

The Pine Warbler



December 2008

Vol.28, No.9

Spring Creek Christmas Bird Count Saturday, December 27, 2008

Join us on Saturday, December 27, 2008 for the Spring Creek CBC. This count, sponsored by the Piney Woods Wildlife Society, covers a 15-mile diameter circle that is roughly centered in The Woodlands at I-45 and Rayford-Sawdust road.

Our count circle is divided into four count areas with leaders and meeting places as follows:

The Woodlands count area will meet at Starbuck's at 7:00 am, (about three traffic lights west of I-45 on Sawdust Road at 25111 Grogan's Mill Road — on the left at the intersection of Sawdust and Grogan's Mill Road).

Al Barr leads the Mercer count area. The owling group will meet at 4:30 a.m. at the Kroger parking lot beside the McDonald's at I-45 and FM 2920. For the non-owling portion, meet in the Mercer Arboretum parking lot (west side) at about 9 a.m.

The Hooks Airport section, led by Jennifer Backo, will meet at 7:30 a.m. at the Hooks airport parking lot at Stuebner Airline and FM 2920.

The Jones State Forest section, will meet at 7:30 a.m. at the Jones Forest office on FM 1488, west of I-45.

After a full day of counting birds, we will again have our countdown dinner at 5:30 p.m. in a private room at the Tequila Patio Mexican Restaurant (281-350-1136). The restaurant is located on the West side of Aldine Westfield Road about 1/2 mile north of Mercer Arboretum. There, we will have refreshments and dinner and will tally the total species and relate the exciting events of the day. You are welcome to attend the dinner whether you participate in the count or not.

There is a \$5.00 fee per count participant that goes to the National Audubon Society. Persons 18 years and under participate free.

If you have any questions please contact Al Barr at 281 443-6629 or via email at Albarr@comcast.net.

PWWS Holiday Party!

December 16

It's party time for PWWS! The December meeting is always a fun time discussing the bird counts. We also eat and visit a lot! Everyone is



invited to bring cookies, cakes, chips and dips, fruit, cheese, cold cuts, deviled eggs, apple pies, whatever you would like to share. PWWS will furnish drinks, cups, paper plates, utensils and napkins. (Don't eat dinner before you attend this meeting!)

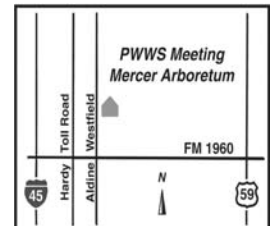
If you have any slides you would like to show, bring a CD and let Al know.

Come join us for a festive evening!

Date: December 16

Time: Social 7:00 p.m.
Meeting 7:30 p.m.

Place: Mercer Arboretum
22307 Aldine-Westfield



©John Jones

Orange-crowned Warbler courtesy of John Jones

Many go fishing all their lives without knowing
that it is not fish they are after. - Henry David Thoreau





Heart Happenings

The next big sea turtle event in Houston will be Sea Turtle Saturday 2009 on February 28 at the Houston Zoo. Outstanding speakers are scheduled for the morning but there will be something different in the afternoon. The addition of the remarkable resources of CSTEM will bring robotic technology to sea turtle conservation. The CSTEM website describes the program as a nonprofit organization whose goal is to reduce achievement gaps between minority and non-minority students, by sponsoring a "Sea Turtle Robotics Challenge" annually in partnership with Shell Oil Company and Schlumberger. It involves many weeks of preparation and culminates in one project—the creation of a robot designed around some aspect of the Kemp's Ridley sea turtle's life cycle." (Website: CSTEM.Org) This year we will be able to see how robotics can teach sea turtle conservation. Students also learn about sea turtles through art and creative writing. A demonstration is planned for the lobby of the George R. Brown Education Building where the entire event will be held.

SEA TURTLE HOSPITAL: The Galveston Lab of National Marine Fisheries Service is looking for a way to replace its rehabilitation building. Although the foundation was not damaged and no turtles were injured, the small building was wrecked. We're looking for volunteer carpenters to help frame up and roof a 40' by 15' building. Contact Carole Allen (Carole@seaturtles.org) if you have any ideas.

DONATION FROM JOE JAMAIL: Donations in the amount of \$25,000 have been received by Texas A&M University at Galveston to match the \$25,000 offered by Houston Attorney Joe Jamail. We thank everyone who donated to the fund to make sure patrolling along the upper Texas coast is possible next spring. (HEART and PWWS contributed!)

NEED ANOTHER PATROL VEHICLE: If Dr. Andre Landry of Texas A&M at Galveston had not moved his two patrol vehicles from the Galveston State Park before the hurricane hit, they would have been lost. There is a great need for a third ATV in 2009 because responses to nesting events will be much more difficult this year due to loss of beach and obstacles such as houses, bulkheads and other things like put near the new waterline of many beach stretches which represent deterrents to driving trucks or cars. A third ATV will allow immediate response to nesting events regardless of the location and will serve as a back up to existing ATVs used for daily patrols, especially as their use on the beach begins to cause potential breakdowns and interruption of patrols. The ATVs currently in use are Honda electric-start ATVs that cost about \$5500.

A tough act to follow - Over the years we have enjoyed the wonderful articles and reviews written by our friend and colleague, Jack Gorman. Well, Jack has decided to bow out while he is on top and enjoy the family life. We will certainly miss his reviews and we definitely wish him all our best!

Thank you to Jack Gorman. - P.W.W.S.

"A Forest Favorite" by Diane Cabiness, Texas Master Naturalist

East Texas Nature

If you look at a thing nine and ninety-nine times, you are perfectly safe; if you look at it the thousandth time, you are in frightful danger of seeing it for the first time." - G. K. Chesterton



I wonder how many times yaupons are seen and ignored as "that green plant that is everywhere" which points to the fact that this is a tough plant. In the fall the berries turn a bright orange-red (or yellow if it is the yellow berry selection) and all of a sudden a star is born. One of the first yards I landscaped was in north Houston. Initially I cleaned up the existing plants along the front of the house such as pruning off the dead growth, and yanking weeds. My client came out to view the first stage of this project and pointed to the yaupon that sat neatly trimmed of broken twigs and dead vines which had clambered over the branches and spotted large clusters of glossy, luscious berries which seemed to pop with color. The lady of the house said, "Wow I like that shrub you planted in the corner". I chuckled and told my client, this was a yaupon and was one of her existing shrubs. I just gave it a makeover so that it could be noticed and appreciated.

For those of you who have not been properly introduced to Yaupon, (*Ilex vomitoria*) or simply have been living on Mars, let me get down to brass tacks. This evergreen shrub or small tree up to 15 feet has alternate leaves, elliptical .8-1.2 inches long, finely wavy-tooth, thick, stiff, shiny green and glabrous above, paler below. The small, 4-petaled, flowers cluster at the base of old leaves in early spring. The small orange-red berries persist into winter will

be found only on the female plants except for an occasional stray female flower which will result in a berry or two sometimes appearing on a male plant. At least 15 bird species and a variety of mammals eat this fruit. Several years ago I have had the pleasure of watching a flock of cedar waxwings descend one winter on my weeping yaupon that resides outside our bathroom window, devouring in minutes most of these berries. I went outside after the cedar waxwings moved on and found one, lone berry that had been missed.

This evergreen makes a great shelter for the birds at night as well as needed protection for butterflies and birds during strong storms. An additional plus, the Yaupon is the larval plant for Henry's elfin butterfly.

If you do not have any cover for your birds and want an easy and quick screen, give this member of the holly family full sun to part shade. One year I found two white-eyed vireo nests in thick clumps of yaupon in different places on our property. A respectable shape and a bigger crop of fruit will be obtained if this plant gets sufficient light. Yaupon will tolerate a variety of soils from dry to moist and is an excellent candidate for the xeriscape landscape as well as salt tolerant.

"An excellent tea" (which the native Americans called it asi or black drink) "can be made from the dried leaves of this native member of the Holly group. Strip the pointed twigs of the shrub, gathering both newer and older leaves. Pick the trash out, wash the leaves, and then put them in a pan or colander in the oven to dry. Keep the oven at about 200 degrees, and stir between your fingers, remove them from the heat and break them up. Use exactly as you would use oriental tea leaves. They contain caffeine in nearly the same amounts as oriental teas."(Carmen Stahl, Papa Stahl's Wild Stuff)

Although Japanese privet, *Ligustrum japonicum* and Chinese Privet, *Ligustrum sinense* were not on the Prohibited Species list of 2006 they were on the Species of Concern list (The Quiet Invasion: A Guide to Invasive Plants of the Galveston Bay Area, www.galvbayinvasives.org). In Montgomery County, especially around Conroe, when in flower we see an inordinate amount of privet in the wild. Please consider our dependable, beloved yaupon in one of its forms such as Weeping, Saratoga Gold, Dwarf, Will Fleming Upright or Standard Red Berry as a replacement plant.

In Green mythology, the Sirens have been depicted as having a maiden's features but from the thighs down had the forms of birds (or fish). The Sirens inhabited an island surrounded by dangerous rocks. One of them played the lyre, another sang and another played the flute. By these means, and with cunning words, the Sirens convinced passing seamen to linger, thus causing their destruction.

Before you let Circe in the guise of a friend convince you that yaupons are not landscape potential and you listen to their



Henry's Elfin Butterflies, courtesy of Marty DeAngelo, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/martytdx>

song of disenchantment, let me remind you where the lure of the traditional manicured look or cookie cutter landscape design can end up, offering little refreshment or rest for "all creatures great and small".

"The holly hath one sign in three - The berry red, the thorn, the tree - The holy tree. On Mary's breast lie three in one - Emmanuel, her little son, The Holy One." - Margaret Fuller (from [Texas Forest Service](#), Circular 32, December 1952).

Please share your nature experiences with me at dianecabinessplants@consolidated.net Merry Christmas to one and all!



Education Chair Needed

PWWS needs a new education chairperson, someone with energy, enthusiasm, and resourcefulness. The challenge is how to "hook" more people into protecting our environment. Karen Stockton, present chair, has presented hundreds of live nature concerts for many years now – but she is Road Weary... Won't you consider creative ways through which the general public (children especially) can be reached? Karen will gladly assist the new chair; she just doesn't want the chairmanship herself. Contact Al Barr, president; or Karen (281 444-0343).



Piney Woods Wildlife Society
P.O. Box 189
Spring, Texas 77383-0189

Piney Woods Wildlife Society Field Trips

Saturday, Dec. 13
Bird Walk - Mercer Arboretum from 8:30-11:00 AM.
Saturday, Dec. 20
Winter Bird Count - Jesse Jones Park at 7:30 PM.
Saturday, Dec. 27
Spring Creek Christmas Bird Count

Bird Walks with Al Barr - 2nd Saturday of every month through May, 2009. 8:30-10:30 at Mercer Arboretum. All that participants need to bring is some binoculars and mosquito repellent if it is needed.

Visit: <http://pineywoodswildlifesociety.org>

2008 Board of Directors

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- 1st Vice President.....Carole Allen
- 2nd Vice President.....Jean and Mike Drummond
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- Director (term expires 2010).....Bill Fortney
- Director (term expires 2008).....Jennifer Backo
- Director (term expires 2009).....Steven Stones
- Past President.....Kathy Coward

Numbers of Interest

Heart Hotline.....281444-6204



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For membership information write to us at P.O. Box 189, Spring Texas 77383-0189. Annual Dues: \$15.00 per household.

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The deadline for submissions is the 25th of the previous month, earlier if possible. Always add "PWWS" in the subject line. All emails will be resonded to with in 3 days. If you do not recieve a response please call 832 717-3276. All articles are subject to approval by the PWWS Board.

Please send new address changes and corrections to Mike Drummond at drummond@thedrummonds.com and add PWWS to the subject line. Thank you.