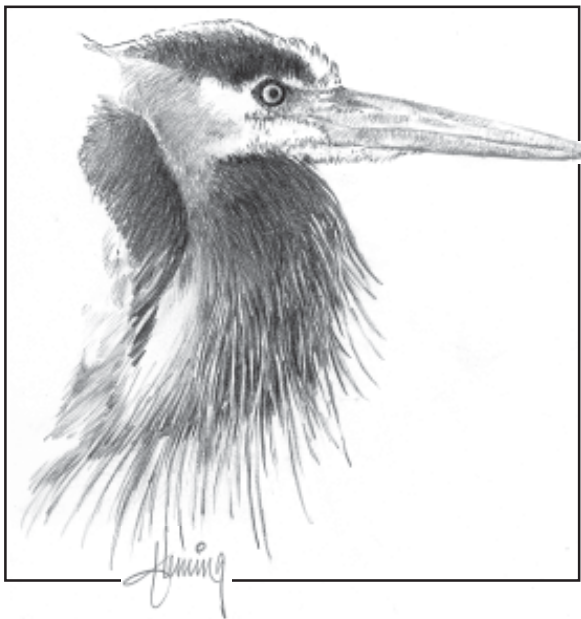


TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE

# BIRDS

OF

SHELDON LAKE  
STATE PARK  
AND ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING CENTER



A FIELD CHECKLIST

2007

Cover: Illustration of Great Blue Heron by Rob Fleming.

January 2007

# INTRODUCTION

**S**heldon Lake State Park (SLSP) is just 16 miles east of downtown Houston's Tranquility Park, as the crow flies. During a workweek, trucks and trains bustle past SLSP going to or from gravel pits, tube fabricators and pipeline companies. Daily commuter and family traffic ebbs and flows by. A few thousand feet overhead, airliners and corporate jets approach and depart from Bush International, the nation's ninth-busiest airport, in a constant stream to places near and far. The activity of the country's third-largest county and fourth-largest metropolitan area reach right to SLSP's boundaries. Urban activity is a matter of perspective.

Tranquility may seem unattainable around the park, but inside its 2,700 acres, things are different. Time is measured in seasons. Congestion comes from rafts of waterfowl moving past one another to roost or feed in the shallow or deep parts of the lake. From thousands of feet overhead, flocks of shorebirds on their seasonal run across continents drop onto the prairie wetlands. The annual nesting activity on the lake's spoil islands is hectic and nonstop.

Sheldon Lake has provided quality habitat for a wide variety of birds since it was created in 1942 as a reservoir for refineries critical to the war effort. The source of the lake is Carpenters Bayou, and park property extends north along its main drainage. There are 800 acres of open water and hundreds of acres of cypress swamp and marsh. The rest of the park, several hundred acres east of the lake, is composed of coastal prairie and bottomland woods. SLSP is a microcosm of Upper Texas Coast (UTC) habitats. The diversity of flora and fauna in the park attracts and holds nearly 250 bird species.

Surrounding the naturalized hatchery ponds of the Environmental Learning Center (ELC) are typical bottomland trees and shrubs preferred by woodland birds whether migratory, resident or wintering. In the wet prairie potholes, waterfowl, waders and shorebirds forage among pickerelweed and wapato. Winter grasses and forbs attract over a dozen sparrow and wren species. Among the reeds and vegetation mats along the lake edge in spring,

nesting Purple Gallinule and Least Bittern prowl. All year long over the lake is the constant traffic of seabirds, gulls, terns and the occasional pelican, typical of the UTC.

When birding the park, it is important always to stay aware of your surroundings. Do not bird from the immediate road shoulder. Find one of the pull-offs or parking lots and park. SLSP has no controlled access. Secure your vehicle and belongings. Alligators and poisonous snakes like Eastern Cottonmouth can be found anywhere at anytime in the park. Watch for and avoid them. Always be aware of your step on the fishing peers.

This revision of the *Birds of Sheldon Lake State Park and Environmental Learning Center* checklist was started in January 2001 and finished after the spring migration of 2006. The goal of the revision was to provide birders of all skill levels with a helpful, accurate depiction of SLSP birding possibilities. A challenge in developing a checklist on the UTC is the annual fluctuations and density of bird species. Therefore, a five-year project period allowed for better determination of bird activity in the park. Many more bird species found on the UTC but not listed are certainly possible here.

Damien F. Carey compiled this checklist revision with the help of dedicated birders who regularly walked every corner of the park, in every season, under every condition, recording the usual and chasing down the unusual birds. SLSP was fortunate to have John Bregar, a top birder in the area, provide reports, expertise and insight. Other birders who assisted included Caroline Carey, Chris Litherland, Nancy and Donny Fisher, and Ricci and Don Deibert. The members of the Friends of Sheldon Lake (FOSL) and Lake Houston Area Nature Club contributed many sightings from their regular visits and field trips. Nomenclature and organization for this checklist follow the seventh edition of the American Ornithologists' Union *Check-list of North American Birds* as currently supplemented.

In addition to the reports of individual birders, there were two great sources for this checklist: the Lake Houston Area Christmas Bird Count from 1999-2006 and the Sheldon Lake Texas Colonial Waterbird Census for 2001-2006.

The birders who contributed to this checklist revision learned a great deal from their effort. The best lesson they learned was that

*on any given day, in any season, birding SLSP can be as rewarding as anywhere else on the UTC.*

SLSP Superintendent Robert Comstock and Interpretive Specialist Tom Olson instigated this checklist revision. The effort would not have been possible without their encouragement and support. Park Ranger Rick Spivey contributed his intimate knowledge of the park and technical assistance that greatly assisted the effort. SLSP staff's stewardship of the park inspired everyone. This checklist is dedicated to the SLSP and SLELC staff.

For current information about birding SLSP, visit [www.fosslsp.org](http://www.fosslsp.org) for recent sightings, or e-mail [birding@fosslsp.org](mailto:birding@fosslsp.org). Report sightings of unlisted and rare species to the SLSP staff.

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*Please help us protect the natural avian communities in our parks by refraining from using playback recordings of bird songs. Frequent use of recordings disrupts normal avian activity patterns, disrupts essential territorial behavior and may lead to nest failure. Thank you for your cooperation.*

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## LEGEND

### Seasonal Occurrence

- Sp** – **Spring** (March, April, May)
- S** – **Summer** (June, July, August)
- F** – **Fall** (September, October, November)
- W** – **Winter** (December, January, February)

### Abundance Designations

- A** – **Abundant**: hard to miss
- C** – **Common**: should be possible to find on most outings
- U** – **Uncommon**: present but might not be found on every outing
- O** – **Occasional**: only one or two reported per season
- R** – **Rare**: not expected every year

# CHECKLIST

	<u>Sp</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>W</u>
___ <b>Black-bellied Whistling-Duck</b> .....	A	A	A	C
___ Fulvous Whistling-Duck .....				O
___ Greater White-fronted Goose .....	U		C	C
___ Snow Goose .....	U		C	A
___ Ross's Goose .....	R		R	O
___ Cackling Goose .....				R
___ Canada Goose .....			R	O
___ <b>Wood Duck</b> .....	C	C	C	C
___ Gadwall .....	O		U	C
___ American Wigeon .....	O		O	U
___ Mallard .....	C		U	A
___ <b>Mottled Duck</b> .....	U	O	O	O
___ <b>Blue-winged Teal</b> .....	C	C	C	A
___ Northern Shoveler .....	U		U	A
___ Northern Pintail .....	C	R	O	C
___ Green-winged Teal .....	U			A
___ Canvasback .....	O		O	U
___ Redhead .....				R
___ Ring-necked Duck .....	O		U	C
___ Greater Scaup .....				O
___ Lesser Scaup .....	O			C
___ Common Goldeneye .....				R
___ Ruddy Duck .....	R			O
___ Northern Bobwhite .....	R			R
___ Pied-billed Grebe .....	U			C
___ American White Pelican .....	R	R	U	U
___ Brown Pelican .....				O
___ <b>Neotropical Cormorant</b> .....	A	U	U	U
___ Double-crested Cormorant .....	U	R	C	A
___ <b>Anhinga</b> .....	A	C	C	C
___ American Bittern .....	R		R	O
___ <b>Least Bittern</b> .....	O			
___ <b>Great Blue Heron</b> .....	A	C	C	C

	<u>Sp</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>W</u>
___ <b>Great Egret</b> .....	A	C	C	C
___ <b>Snowy Egret</b> .....	A	C	C	U
___ <b>Little Blue Heron</b> .....	A	C	C	U
___ <b>Tricolored Heron</b> .....	C	C	U	U
___ <b>Reddish Egret</b> .....			R	O
___ <b>Cattle Egret</b> .....	A	A	C	R
___ <b>Green Heron</b> .....	A			U
___ <b>Black-crowned Night-Heron</b> .....	U	C	U	U
___ <b>Yellow-crowned Night-Heron</b> .....	A	A	C	U
___ <b>White Ibis</b> .....	A	A	A	A
___ <b>Glossy Ibis</b> .....	R			
___ <b>White-faced Ibis</b> .....	U			O
___ <b>Roseate Spoonbill</b> .....	C	U	U	C
___ <b>Wood Stork</b> .....		R		
___ <b>Black Vulture</b> .....	C	C	C	C
___ <b>Turkey Vulture</b> .....	C	C	C	C
___ <b>Osprey</b> .....	U	U	C	C
___ <b>White-tailed Kite</b> .....	R			R
___ <b>Mississippi Kite</b> .....	O		O	
___ <b>Bald Eagle</b> .....	R	R	U	U
___ <b>Northern Harrier</b> .....	O			U
___ <b>Sharp-shinned Hawk</b> .....	R		R	
___ <b>Cooper's Hawk</b> .....	R		O	R
___ <b>Red-shouldered Hawk</b> .....	A	C	C	C
___ <b>Broad-winged Hawk</b> .....	R		U	
___ <b>Swainson's Hawk</b> .....	U		R	
___ <b>Red-tailed Hawk</b> .....	U	U	U	C
___ <b>Crested Caracara</b> .....				R
___ <b>American Kestrel</b> .....			O	C
___ <b>Merlin</b> .....				R
___ <b>Peregrine Falcon</b> .....	R		R	O
___ <b>Yellow Rail</b> .....	R			
___ <b>Sora</b> .....	O			
___ <b>Purple Gallinule</b> .....	U	R		
___ <b>Common Moorhen</b> .....	A	A	O	R

	<u>Sp</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>W</u>
___ American Coot .....	U	U	C	A
___ Sandhill Crane .....				R
___ Black-bellied Plover .....	O	R	O	O
___ American Golden-Plover .....	R			
___ Wilson's Plover .....	R			
___ Semipalmated Plover .....	R			
___ <b>Killdeer</b> .....	A	A	C	A
___ Black-necked Stilt .....	O	O	O	O
___ American Avocet .....	R			R
___ Spotted Sandpiper .....	U			C
___ Solitary Sandpiper .....	O			R
___ Greater Yellowlegs .....	O			C
___ Lesser Yellowlegs .....	O			C
___ Upland Sandpiper .....	O			
___ Hudsonian Godwit .....	R			
___ Marbled Godwit .....	R			
___ Ruddy Turnstone .....	R			R
___ Sanderling .....	U	R		U
___ Semipalmated Sandpiper .....	R		R	R
___ Western Sandpiper .....	O		R	R
___ Least Sandpiper .....	C		U	C
___ White-rumped Sandpiper .....	O			
___ Baird's Sandpiper .....	U			
___ Pectoral Sandpiper .....	U			
___ Buff-breasted Sandpiper .....	O			
___ Short-billed Dowitcher .....	O			O
___ Long-billed Dowitcher .....	O			U
___ Wilson's Snipe .....	U		U	U
___ American Woodcock .....	R			R
___ Wilson's Phalarope .....	O			
___ Laughing Gull .....	C	C	C	A
___ Franklin's Gull .....			R	O
___ Ring-billed Gull .....	A	A	A	A
___ Herring Gull .....	C	C	C	C
___ Least Tern .....	U	U	O	O



	<u>Sp</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>W</u>
___ Caspian Tern .....	U	U	U	U
___ Forster's Tern .....	U	C	C	C
___ Royal Tern .....	U	U	U	U
___ Sandwich Tern .....	R			R
___ <b>Rock Pigeon</b> .....	C	C	C	C
___ <b>White-winged Dove</b> .....	R	R	R	R
___ <b>Mourning Dove</b> .....	C	C	C	C
___ <b>Inca Dove</b> .....	U	U	U	U
___ Monk Parakeet .....	R			R
___ <b>Yellow-billed Cuckoo</b> .....	U	U		
___ <b>Barn Owl</b> .....	C	C	C	C
___ <b>Eastern Screech-Owl</b> .....	U	U	U	U
___ <b>Great Horned Owl</b> .....	U	U	U	U
___ <b>Barred Owl</b> .....	C	C	C	C
___ Common Nighthawk .....	R	O		
___ <b>Chimney Swift</b> .....	C	C		
___ <b>Ruby-throated Hummingbird</b> .....	C	C	U	
___ Black-chinned Hummingbird .....	U		U	
___ Belted Kingfisher .....	U		U	C
___ <b>Red-headed Woodpecker</b> .....	O	O	O	O
___ <b>Red-bellied Woodpecker</b> .....	C	C	C	C
___ Yellow-bellied Sapsucker .....			U	O
___ <b>Downy Woodpecker</b> .....	C	C	C	C
___ Hairy Woodpecker .....				R
___ Northern Flicker .....			U	O
___ <b>Pileated Woodpecker</b> .....	U		U	U
___ Olive-sided Flycatcher .....	R			
___ Eastern Wood-Pewee .....	U			
___ <b>Acadian Flycatcher</b> .....	O			
___ Willow Flycatcher .....	R			
___ Least Flycatcher .....	O			
___ Eastern Phoebe .....			U	C
___ Vermilion Flycatcher .....				U
___ Ash-throated Flycatcher .....				U
___ <b>Great Crested Flycatcher</b> .....	U			

	<u>Sp</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>W</u>
___ Great Kiskadee .....				R
___ <b>Eastern Kingbird</b> .....	U			
___ <b>Scissor-tailed Flycatcher</b> .....	C	C	U	
___ <b>Loggerhead Shrike</b> .....	C	C	C	C
___ <b>White-eyed Vireo</b> .....	C			U
___ Yellow-throated Vireo .....	O			
___ Blue-headed Vireo .....	U			U
___ Warbling Vireo .....	R			
___ Philadelphia Vireo .....	O			
___ Red-eyed Vireo .....	C			
___ <b>Blue Jay</b> .....	C	C	C	C
___ <b>American Crow</b> .....	A	C	C	A
___ Fish Crow .....	R	R	O	O
___ <b>Purple Martin</b> .....	C	C	U	
___ Tree Swallow .....	C		U	R
___ Northern Rough-winged Swallow .....	U		U	R
___ <b>Cliff Swallow</b> .....	C	U		
___ Cave Swallow .....	R	R		
___ <b>Barn Swallow</b> .....	A	A		
___ <b>Carolina Chickadee</b> .....	C	C	C	C
___ <b>Tufted Titmouse</b> .....	C	C	C	C
___ Brown Creeper .....	R			R
___ <b>Carolina Wren</b> .....	C	C	C	C
___ Bewick's Wren .....				R
___ House Wren .....				U
___ Winter Wren .....				O
___ <b>Sedge Wren</b> .....	U			C
___ <b>Marsh Wren</b> .....	C	U	U	U
___ Golden-crowned Kinglet .....	O			O
___ Ruby-crowned Kinglet .....	U			C
___ Blue-gray Gnatcatcher .....	U		U	C
___ <b>Eastern Bluebird</b> .....	C		C	C
___ Gray-cheeked Thrush .....	R			
___ Swainson's Thrush .....	O			
___ Hermit Thrush .....			U	C

	<u>Sp</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>W</u>
___ <b>Wood Thrush</b> .....	O		O	
___ American Robin .....	O		U	U
___ Gray Catbird .....	U		U	C
___ <b>Northern Mockingbird</b> .....	A	C	C	A
___ Brown Thrasher .....	U			U
___ Water Pipit .....	U		U	C
___ Cedar Waxwing .....	U			U
___ <b>European Starling</b> .....	A	A	A	A
___ Blue-winged Warbler .....	R			
___ Tennessee Warbler .....	C			
___ Orange-crowned Warbler .....	U			C
___ Nashville Warbler .....	U		U	C
___ Northern Parula .....	C			
___ Yellow Warbler .....	C			
___ Chestnut-sided Warbler .....	U		O	
___ Magnolia Warbler .....	U		O	
___ Yellow-rumped Warbler .....	C			A
___ Black-throated Green Warbler .....	U			
___ Blackburnian Warbler .....	U			
___ Yellow-throated Warbler .....	U			
___ Pine Warbler .....	C	C	C	C
___ Palm Warbler .....	R			R
___ Bay-breasted Warbler .....	O			
___ Blackpoll Warbler .....	R			
___ Black-and-white Warbler .....	U			R
___ American Redstart .....	O			
___ Prothonotary Warbler .....	C	R	R	
___ Worm-eating Warbler .....	O			
___ Ovenbird .....	O			
___ Northern Waterthrush .....	U			R
___ Louisiana Waterthrush .....	U		O	
___ Kentucky Warbler .....	O			
___ Connecticut Warbler .....				R
___ Mourning Warbler .....	O			
___ <b>Common Yellowthroat</b> .....	C		U	U

	<u>Sp</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>W</u>
___ Hooded Warbler .....	U			
___ Wilson's Warbler .....	O		R	
___ Canada Warbler .....	R			
___ Yellow-breasted Chat .....	O			
___ <b>Summer Tanager</b> .....	U			
___ Scarlet Tanager .....	O			
___ Eastern Towhee .....	R			O
___ Chipping Sparrow .....			O	U
___ Field Sparrow .....				O
___ Vesper Sparrow .....				U
___ Lark Sparrow .....				R
___ Savannah Sparrow .....	C		C	A
___ Grasshopper Sparrow .....				R
___ Le Conte's Sparrow .....				U
___ Fox Sparrow .....				U
___ Song Sparrow .....				U
___ Lincoln's Sparrow .....			U	U
___ <b>Swamp Sparrow</b> .....	U		U	C
___ White-throated Sparrow .....			U	C
___ White-crowned Sparrow .....			R	U
___ Dark-eyed Junco .....				R
___ <b>Northern Cardinal</b> .....	A	A	C	C
___ Rose-breasted Grosbeak .....	U			
___ Blue Grosbeak .....	U		U	
___ Indigo Bunting .....	C		U	
___ Painted Bunting .....	U		U	
___ Dickcissel .....	U			
___ <b>Red-winged Blackbird</b> .....	A	A	A	A
___ <b>Eastern Meadowlark</b> .....	C	C	C	C
___ Rusty Blackbird .....				R
___ <b>Common Grackle</b> .....	A	C	A	C
___ <b>Great-tailed Grackle</b> .....	A	C	A	A
___ <b>Brown-headed Cowbird</b> .....	U	R		U
___ <b>Orchard Oriole</b> .....	C	C		
___ Baltimore Oriole .....	U			

	<u>Sp</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>W</u>
___ <b>House Finch</b> .....	U		U	U
___ Pine Siskin .....				R
___ American Goldfinch .....	C		U	A
___ <b>House Sparrow</b> .....	C	C	C	C

**bold = nesting species**

### Density of Bird Species by Season

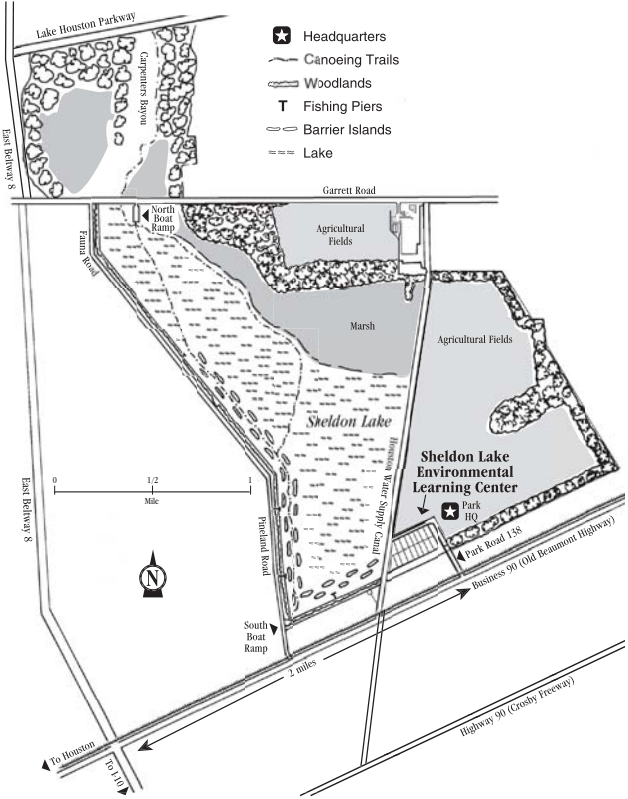
	<u>Sp</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>W</u>
Abundant	23	11	7	19
Common	45	38	40	53
Uncommon	62	14	46	40
Occasional	39	4	18	24
Rare	38	13	14	35
	<u>207</u>	<u>80</u>	<u>125</u>	<u>171</u>

## CITATION

Carey, Damien F. June 2006. *Birds of Sheldon Lake State Park and Environmental Learning Center: A Field Checklist*. Natural Resources Program, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

# Sheldon Lake

## State Park and Environmental Learning Center



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In 1983, the Texas Legislature created the Special Nongame and Endangered Species Conservation Fund. This fund may be used for nongame wildlife and endangered species research and conservation, habitat acquisition and development and dissemination of information pertaining to nongame management. Money for this fund is obtained through private donations and sale of nongame wildlife art prints and stamps. This fund now gives Texans a unique opportunity to help support this state's valuable and sensitive nongame resources. Your individual contributions and purchases of nongame art prints and stamps will help determine the level of nongame conservation activities in Texas. For more information call toll-free (1-800-792-1112) or contact: **Nongame and Endangered Species Program, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, Texas 78744.**

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Natural Resources Program  
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department  
4200 Smith School Road  
Austin, Texas 78744