster! Experienced birders will note the silliness of separating Calidris sandpipers with the plovers and phalaropes; distinguishing Dunlin from Western Sandpiper is not a trivial problem for a beginner, but neither of them looks like a plover! The night herons are separated because of their supposed resemblance to some of the day herons, but the serious identification problem is with the juveniles, which should be placed together. Cinnamon and Blue-winged Teal, and Ruddy and Masked Duck are also separated, even though the similarity of their females is the major I.D. problem (Masked Duck is placed with Cinnamon Teal). Mixing Vireos with Warblers does the beginner a distinct disfavor, and why Western Kingbird (note the salmon colored belly) is sandwiched between Brown-crested Flycatcher and Great Crested Flycatcher is

a mystery to me.

Sadly, the book is poorly bound, and is not likely to withstand the rigors of use in the field.

There are other problems with this field guide, but it falls into the "Not Recommended" category long before all the shortcomings (and the strengths, such as the inclusion of Bronzed Cowbird which is not illustrated in Peterson) can be noted and described. The unfortunate thing about this book is its sponsorship by the National Audubon Society. I'm sure Farrand believes in his system, and authorship of a book such as this field guide requires an awesome amount of work. The publisher will undoubtedly turn a nice profit. But why does the National Audubon Society lend its name to a product which is clearly not suitable for the vast majority of persons needing a field guide for the first time? This field guide is prominently displayed in bookstores and will without doubt be sold to many beginners who will translate "sponsorship" as "recommendation".

Perhaps all these complaints are unnecessary, since novices who "catch on" and become serious birders will soon relegate Farrand's volumes to the bookshelf, and put Peterson, "Geo", or Robbins in their daypacks.--Alfred E. Smalley.

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**FOR SALE:** Clarence Greenwalt's HUMMINGBIRDS, the magnificent, out-of-print classic with 70 tipped-in color photos, good condition, \$300.00. Call Charlotte or Jean Seidenberg (504) 899-6973.

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 (Orleans Aud., 1987)..... 4.95 plus  
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NOTE NOTE NOTE NOTE NOTE NOTE NOTE NOTE NOTE NOTE NOTE NOTE NOTE NOTE NOTE NOTE NOTE

THE DATE OF THE ANNUAL FALL MEETING OF THE LOUISIANA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY HAS BEEN CHANGED TO THE WEEKEND OF 21-22-23 OCTOBER 1988. The guest speaker will be Peter Scott who will present a program entitled The Natural History of Big Bend National Park.

LOUISIANA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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