

The Pine Warbler



Piney Woods Wildlife Society December 2021 Newsletter



No Christmas Potluck for December

Because of continued concerns about the Covid Pandemic, there will not be a Christmas Potluck get together in December 2021 as is our typical custom. We're hopeful for a return to normalcy in 2022. We will continue with our monthly programs in January. Generally, we target the third Wednesday, but we will let you know if we need to change any to the second Wednesday. For 2022, the meeting dates are currently set as Jan 19, Feb 17, Mar 16, Apr 20 and May 18.

We hope that everyone stays safe and healthy and enjoys the holidays.

PWWS Board Members Needed

Calling all volunteers! The search is on for some volunteers to take on several roles on the Board of Piney Woods Wildlife Society. The roles needing filling include Treasurer and Program Chair. The Treasurer tracks incoming and outgoing money to the charity and files needed paperwork for our 501c3 organization. The Program Chair role works to get presenters for the monthly meetings. That role could be taken on by a committee of folks...?

If you might be interested or have any questions, please email our president, Kathy Coward, at justforthebirds@sbcglobal.net or call her at 281-288-9019.



Note from PWWS President

A few thoughts at the end of the year.

This year has flown for me as I think it has for many of you. I hope as many of you as possible can be with family or good friends during this season. So sorry we cannot be together for our traditional pot luck this December but if things improve as it looks like they will, we will try next year.

Happy New Year to all, enjoy all of the wonderful nature around us and may the

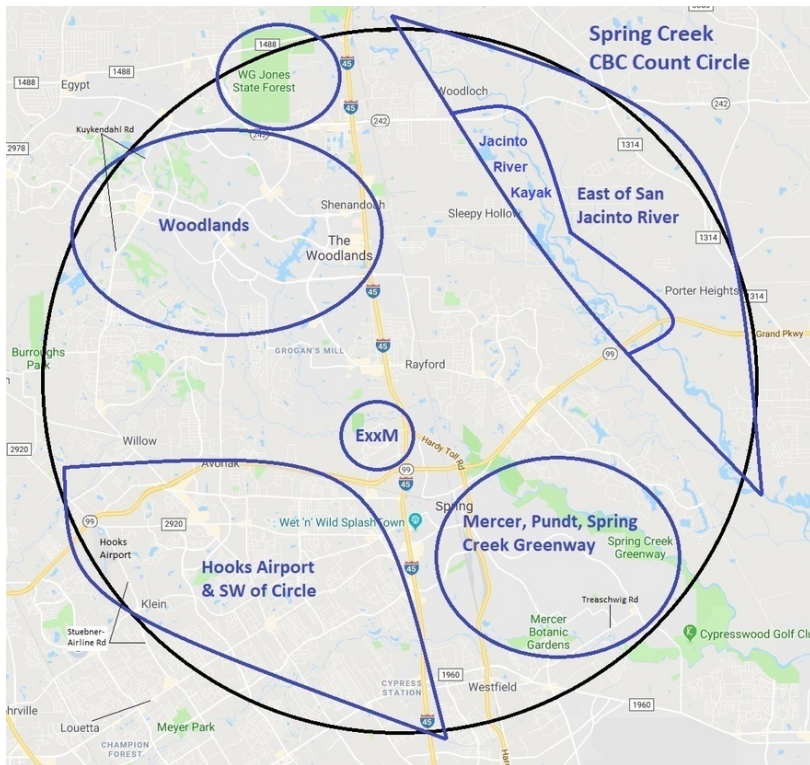
birds sing for you.

Kathy, Your President



Christmas Bird Counts

By Claire Moore



Although everything is racing toward Christmas, it is nice to take a break in nature during this season and help with a Christmas Bird Count.

In our area of North Houston, the Spring Creek CBC is looking for volunteers to help on Saturday, Dec 18th, in the field bird watching or at their feeders (if they live in the count circle map).

Several teams will be birding that day including Al Barr's team starting in Mercer Park, Claire's team starting at Hooks airport, Krien's team at Jones Forest, JoJo's team in the Woodlands, or Dave's team kayaking the West Fork of the San Jacinto River. Email Claire Moore at cdmoore3i@gmail.com to volunteer. Just tell her where you'd like to help.

Other nearby CBCs happen on dates between December 14th and January 5th as noted at this Audubon web site:

<https://houstonaudubon.org/birding/christmas-bird-counts/upper-texas-coast.html>

Contact information is provided if you would like to accompany any of the groups.

Be part of the fun and help with the citizen science at the same time. No bird knowledge needed.



Mountain Lion November Program Recording

Did you miss the November PWS program all about Mountain Lions in Texas by Monica Morrison? If so, you can watch the recording of it when you have time at the following link.

https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/b_zQQDo4xHo_9dmjgF-ZeUcfKNLApbIBdSOkdc9SHEPjJ8HZRErshNOBbYUqEMx.Ntwye7SITgzUMB2L
Passcode: ^YH3eZ5X

<https://texasnativecats.org/>

The <https://TexasNativeCats.org/> web site has all types of Education and Outreach information about the five species of native cats in Texas: jaguar, mountain lion, bobcat, ocelot, and jaguarundi.

Note from your Editor Diane & Webmaster Claire

We like to thank everyone who contributed their photos, stories or who shared adventures with us. You are so appreciated! God Bless you!

Have a Wonderful Christmas!

TEAMWORK LESSONS FROM GEESE

By Cheryl Conley



Canadian Geese - Photo by Cheryl Conley

Look up in the sky. It's a bird, it's a plane. No, it's Canadian geese flying south in their iconic "v" formation, typically during the months of September and October. However, I just saw a flock last week so obviously it can be later in the year. Normally, I hear them before I see them because they "honk" while they're flying. This is their way of keeping the flock together. They don't let bad weather or nighttime keep them from flying so when it's cloudy or dark with limited visibility, they are able to keep track of each other by honking.

As human beings, we often (but not always) choose our leaders because of

their knowledge and abilities. Not so with geese. When migrating, the duty of leading the flock (or skein) is a shared responsibility. The vertex of the formation is a difficult and exhausting position to be in so it changes frequently. Each bird in the “V” flies a little higher than the bird in front of them. This reduces wind resistance and conserves energy for every bird in the formation except the lead bird so when the leader tires, it will fall back and another bird will take the lead. This is teamwork in action.

Migrating Canada geese can fly up to 1500 miles in 24 hours and fly 2,000 to 3,000 miles in total to get to their destination. Some will spend their winters in the southern United States or Mexico. It’s interesting to note, however, that some geese don’t migrate at all. If there’s open water and available food, they may become year-round residents. They are highly adaptable.

A goose’s body size can range from 30 to 43 inches with a wingspan of 4.2 feet to 5.6 feet. You’ll be pleased to know that wild Canadian geese mate for life but domesticated geese prefer to play the field and can have many mates. Wild geese will stay loyal to their mates until death at which time they may seek out another mate. Interestingly, geese exhibit signs of mourning when they lose a mate. They separate from the flock and will often make mourning-type sounds.

Come spring, you may hear or see geese heading north. Normally they will return to the same nesting site every year. The female chooses the nesting site and does most of the nest construction while dad stands guard. The female lays between 4 and 9 eggs and will lay one every 1 to 2 days. The incubation period is about 30 days and during this time she will only leave the nest for very short periods of time to eat and drink. Soon after hatching, the goslings are taken to the water to eat. Mom and dad are very protective of their broods for 10-12 weeks after hatching. As the goslings grow older and learn to fly, the parents become less protective.

The Canada Goose is protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. This means that it is illegal to capture, kill, trade, transport, or damage eggs or their nests without permission from the US Fish and Wildlife Service. There is, however, a hunting season for geese in Texas. Here is the link for the regulations: <https://tpwd.texas.gov/regulations/outdoor-annual/regs/animals/goose>



Geese in formation - Photo by Cheryl Conley



Photos by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn



Wood Stork - Photo by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn



SCV 2021

Wood Stork (my first) - Photo by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn



Willet - Photo by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn



Sandhill Cranes - Photo by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn



Sandhill Crane seen in Florida while on vacation. It was seen just off of the shoulder of the Florida Turnpike. Part of a pair. November 2021 - Photo by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn



Sandhill Crane - Photo by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn



Ruddy Turnstone - Photo by Sandy Crystal



Osprey - Photo by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn



Limpkin - Photo by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn



Great Blue Heron - Photo by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn



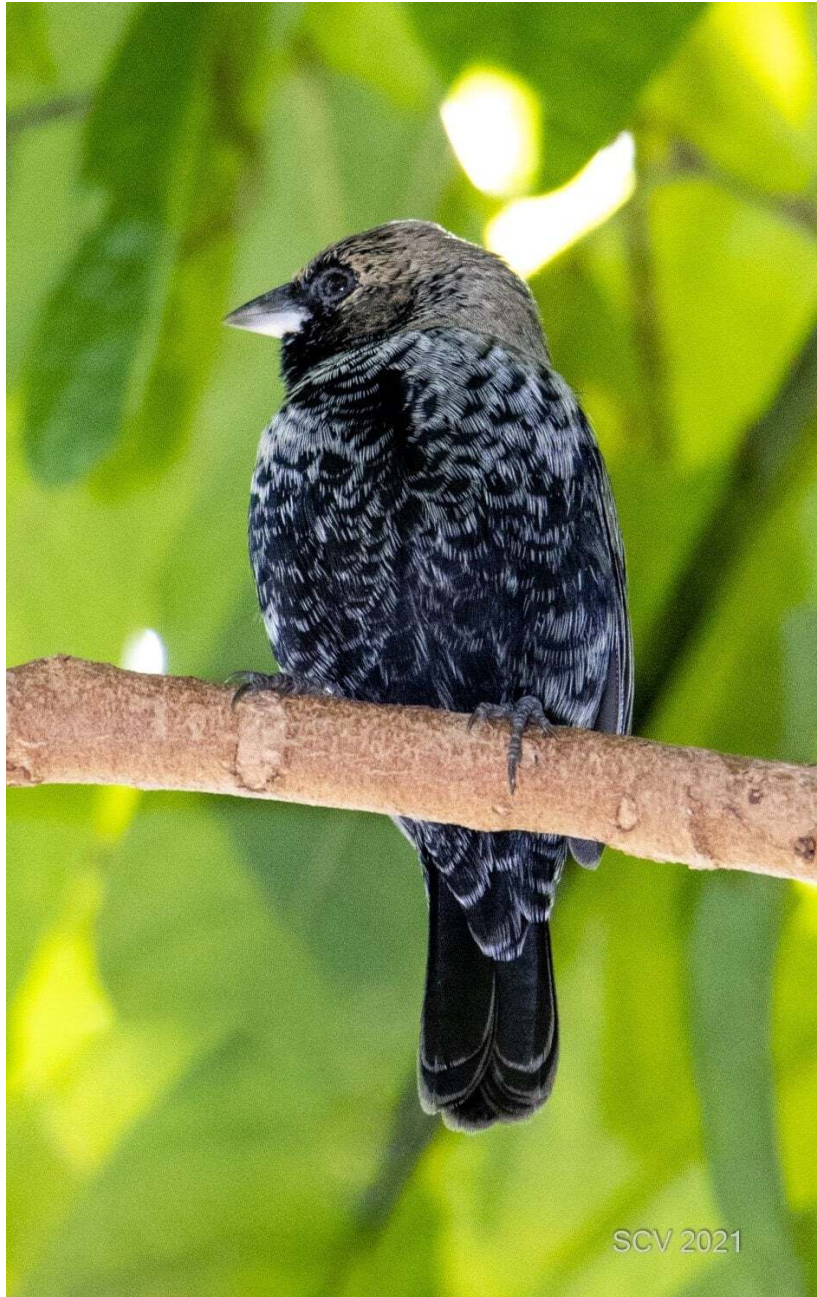
This bird deserves its own post. It is the Florida Scrub Jay. The only bird species endemic to Florida. It is protected. Look close; it is banded. The last bird image I captured with ole camera when in Florida on vacation! - Photo by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn



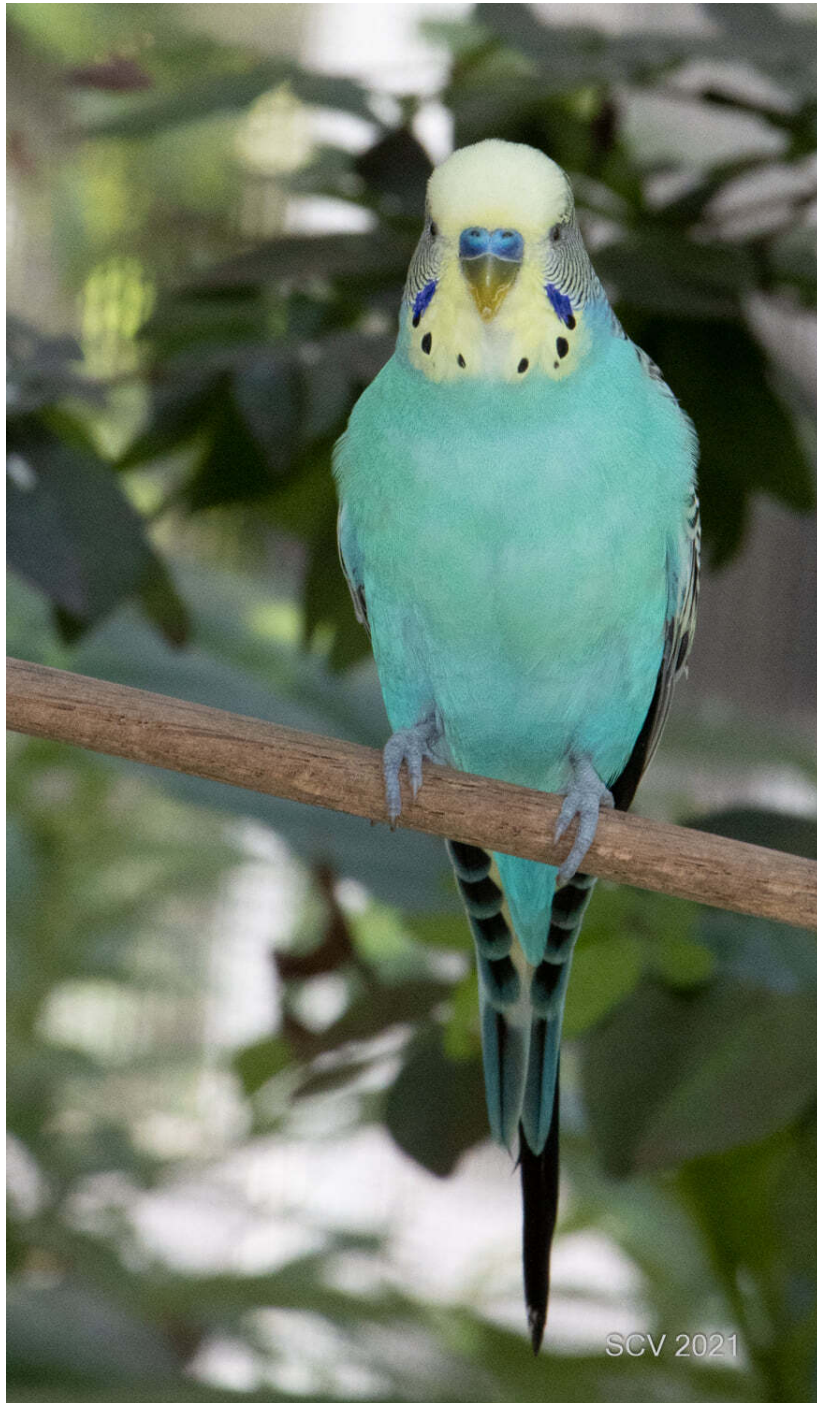
I wanted to see manatees while vacationing in Florida. Found them at Manatee Cove Park in Brevard County. I was not more than fifteen feet away and saw my first manatee within ten minutes of arriving. If only nature was like this every time! - Photo by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn

Butterfly World Birds Coconut Creek Florida 11082021

By Sandy-Crystal Vaughn



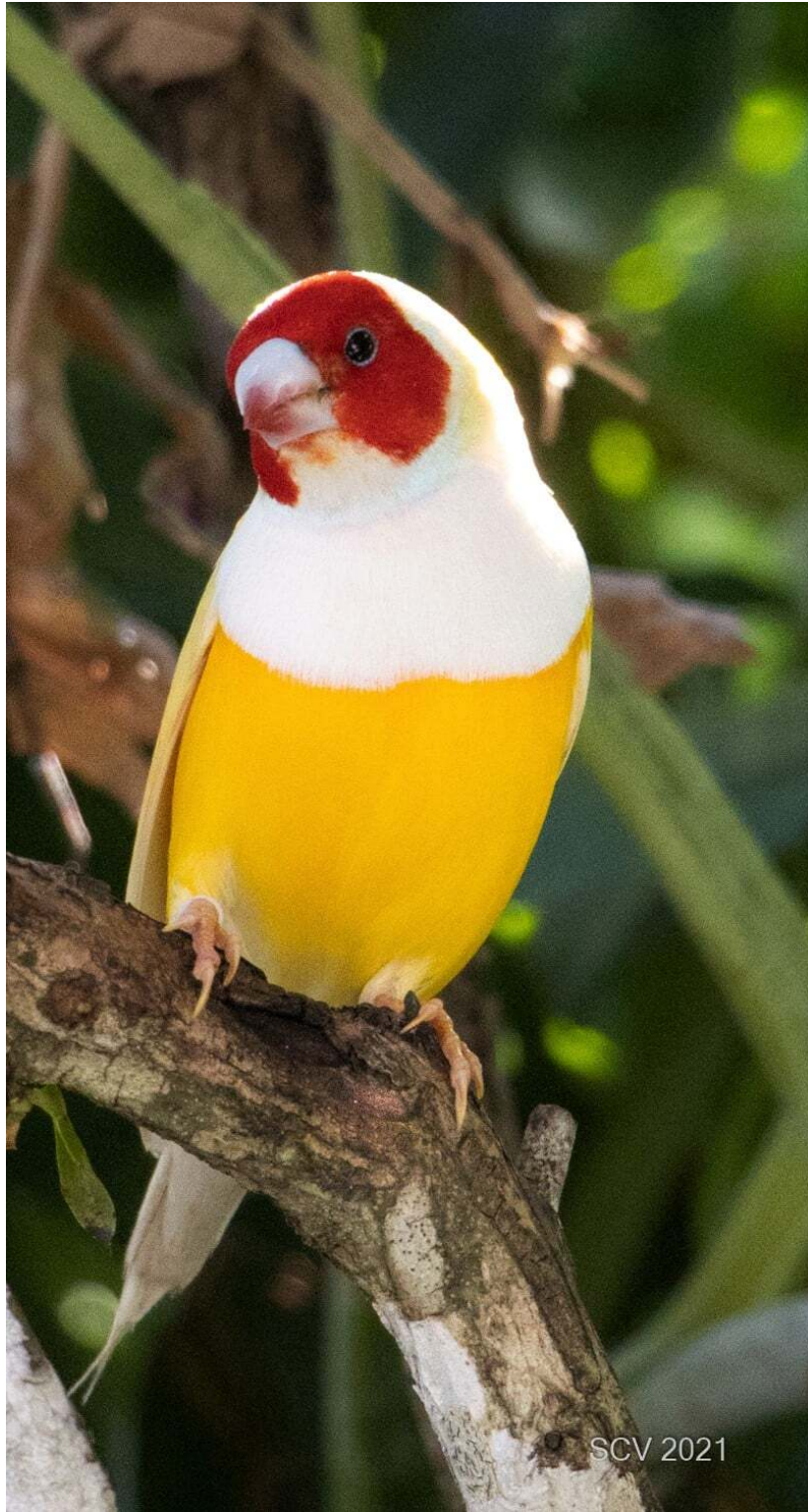
Blue-black Grassquit/Brazil - Photo by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn



Budgie/Australia - Photo by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn



Java Rice Finch/Indonesia - Photo by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn



Lady Gouldian Finch/Australia - Photo by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn



Lady Gouldian Finch/Australia - Photo by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn

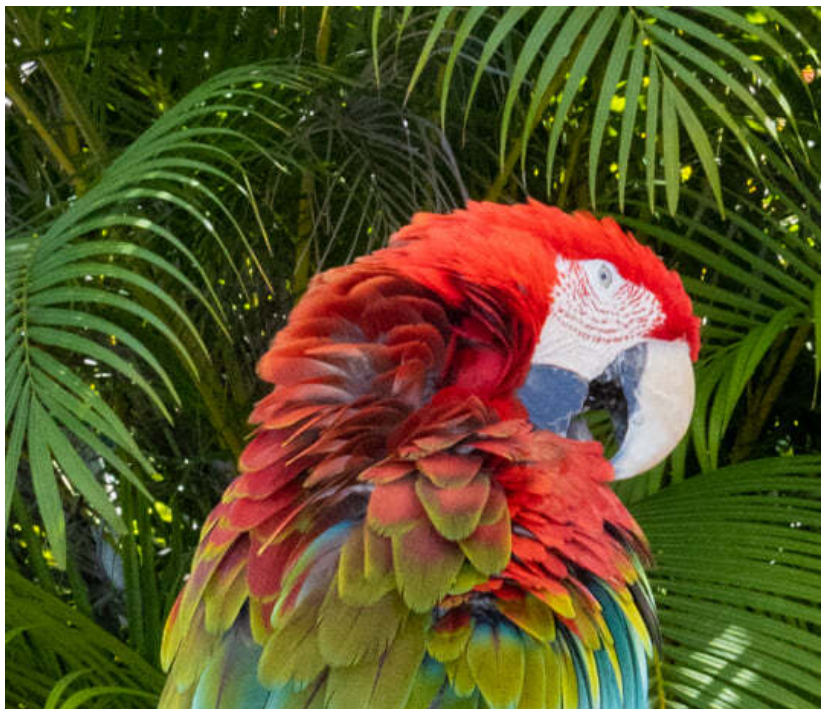


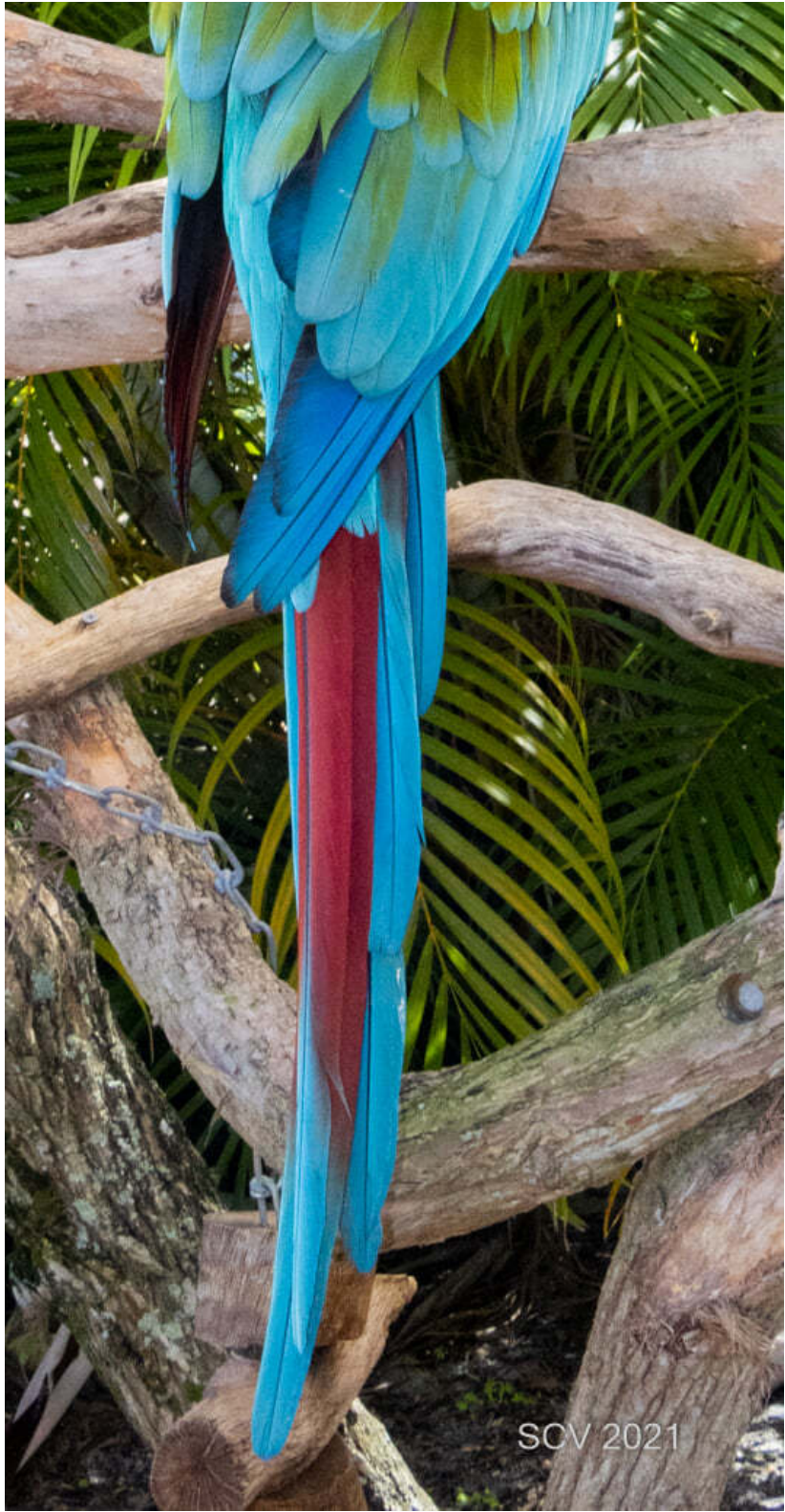
Shafttail Finch/Australia - Photo by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn



SCV 2021

Zebra Finch/Australia - Photo by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn





Macaw - Photo by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn



Macaw close-up - Photo by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn



SCV 2021

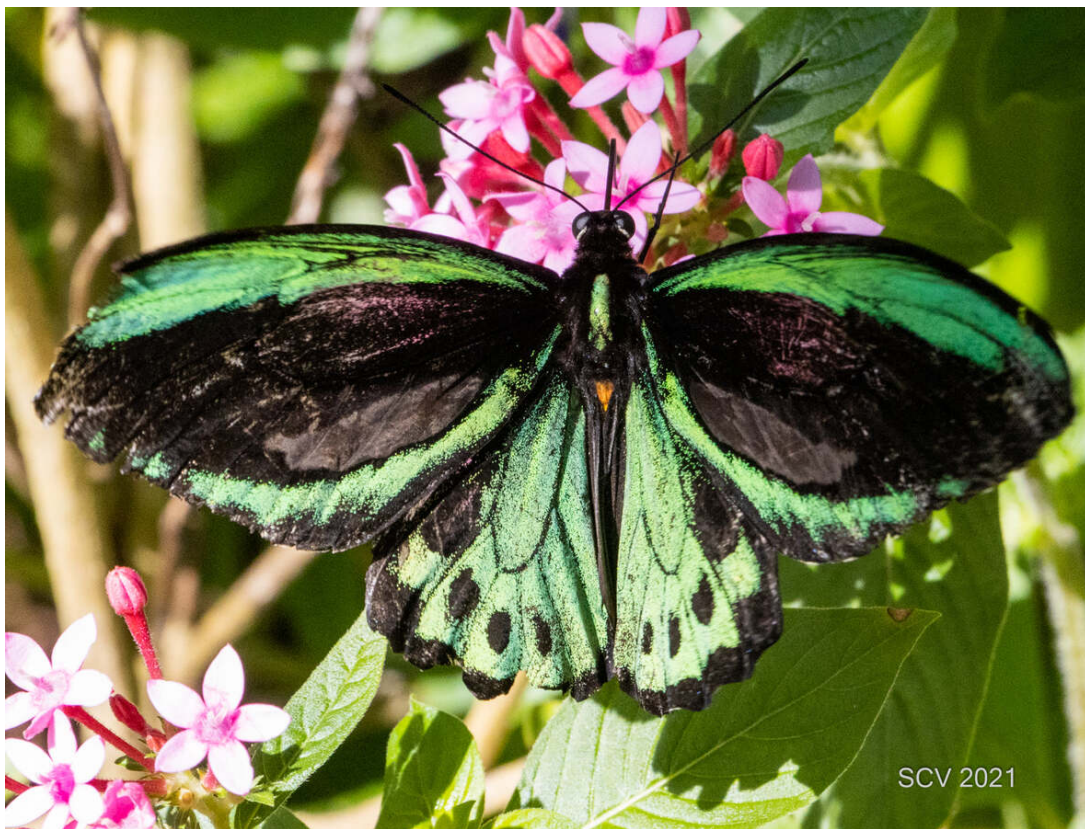
Macaws - Photo by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn

Butterfly World in Coconut Creek

The largest butterfly park in the world. First learned of this place in 2010. It got checked off the bucket list on Monday, November 8, 2021.



A Butterfly World Piano Key butterfly - Photo by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn



Common Green Birdwing - Photo by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn



Tree Nymph - Photo by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn



Zebra Longwing; Florida's state butterfly - Photo by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn



The exotic Ruddy Daggerwing!!! Saw this beauty while on vacation in Broward County, Florida on Monday, November 8, 2021. It was nectaring on Buddleia Butterfly Bush. - Photo by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn



Cassius Blue butterfly ovipositing on a Mimosa tree at Mead Botanical Garden in Winter Park, Florida. I could not find a reference for Mimosa as a host for this butterfly, but perhaps it is a generalist, like the Gray Hairstreak! 11102021 - Photo by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn



SCV 2021

Chrysalis - Photo by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn



SCV 2021

Eggs - Photo by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn



SCV 2021

Larva - Photo by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn



SCV 2021

Atala butterfly on host plant (Coontie) at Rockledge Gardens in Brevard County in Florida. 11122021 - Photo by Sandy-Crystal Vaughn



SNOWY OWL IN NORTH DAKOTA!

Photos by Wayne Easley



Immature Snowy Owl - Photo by Wayne Easley

I sat motionless in the car as I watched that Snowy Owl. Carefully, almost holding my breath, I reached for my camera. I was scared to death it would take off at any moment. I had not seen a Snowy Owl in a long time and I wanted to get some pictures. What a spectacular bird it was; almost two feet tall, a white body with heavy horizontal brown markings, piercing yellow eyes and ears that do not miss a sound. It was most likely a young female Snowy as they are the more colorful of the immatures that range into the Dakotas at this time of the year. Snowy Owls are marvelously adapted to living their lives on the treeless tundra of the far north. And where they live has some of the most turbulent weather in the entire world.

The white bodies of the Snowy Owls seem to fit in very well with the abundant snow of the arctic tundra. Their legs and feet are covered with feathers and the feet are padded and shaped like snowshoes. While the Snowy Owl is not the largest owl in North America, (that would be the Great Gray Owl) it is the heaviest and sports a wingspan of over five feet. The birds feed primarily on small mammals, but their diet does include small birds that they capture in flight as well as ducks and an occasional ptarmigan. Their favorite food is the Lemming which are small mice that live in the snow and ice of the tundra. Scientists are still trying to determine the exact relationship between Snowy Owls and the Lemming. Since the population of lemmings tends to fluctuate, there are times when these great white owls of the north cannot find sufficient food. In abundant years when food is readily available the clutch of eggs may be more than in the years when lemmings are scarce.

It is thought that the male bird selects the nesting territory but the female bird chooses the location. The female scrapes out a hollow in the tundra where she will deposit from three to eleven eggs. Generally, the nest is located where there is good visibility. You have to make certain predators are not hanging around. The eggs are incubated for almost a full month. During this time, the male bird brings a daily assortment of food for the female. Leftovers are stored nearby. Breeding success depends a lot on the Lemming population. When the small mice die off, Snowy Owls are forced to move to the south in search of food. Usually, the immatures will be the first to migrate and that is when we see the birds here in North Dakota. Studies have shown that every four years or so, there is a major migration south for the Snowy Owls and every ten years or so there is a mega-irruption of these incredible white birds. Birders in North Dakota were richly rewarded during the winter of 2011-2012 when we experienced a massive invasion of Snowy Owls in the Dakotas. Some of us tallied as many as forty of these gorgeous owls that year. They were everywhere, resting on rocky outcrops, fence posts, utility poles or just sitting majestically on the snow-covered prairie. Since they have been seen as far south as Texas, one may see them almost anywhere. I sincerely hope you will get your chance to see one and if you do, I promise you one thing. You will enjoy it.

Wayne Easley/written on Nov. 23, 2021 in Harvey, North Dakota.

Pictures: Taken by Wayne Easley and my son Steven. Pictures can be used for educational purposes. Thank you,

1-5- Immature Snowy Owl (probably a female). Seen on Nov. 20, 2021 near Goose Lake, North Dakota.

6-Snowy Owl near Tuttle, North Dakota

7-Snowy Owl resting on utility line during abundant migration in 2011-12.

8-Snowy Owl near Long Lake Refuge, North Dakota.

9-Likely male bird near Manfred, North Dakota.

10-Snowy Owl in flight showing that five-foot wing-span.



Immature Snowy Owl - Photo by Wayne Easley



Immature Snowy Owl - Photo by Wayne Easley



Immature Snowy Owl - Photo by Wayne Easley



Snowy Owl - Photo by Wayne Easley



Immature Snowy Owl - Photo by Wayne Easley



Immature Snowy Owl - Photo by Wayne Easley



Snowy Owl - Photo by Wayne Easley



Snowy Owl - Photo by Wayne Easley



Snowy Owl - Photo by Wayne Easley

TURKEYS OF THE WORLD/WILD AND OCELLATED!

By Wayne Easley



American Wild Turkey - Photo by Wayne Easley

It may come as a surprise to some that there are only two wild turkeys in the world. That's right, only two! They are the Wild Turkey which has several sub-species scattered over the United States and lower Canada and the Ocellated Turkey of Central America.. In some countries, especially in Asia, they have birds that are called brush turkeys but they are much smaller than the two mentioned above and are not really turkeys. Both the Wild Turkey and the Ocellated are two of the more spectacular birds in the world. In fact, when the males fan out those iridescent feathers in a courtship display, you better have a camera handy because they are awesome.

Wild Turkey males are known as toms and the females are called hens. The young birds go by the name of poults and are precocial. That means they spend very little time in the nest once they have hatched and they are able to fly when they are only a couple of days old. Wild Turkeys roost in trees at night but spend much of the day-light hours on the ground searching for food. Their diet consists mainly of insects such as beetles and grasshoppers but they do relish acorns and seeds as well. During the breeding season, the male announces his interest in mating when he begins to gobble. This lets the female know that he is in the area and is ready to start a family. With the longer days of spring, the female's hormones react suggesting she too is anxious to do her part. Once mating has occurred, the female becomes very secretive, constructing a nest that is carefully hidden among the bushes and the understory of the forest. There she will lay from eight to twelve eggs which she will incubate for almost a full month. Despite the ever-present predators and the cutting down of forests for housing projects, the Wild Turkey is slowly gaining in population.

The other turkey is the Ocellated Turkey which ranges from SE Mexico down into Belize and the Tikal area of Guatemala. The feathers of the male bird are a mix of bronze and green. The tail is a beautiful blue and has spots that remind a person of the peacock. The blue head is covered with reddish-orange nodules and the deep red legs are equipped with spurs that can be almost two inches long. These are used in fending off other males when the Ocellated Male is seeking a mate. The courtship dance is a beautiful performance. When the bird has his eye on a potential mate, he fans out that gorgeous tail, lowers his wings so they just touch the ground and then stomping his feet, he dances around the female in a complete circle. If the female is receptive, they will mate and once again the female seeks a quiet safe place to build her nest and raise the young. At night the Ocellated Turkeys tend to roost high in the trees, making sure they are out of reach of the many cats that live in the area. Unfortunately, the Ocellated Turkeys are on the Near Threatened List.

Both of these turkeys of the Americas have had a close relationship with man. The early pilgrims who came to the New World used the Wild Turkey as food.

So this bird has become heavily associated with Thanksgiving. Ben Franklin, one of our founding fathers was hopeful the country would name the Wild Turkey as the national symbol but that did not materialize. In the Mayan culture, the Ocellated Turkey was also a source of food with the feathers being used in religious ceremonies. Let's hope that both of these turkeys are with us for a very long time.

Wayne Easley/written on Nov. 4, 2021 in Harvey, North Dakota. Pictures can be used for educational purposes. Photos were taken by Wayne Easley and my son Steven.

1-6-Wild Turkeys

7-9-Ocellated Turkeys



American Wild Turkey - Photo by Wayne Easley



American Wild Turkeys - Photo by Wayne Easley



American Wild Turkeys - Photo by Wayne Easley



American Wild Turkey - Photo by Wayne Easley



American Wild Turkey - Photo by Wayne Easley



Ocellated Turkey - Photo by Wayne Easley



Ocellated Turkey - Photo by Wayne Easley



Ocellated Turkey - Photo by Wayne Easley

Cattail Marsh - Nov. 14, 2021

By Paul Gregg



Pied-billed Grebe - Photo by Paul Gregg

Carol and I decided to get out of town on the 14th, so we drove up Hwy59 to Livingston and east to Woodville where we hoped to eat at the Pickett House

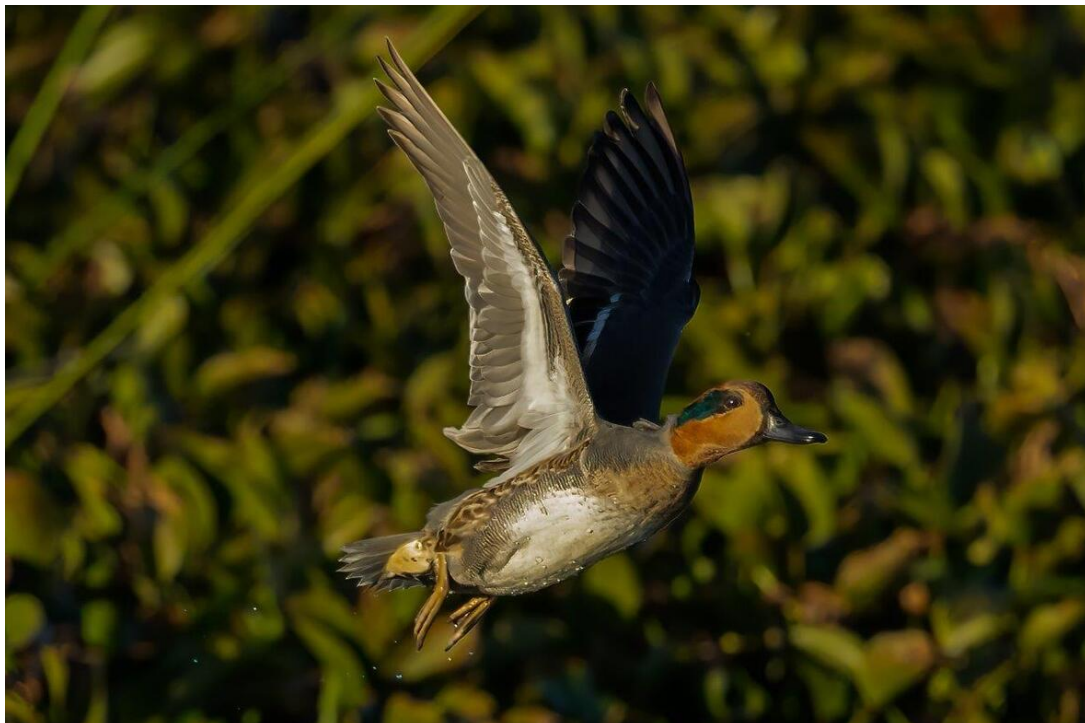
restaurant. However, the crowd waiting for a table was just too many for us to keep waiting. So we headed south to Beaumont and grabbed a bite at the Cracker Barrel there. We had a couple hours before sunset, so we decided to visit Cattail Marsh.

Though invasive water plants have almost choked out open water near their boardwalk, there was a fair variety of birds on the water. The main wintering fowl haven't arrived by the numbers yet, but I was able to get a few good photographs of some birds that were there. I've named the sparrow photo as a Savannah Sparrow. If I'm wrong, I'm sure someone will correct me. The teals were photogenic and weren't too far from the boardwalk to get some decent photos. The Pied-billed Grebe was alone; but I'm sure will be having companions soon. There were some adult Common Gallinules, but the immature one made for a good shot. Not included was a far distant shot of a Northern Harrier. I made a highly cropped photo of it, but just couldn't quite get it to an acceptable photo to share.

We are looking forward to when greater numbers of fowl arrive at Cattail Marsh and Anahuac NWR. We hope whoever manages the pools at Cattail Marsh will clear some of the overgrown areas in the near future. Winter birding and photography can be great in the Southeast Texas areas.

Enjoy,

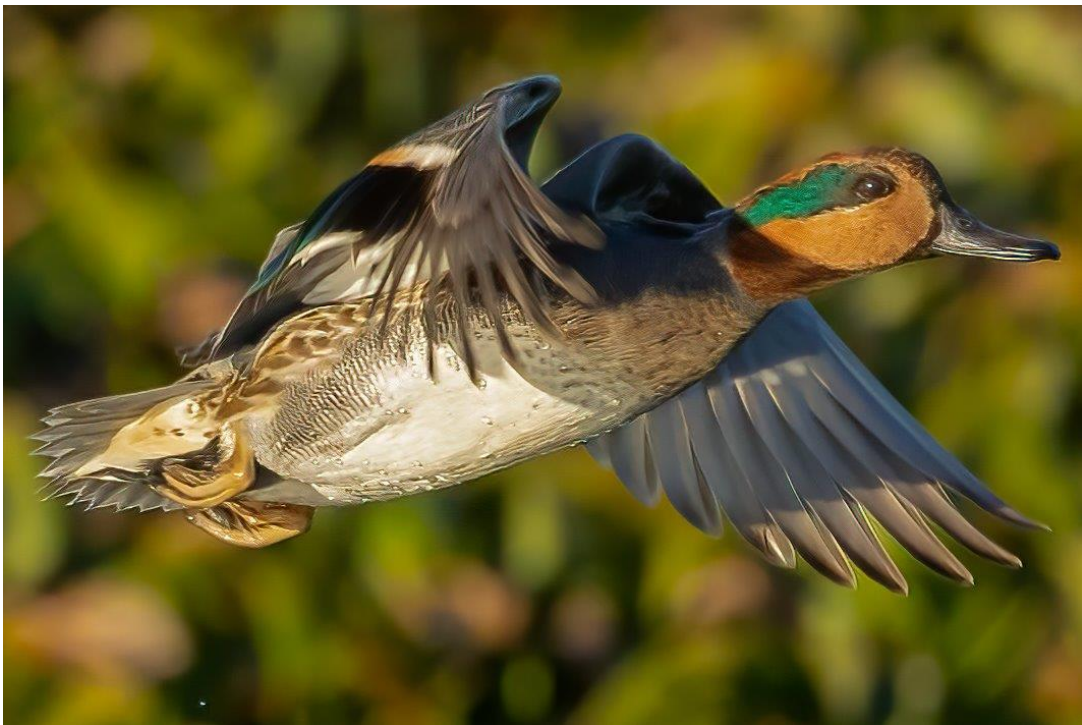
Paul Gregg, SMSGT, USAF (Ret.)



Green-winged_Teal - Photo by Paul Gregg



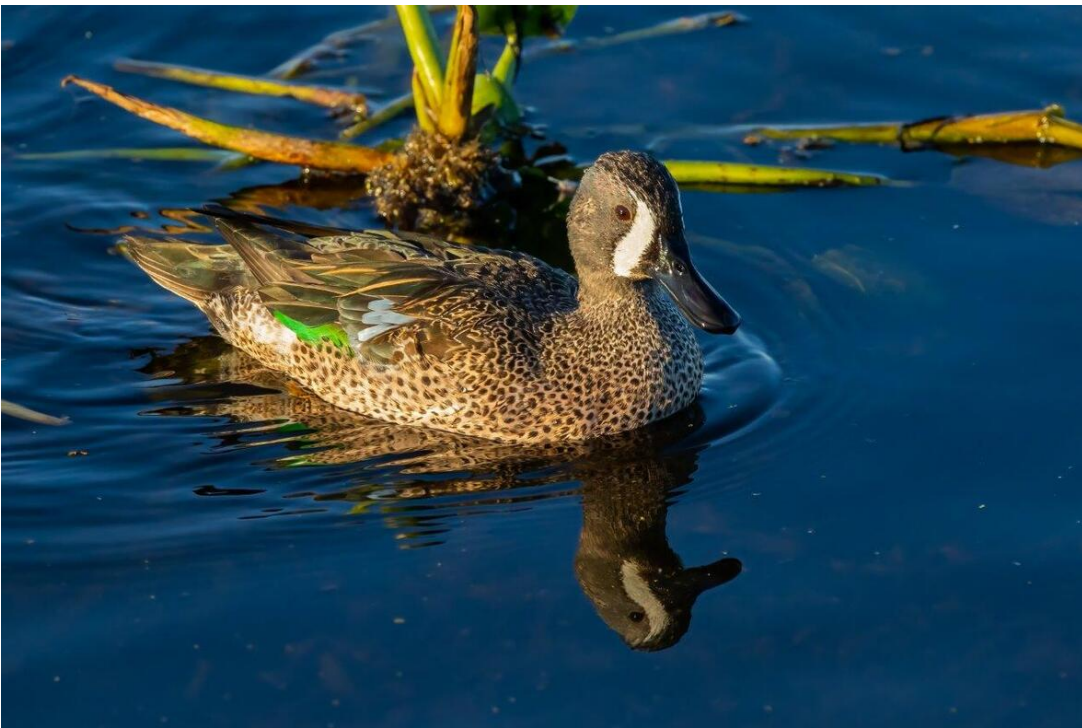
Common Gallinule juv. - Photo by Paul Gregg



Green-winged Teal - Photo by Paul Gregg



Blue and Green-winged Teal - Photo by Paul Gregg



Blue-winged Teal - Photo by Paul Gregg



Savannah Sparrow - Photo by Paul Gregg



Great Blue Heron flew across a retention pond near our subdivision and this is my best shot out of maybe 40 photos. Humble, TX. 11.08.21. - Photo by Paul Gregg

Family Matters

Photos & links from Hank Arnold



Photo by Hank Arnold

It was a magnificent coastal winter day.

It started cold for our bike ride, and I decided to take a jacket to wear on the Skimmer, but once the sun came out, everything was bright and warm.

Not a breath of wind, water surface like glass.

Great day for photography and boat trips.

We had about 12 people on board, a few cameras carried, but no tripods or scopes.

Our first event even happened just outside the harbor, when Tommy pulled over to a pod of dolphins for his “bi-camberal” speech. The pod was working a school of fish, and had attracted a few gulls and some terns. While we were slowly circling, a Great Egret wanted to see what was going on, and came in and landed on the cross-bar of the gate, up at the bow. He sat there for a few seconds, taking in the beautiful day and Tommy’s words of wisdom.

Tommy said it was a first.

With my 500mm lens, and everyone standing around watching, this was the best I could do to record the moment...



White Egret - Photo by Hank Arnold

When Tommy finished, he very politely put the engines in gear and started slowly, to give our newest non-paying customer a chance to leave...

But he didn't

He just faced into the wind and held on

For quite a while.

Figurehead

Like a scene from "Titanic"

Eventually he tired of the whole birding tour thing, spread his wings, and lifted off (safely) into the Windstream.

Nice start.

As usual, I took way too many pictures.

Of note...



Hooded Mergansers - Photo by Hank Arnold



Golden Eyes (?)



This picture of the top of an adult Whooping Crane's head... Photo by Hank Arnold

Tommy always points out that the red patch is covered in skin, not feathers, but I don't think I've ever taken a picture before that convinced me of that.

The patch is indeed red skin, covered in black hairs, that without the benefit of a 42 megapixel sensor look like some kind of feather quills.

But, as usual, Tommy was right.

Its very similar to a guy losing his hair, and there is a lot of that going around.

Tommy also says that when the bird gets into a dispute the skin puffs up, so I'll have to try that the next time I get mad.

This is a picture of the buoyant end of what Tommy called a Lesser Black Backed Gull.



Photo by Hank Arnold

I had been watching him for a while, and it was a first for me to see a gull go diving, but the proof is in the pudding.

In the pictures you'll see he was looking down into the water just before this, and came up with a fair sized crab just after.

I was very impressed.

The highlight of the day was a family of cranes with this youngster, who didn't mind having his picture taken at all...



We beached beside them for at least 20 minutes, watching WHCR family life, including at least 4 crabs get dispatched.

For each crab, the adult would take it to the shore, and with the juvenile watching, take off the claws, open it up, clean it by washing, then offer it to the youngster.

Another question I always wondered about is what happens to the crab claws?



After Junior had finished, the adults would pick up the claws, heft them back to crushing position, give a single crack, then down the hatch.

Doubtless that's their percentage during these childrearing times.

Wonderful day

This is my favorite picture of the day...



If you're cheering for the crab, you need to be getting your bird image jollies from somebody else, because that ain't happening.

Short version of images (20 or so)...

<https://hmarnold.smugmug.com/20211130-Skimmer-Short/>

Long version (over 100)...

<https://hmarnold.smugmug.com/20211130-Skimmer-Long/>

Paradise

By Hank Arnold

It was a beautiful day yesterday, so we did what any self-respecting Coastal Bend residents would do in that situation...

We went birding.

Yesterday, for us, that meant three humans and two dogs in a car with two seats, including Karan and Monica.

Thankfully, all were friends, but it did get locally crowded whenever anything interesting was only visible from one side of the car...



Our operating mode was that any time we saw a bird coming on the path ahead, we would stop, open the door to release the Furred Chaos, then one of us would stay behind to throw balls and Frisbees while the rest of the team went ahead to investigate the bird. This worked very well, and ended up with several pictures being taken by guest photographers.... Karan...

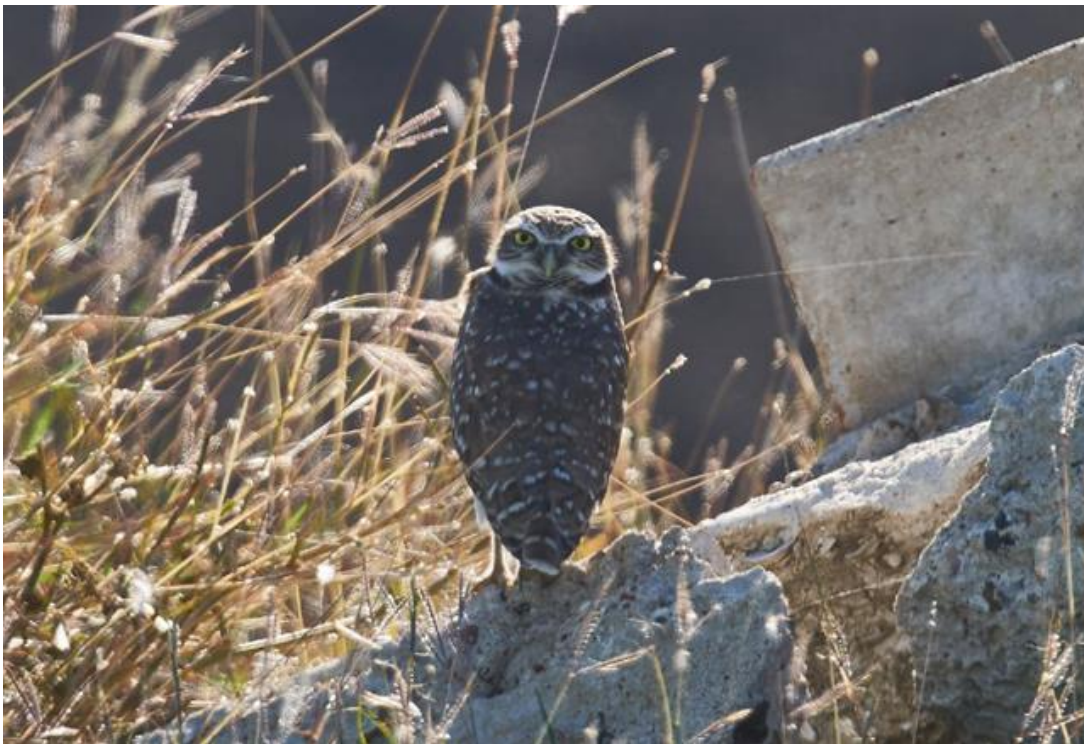


Photo by Nancy Arnold



Pictures of note include this guy I assume is a Forster's Tern, but haven't heard back from Nan on yet...



He's just not a bird you see sitting around enjoying the sun on a pier very often, and at the time looked a way too big to be a Least Tern. When we took this picture we decided it was a face only a mother could love...



But after seeing it up close, I'm not sure even Mom thinks he's handsome.

Bottom line is that, as with most impromptu birding adventures, we had a great time.

Where else can you wake up from a nap, collect some friends, then among other birds find a new Burrowing Owl, see some of the most rare birds on the planet, and be back home in a little over two hours?

Folks, we live in paradise

<https://hmarnold.smugmug.com/20211113-774-Barn/>

Happy Thanksgiving, everyone!

We went out wandering yesterday, and ended up in the HW774 area north of Rockport.

We didn't really have a route planned, and were wandering the dirt roads looking for places Tycho might like to explore, when we came upon a new (to us) Great Horned Owl.



He looked pretty happy, so hopefully we can take anyone there to see it that would like.

Down the road a ways, there were Sandhill Cranes falling out of the sky. We tracked them to a field that probably had 100 or more.



Sand Cranes - Photo by Hank Arnold

First time we've seen that in several years.

Here are all the pictures...

<https://hmarnold.smugmug.com/20211124-HW774/>

We also took the puppies out on a pretty day a while back.

When Tycho gets tired he collects all the toys so nobody can throw them anymore, but Miss Dani runs and runs and runs...

<https://hmarnold.smugmug.com/20211123-RFHS/>

Last week was an exciting one on technical grounds, as two of my long-term projects had big news...

The first was that the Texas Colonial Waterbird Society asked me to make a presentation about the system we have developed over the years to count birds using drones. My presentation was to be by video that was played for the annual conference last Thursday.

It's 20 minutes and somewhat technical, so there won't be a pop quiz at the end...

<https://hmarnold.smugmug.com/Audubon-Presentation/i-DKDFNS3/A>

Audubon Presentation - Hank Arnold (smugmug.com)

Thanks to Nancy, Diane, Mellissa, and of course Tim for helping me put it together.

It seemed to go over well and I've had several contacts resulting from it, so hopefully it will end up being a good thing for the little birdies.

We also had a breakthrough in our program to count birds from drone images using Artificial Intelligence.

It's something I've been working for 7 months, and was really the reason I stopped writing a story every day.

Teaching an old dog this particular new trick has been a long and arduous quest.

In the artificial intelligence world, two and two don't equal 4. What you're looking for is an answer that comes out something like "High Confidence Level Of A Number Close To 4".

When you first start out learning though, two plus two comes out anywhere between 0 and 50.

Hence the “arduous” designation.

I contacted several universities looking to hire some brilliant but starving student to help me learn, including Rice University.

I’ve had very good luck with this trick in the past. It cuts off months of stumbling for me and gives a bright young mind interested in the field some experience and a little money.

Win/Win

At Rice I came across an old friend, explained my quest and slowly worked up the food chain to a PHD that said he wanted to give the problem to his fall class of post-graduate students as a semester project.

“Uhhhhhhhhh, OK!”

I provided my best images, marked all the birds as a starting point for them to learn from, had a Zoom meeting with them every week, and kept up communications (arguments) via files and email during the entire semester.

Most of my suggestions were along the lines of “I tried that – it doesn’t work and here’s why...”.

Although they had experience in using artificial intelligence for other data areas, they kept getting distracted by the same sorts of problems other projects I have either studied or been a part of did, which is why all previous projects over the years have failed.

I don’t know exactly what happened, but I suspect with the end of the semester coming up, some PHD or more likely consortium of PHDs stepped in and twisted some dials and pushed some buttons.

PHEW!

Whatever they did, it was good, and it all came out last week.

Here is a way zoomed in example of a tern colony on Chester Island...



This shows purple rectangles around where the computer thought terns were, and the single red rectangle in the middle for a Laughing Gull, partially hidden in the grass.

Here is the same area with color coded "X"s showing the birds I had marked.



You can see that the boxes and crosses line up extremely well, which means it was almost always right.

Here is another example, this time with green for Brown Pelicans, showing matches for the 4 on the right, but my “X” in the upper left doesn’t have a box, so the computer missed that one.



One of VERY few mistakes. That particular pelican is hiding from the sun under a bush, so it's a tough one for humans, as well.

Looking at this next picture, which is the full image that includes the examples above, you can see how powerful this technology will be...



It took me several hours to manually mark those birds, and the computer can do it in a few seconds.

We still have some work to do to make it useable for other people counting birds, but its no longer a question of "IF" it can be done, because it has.

For me to help, we agreed from the start that whatever we came up with had to made available to anyone that wanted to use it, for free. Now we're working on exactly how that can happen.

Rice is so happy with the results that they're asking me what we want to do next year.

I'm pitching an AI program that correlates bird population changes with available weather and urbanization data, across the entire country.

Things like...

How did the passage of hurricane Harvey affect Christmas Bird count results across Texas? Only a few of the birds died in the storm, they were displaced. Over the years they have since come back.

I now have CBC data from Audubon for every circle in Texas going back into the 80's, so I think we'll be able to see abnormally high populations of non-migrating birds to each side of Harvey's path, then a slow return to normal levels for all CBC circles over the intervening years.

Picture a map of the coast showing points for each CBC circle, then a bowl shaped dip along Harvey's path where it came ashore (our house) that slowly evens back out over the ensuing years.

I'm pushing it because only something like Artificial Intelligence will be able to work with that much data, all at once.

If we can crack that particular nut, I can see it being useful, among other things, in quantifying how setting aside areas of protected habitat work out as those areas become more compressed by the spread of urban areas.

In my experience, people are more likely to support something they can see and understand, so maybe it will help.

Anyway, Happy Thanksgiving to all our friends.

Come birding soon!

Nancy, Tycho, and Hank



Photos by Randy Scott



Chipping Sparrow Coming in for Landing. These small birds visit our home in Conroe each year in a flock. They like to eat seeds on the ground or flat feeders. They leave in the Spring. A winter resident. #landbirds #sparrows - Photo by Randy Scott



This is bird is a rarity in our yard but is seen each year in the winter. Normally, it will sit on our fence but this time I caught it in a more conspicuous location, better for bug catching. It is a Phoebe. They often will hunt, catch their prey, eat it and then return to the same location. But this one always just flies off with the other flocks of birds. Too dangerous to be out in the open on account of the hawks nearby. - Photo by Randy Scott



White Pelicans - A little island sanctuary at Seven Coves on Lake Conroe. Noisy White Pelicans two weeks ago. #waterbirds #conroetexas #SevenCoves - Photo by Randy Scott



Yellow-rumped Warbler in our backyard in Southeast Texas, among other flocking birds. This species tend to arrive when we get our first really cold spell and they stay a while, eating seeds, acorns, and bugs. #landbirds #warblers - Photos by Randy Scott



The local bar on Lake Conroe. These Cormorants are having a great time socializing. Photo taken this week. #waterbirds - Photos by Randy Scott



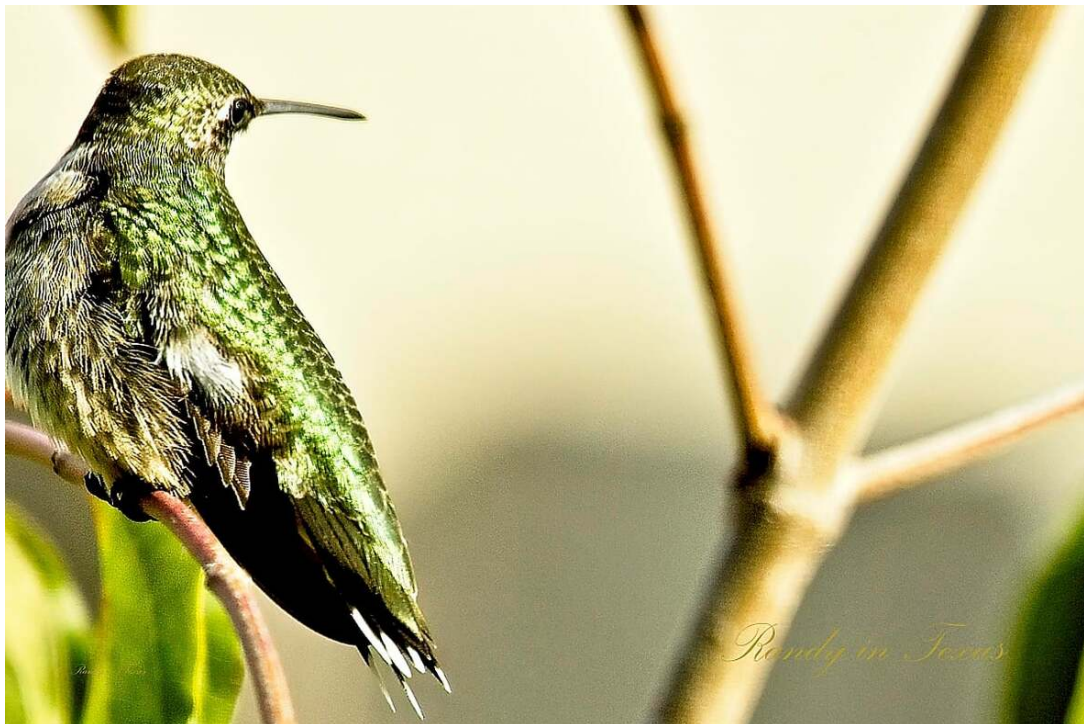
Randy in Texas

Pine Warbler in The Woodlands, Texas, feeding on seed pods, but not pine cones. #landbirds #Warblers - Photo by Randy Scott



Randy in Texas

At Quintana, Texas, during Spring migration, this little Hooded Warbler showed off his colors after a long flight over the Gulf of Mexico. It winters in Central America and is commonly seen during migrations along the Texas Coast. I spotted only one in my backyard over the watching decades, when it discovered a moving water feature about 4 years ago. They are often spotted in dense undergrowth and on the ground, feeding on insects. If you have a woodpile with insects in it, you might be fortunate to see one of these remarkable birds. #warblers #landbirds - Photo by Randy Scott



Randy in Texas

Last Hummingbird photographed in my yard the day before all of them were gone in the 2021 Fall migration. Nov. 8, 2021 She seemed unwilling to take the long flight to Central America but the recent norther convinced her it was worth the trip - Photo by Randy Scott

Photos by Bill Miller



Tagging photos from the RGV trip. This is a Common Mestra 11-4-2021 - Photo by Bill Miller



Photo by Bill Miller



This branch is probably gonna be our fall colors. — at Sheldon Lake State Park & Environmental Learning Center. - Photo by Bill Miller

Photos by Jim Snyder



We had three Question Mark butterflies at the bait dish today. One flew away as I tried to take this picture. 11-21-2021 - Photo by Jim Snyder



Our final Monarch of the season eclosed today in the rearing cage. Although well-formed, he is about half the size of a "normal" adult Monarch - 11-21-2021 - Photo by Jim Snyder



Big Stone Lodge - Dennis Johnston Park

709 Riley Fuzzel Road

PWWS meetings are held at the Big Stone Lodge at the new Dennis Johnston County

Park at 709 Riley Fuzzel Road.

The directions to get there are much the same as to the Nature Center. Aldine-Westfield turns into Riley Fuzzel Road just northeast of Spring so there are several ways to get there.

1. Take the Rayford/Sawdust exit and go east on Rayford Rd. At Grand Parkway (99), turn right on the Grand Parkway frontage road. Go 2 miles (staying on the frontage road) watching for the Johnston Park sign on your right just before you get to the Hardy Toll Road overpass; or,
2. Take Louetta Road east from I45 to where it deadends into Aldine-Westfield. Turn left on Aldine-Westfield until it deadends into Riley Fuzzel Road. Turn right onto Riley Fuzzel Road and go only 0.5 miles to the park entrance on your left just after passing under Hardy Toll Road; or,
3. Take Aldine-Westfield north from Mercer Arboretum until it deadends into Riley Fuzzel Road. Turn right onto Riley Fuzzel Road and go only 0.5 miles to the park entrance on your left just after passing under Hardy Toll Road.

Piney Woods Wildlife Membership Form		
Last Name(s):	First Name of Member(s):	
Street Address:	City:	State and Zip:
Home Phone No:	Work Phone No:	Email Address(s):
Pine Warbler will be delivered by E-mail Only		
Annual Membership Fee \$15.00* Additional Contribution \$ _____ Total \$ _____		Mail this form and check made payable to PWWS to: Piney Woods Wildlife Society P.O. Box 189 Spring, TX 77383-0189
*Per Household – Includes <i>The Pine Warbler</i> newsletter New _____ Renewal _____ Rejoining _____		

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Please submit any articles you'd like considered for the PWWS Newsletter. The Pine Warbler, to our President, Kathy Coward, justforthebirds@sbcglobal.net or Diane Wedgeworth, Editor, milanodi@yahoo.com

Please send all new address changes and any corrections to cdmoore3@gmail.com (Claire Moore) and add PWWS to the subject line.
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