

WINNERS REPORT



APRIL 27 - MAY 4

2008

Great Texas Birding Classic

BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE GULF COAST BIRD OBSERVATORY
AND THE TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT



Mission Statement

To increase appreciation, understanding and conservation of birds along the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail through education, recreation, nature tourism and conservation fundraising.

For More Information

For more information about how you, your business or community can be involved in this year's event, please contact the Birding Classic Staff:

(979) 480-0999

www.birdingclassic.org

Tournament Coordinator

Carol Jones
cjones@gcbo.org

Cover Artwork

Original artwork by John O'Neill is featured on the cover.



PROUD PARTNER

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Thank You!

The Birding Classic staff would like to extend a warm “thank you” to all participants, our host community and our sponsors for making the 12th Annual Great Texas Birding Classic such a great success! Thank you for your support of our efforts to conserve coastal habitat and wildlife along the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail.

- We had the financial support of eight Texas coastal communities.
- We had 59 additional sponsors, including corporations, small businesses, artists, foundations and individuals.
- 200 people participated in the competition.
- A total of 37 teams with birders from 18 states and the District of Columbia competed in all categories.
- We had 12 youth teams participate and 11 Big Sit! teams.
- The combined species total seen or heard by all teams during the Birding Classic this year was 353! To see which birds were seen by the winning teams, go to www.gcbo.org
- Through the past 12 years, winning teams have donated \$651,000 to avian habitat conservation along the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail! This is a significant accomplishment—one that cannot be celebrated enough. The creation and continuation of this event has benefited birds, other wildlife and people, as well.



Mission Statement

To increase appreciation, understanding and conservation of birds along the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail through education, recreation, nature tourism and conservation fundraising.

**Thanks to the Beaumont
Convention and Visitors Bureau
for hosting our Awards Lunch on
Sunday, May 4!**

The top three Weeklong Tournament teams were eligible to win individual prizes, and the top sponsored teams competing the entire week earned the right to designate which conservation projects received \$20,000 and \$10,000.

2008 GTBC Conservation Grant Grand Prize Winners

Reliant Energy Environmental Partners

Reliant Energy

Bill Baker

Awarded \$20,000 in conservation money.

Tom Roberts

The winning team received the first place prize of framed 12th Annual special art for the 2008 Classic, four boat trips for two people to see the whooping cranes donated by Rockport Adventures Captain Tommy Moore, and binoculars donated by Pentax.

Greg Mason

They selected the winning \$20,000 conservation project (listed on page 5).

Lalise Mason

Number of species: 316

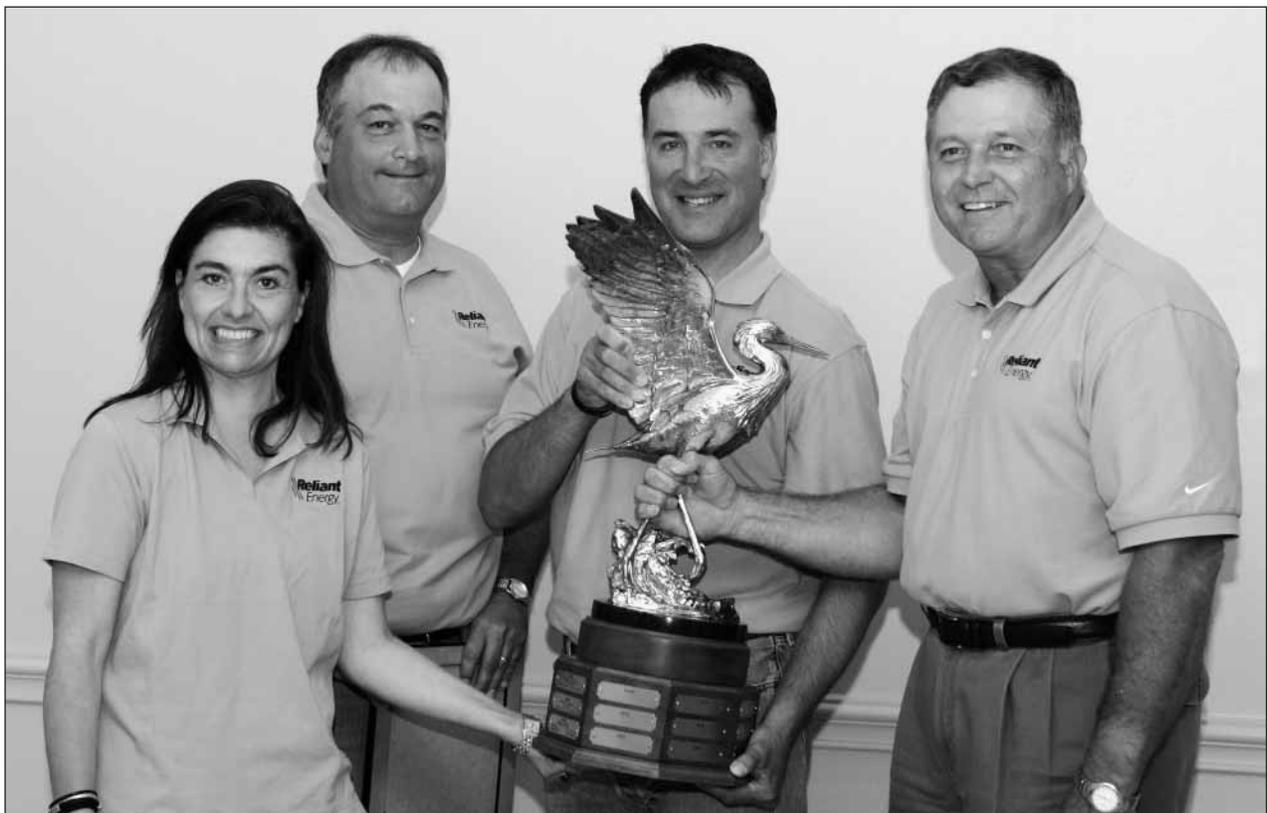


Photo by Earl Nottingham.

Second Place

ConocoPhillips Cranes

ConocoPhillips

Tony Frank
Lynn Barber
Sheridan Coffey
David Sarkozi



Photo by Karen McBride.

Awarded \$10,000 in conservation money.
Individual prizes for second place were books—*Gulls of the Americas*, donated by Houghton Mifflin, and *Texas Endangered Animals*, donated by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. The team selected a \$10,000 conservation project.

Number of species: 306



Photo by Earl Nottingham.

Third Place

Bushnell Butcherbirds

Bushnell Outdoor Products

David Womer
David Dendler
Don Friday
Rex Miller

Individual prizes for third place were “Bird Songs of the Lower Rio Grande Valley” CDs donated by Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and Birding Trail caps and T-shirts donated by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.



Number of species: 288



Photo by Earl Nottingham.



Birders at Sabine Woods. Photo by Carol Jones.

2008 Conservation Grants

The real winners of the Great Texas Birding Classic are the birds and the habitat that supports them. Through increased awareness of birding and nature tourism, we hope to bring to light the importance of habitat conservation. This awareness, along with the money donated directly to habitat conservation projects each year, will preserve and protect important coastal habitat for many years to come.

The top two places in the Weeklong Tournament won the privilege of awarding \$30,000 to the habitat conservation projects of their choice. The following projects were recipients of the Weeklong Conservation Grant Grand Prizes.

\$20,000 – Donated by Reliant Energy Environmental Partners/Reliant Energy:

Texas City Prairie Preserve, Borrow Ditch Wetland Restoration Project – submitted by The Nature Conservancy

Restoration project – Galveston County

A section of the “borrow ditch” created with the construction of the Texas City levee that borders the preserve will be filled in with material to create a section as mudflat (5-10 acres) and the rest as coastal marsh (5-10 acres).

\$10,000 – Donated by the ConocoPhillips Cranes/ConocoPhillips:

Sabine Woods Oak Motte Enhancement – submitted by Texas Ornithological Society

Restoration project – Jefferson County

Improvements to the 30-acre property will be continued by planting live oak and mulberry trees, with some of the live oak being large, to provide additional food and cover for migratory birds. An improved water system will be included to support the newly planted trees.

NEW! Energy Saver Winners

This year we had our first attempt at creating a tournament with a greener twist. The basic rules were that a team had to travel a minimum of 50 miles and turn in their mileage with their Official Checklist. Once the judges assessed the species list, we then calculated the number of species seen per mile driven. Both Gliders and Adult teams were eligible to compete in the coast-wide Energy Saver tournament. A \$10,000 Conservation Grant was awarded by the team with the highest number of species per mile. The teams that participated had a great time and enjoyed the challenge of determining a very birdy route.

1. Weslaco Slice of Good Lifers

Weslaco Chamber of Commerce

Wayne Bartholomew, Jim Booker, JD Cortez, Martin Hagne, Dan Jones

Number of species per mile: 3.34 (174 species)

\$10,000 Conservation Grant

Individual prizes: Framed special art certificates for the 2008 Classic and *Gulls of the Americas*, donated by Houghton Mifflin.



Weslaco Slice of Good Lifers.

Wetlands Restoration Project – submitted by Frontera Audubon Society

Restoration project – Hidalgo County

Invasive species will be removed within and around the marsh, two ponds and the storm water drainage channel. A mixture of native species will be planted in the areas that are peculiar to the requirements of each habitat and soil type.



GCBO Cuckoos. Photo by Sue Heath

2. GCBO Cuckoos

ConocoPhillips

John Arvin, Sue Heath, David Benn

Number of species per mile: 3.24 (167 species)

Individual prizes: A collection of books published by Texas A&M Press (provided by Texas A&M Press) and certificates with special art for the 2008 Classic.

Birding Classic Goes Green: A Third Way

I was very happy to hear from the Great Texas Birding Classic staff that there would be a new energy saver tournament. We were in a pickle. If we wanted to win the traditional tournament we would need to cover some ground and this would keep us from being competitive in the energy saver tournament. If we really wanted to save energy, we'd do a Big Sit and have 120 species in zero miles. The team was set on tweaking the route and improving on our Big Day from the previous year. What to do?

The times they are a changin'. One way to measure environmental impact is by measuring the amount of carbon released from the hydrocarbon chains as we run fuel through our vehicles. This measurement is the carbon footprint of whatever activity you happen to be measuring. In this case, we wanted to make our birding effort carbon neutral, sustainable if you will.

We figured out our mileage door to door (about 2,000 miles) for the event and purchased a carbon offset for twice our mileage through Terra Pass which has made our effort carbon negative. Say what? It's a little bit of a black box with the brokers, but it works like this and requires a bit of faith in the broker. It's a voluntary program that connects carbon emitters who pay a carbon broker to offset CO2 emissions with carbon sequestration projects. I ran the company by an energy policy wonk friend of mine and he gave me the green light for this company as being a positive force in the emerging market of carbon cap and trade. Maybe one day this will be worked into the fuel cost, but now it's voluntary and a third way to reduce our collective carbon footprint.

Richard Gibbons, Team Captain – Zeiss LSU Tiger-Herons

ADULTS – Lower Coast Only

1. Swarovski Roadside Hawks Two

Swarovski Optik N.A., Ltd

Joel Simon, Nicholas Block and Father Tom Pincelli

Number of species: 185

Prizes: First-place prize of framed 12th Annual special art for the 2008 Classic and *Gulls of the Americas* donated by Houghton Mifflin. The team will also get to pick the Lower Coast project for a \$10,000 conservation grant.

ADULTS – Central Coast Only

1. Zeiss LSU Tiger-Herons

Carl Zeiss Sports Optics

Richard Gibbons, Phred Benham, Erik Johnson

Number of species: 211

Prizes: First place prize of framed 12th Annual special art for the 2008 Classic and *Gulls of the Americas* donated by Houghton Mifflin.

The team will also get to pick the Central Coast project for a \$10,000 conservation grant.

2. King Ranch Pajareros

King Ranch

Tom Langschied, Oscar Cortez, Jim Sinclair, Brian Williams

Number of species: 182

Prizes: LED flashlights and certificates with special art for the 2008 Classic.

3. Aplomado Falcons

Independent

Ray Allen, Gene Blacklock, Jay Pruett, Victoria Allen

Number of species: 181



Zeiss LSU Tiger-Herons. Photo by Earl Nottingham.

ADULTS – Upper Coast Only



TAMUG WildBirders. Photo by Earl Nottingham.

1. TAMUG WildBirders

WildBird

Susan Knock, Chris Roberts, Katie St. Clair,

Emily Watson, Logan West

Number of species: 179

Prizes: First place prize of framed 12th Annual special art for the 2008 Classic, *Gulls of the Americas* donated by Houghton Mifflin, umbrellas donated by the Brazosport Convention and Visitors Council and Birding Trail caps and T-shirts donated by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

The team will also get to pick the Upper Coast project for a \$10,000 conservation grant.

2. The Grey Feathers

Independent

Patricia Bowen, Shirley Smith, Carol Scherer

Number of species: 166

Prizes: LED flashlights and certificates with special art for the 2008 Classic.

3. Woody's Golondrinas

Independent

Connie Hoke, Jeff Dallarosa, Frank Fichtel, Curt Harweth, Woody Woodrow

Number of species: 148

4. Langtry Loons

Independent

Megan Phillips, Mathew Genotte, Stephen Ross, Tom Sankey, Jody Schaap

Number of species: 117

5. Necked Jaybirds

Independent

Linda Pechacek, Ted Cleveland, Terry Baldwin

Number of species: 107 (due to team member illness, only birded half a day)



Langtry Loons. Photo by Carol Jones.

Sectional Conservation Grants

Sectional Conservation Grants of \$10,000 each were awarded by the winning team of each section of the coast to the habitat conservation project of their choice. This guarantees that at least one project will be funded in each section of the coast every year! The following projects were recipients of the Sectional Conservation Prizes.

LOWER TEXAS COAST \$10,000 – Donated by the Swarovski Roadside Hawks Two Warbler Rest Stop on South Padre Island – submitted by Gabriel Tree of Life Foundation

One lot, 50x100 feet, will be planted with shrubs and trees known to be most critical for nearctic/neotropical migrants. A water system for the new plants and a drip for the birds will be included.

CENTRAL TEXAS COAST \$10,000 – Donated by the Zeiss LSU Tiger-Herons Brazilian Pepper Tree Removal at two city birding locations, Paradise Pond and the Birding Center – submitted by City of Port Aransas

Funds from this grant will be used to eliminate invasive plant species and replace them with native species that will provide improved habitat for resident and migratory bird species.

UPPER TEXAS COAST \$10,000 – Donated by the TAMUG WildBirders Hooks Woods Motte Enhancement – submitted by Texas Ornithological Society

The objective of this project is to plant live oak, bald cypress, hackberry and mulberry trees to provide additional food and cover and food for migratory birds helping to restore habitat damaged during the passage of Hurricane Humberto in 2007.

Gliders Teams (14- to 18-year-olds)

The youth tournaments continue to attract new birders every year! A special “thank-you” goes out to all of the mentors, teachers, parents and sponsors for taking the time to help guide these young people into the field and educate them about birds and conservation along the Texas coast.

1. ABA / Leica Tropicbirds (lower coast)

Leica Camera – Sports Optics & American Birding Association

Saraiya Ruano, Nico Sarbanes,

Hope Batcheller, Neil Gilbert

Chaperones: Jeff & Liz Gordon

Number of species: 195

Prizes: Binoculars donated by Pentax and first-place prize of framed 12th Annual special art for the 2008 Classic.



ABA/Leica Tropicbirds.

Photo by Marci Fuller.



TAS Towhees. Photo by Earl Nottingham.

2. TAS Towhees (upper coast)

Travis Audubon Society

Additionally supported by San Antonio Audubon Society, Field Guides Inc., Rebecca and Andrew Cable, William Conley, Dr. Jackson Walker, Mary Kay Becher

Jesse Huth, Katrina Troppy, Austin Walker, Christian Walker

Chaperones: Jaci Kroupa, Mike Troppy

Number of species: 191

Prizes: Birding software donated by Thayer, Birding Trail caps and T-shirts donated by TPWD and second-place prize of 12th Annual special art for the 2008 Classic.

3. Houston Audubon Hawks (upper coast)

Houston Audubon Society and

Tropical Birding

Luke Downey, Patrick Bryan,

Justice Haynes

Chaperone: Joy Hester

Number of species: 161

Prizes: *Lives of North American Birds* donated by Houghton Mifflin, Birding Trail caps and T-shirts donated by TPWD and Third place prize of 12th Annual special art for the 2008 Classic.



Houston Audubon Hawks. Photo by Earl Nottingham.



4. The Laughing Gals (central coast)

Port Aransas Chamber of Commerce/Visitors Bureau

Kelsey Abel, Kalani Balcom, Kelsey Bigalow, Lily Cartwright, Megan Hardegree

Chaperone: Joan Holt

Number of species: 152

The Laughing Gals.



Roughwings (8- to 13-year-olds)

1. Houston Audubon Accipiters (upper coast)

Houston Audubon Society

John Bryan, Cooper Raterink, Elissa Mroski

Chaperone: Stennie Meadours

Number of species: 130

Prizes: Eagle Optics Triumph binoculars (donated by Eagle Optics), *Young Birders Book* donated by Houghton Mifflin, Texas Birds Publications Collection donated by TOS and the first-place prize of 12th Annual special art for the 2008 Classic.

2. Edinburg Kingfishers (lower coast)

Edinburg World Birding Center

Teresa Sova, David Tovar, Lauryn Brough,

Kathryn Brough, Rebecca Sova

Chaperone: Javier de Leon

Number of species: 67

Prizes: Eagle Optics Triumph binoculars (donated by Eagle Optics), *Young Birders Book* donated by Houghton Mifflin, Texas Birds Publications Collection donated by TOS and the Second place prize of 12th Annual special art for the 2008 Classic.



Edinburg Kingfishers.

3. Dow Ospreys (upper coast)

The Dow Chemical Company

Jacob Truetken, Jeremy Simon, Elijah Simon, Dylan Etie

Chaperones: Dana Simon, Sheree Etie

Number of species: 74

Prizes: Eagle Optics Triumph binoculars (donated by Eagle Optics), *Young Birders Book* donated by Houghton Mifflin, Texas Birds Publications Collection donated by TOS and the third-place prize of 12th Annual special art for the 2008 Classic.



Dow Ospreys. Photo by Dana Simon.

4. Screaming Eagles (central coast)

AEP Texas

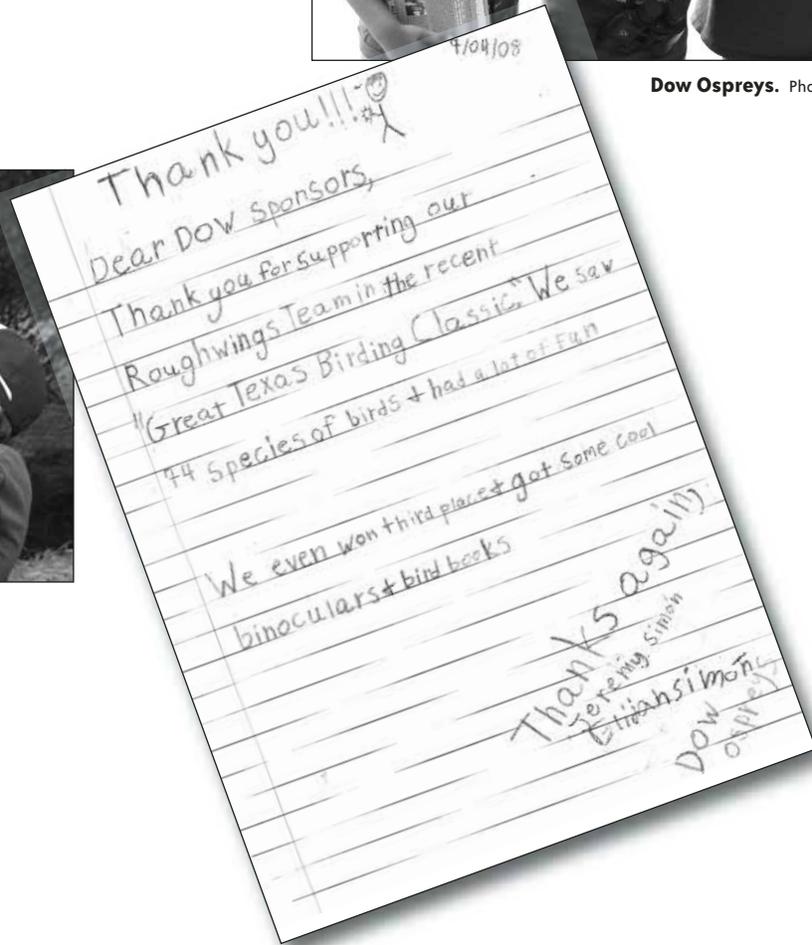
Miguel Rivera, Roland Silva, Ethan, Belize Ellison

Chaperone: Beau Hardegree

Number of Species: 73



Screaming Eagles.



5. Blue Merlins (central coast)

AEP Texas

Chase Hagedoin, Genevieve, Emma Shannon,

Ambrick Sample, Kristen Mouton

Chaperone: Carolyn Grosse

Number of species: 65

6. Crazy Cardinals (central coast)

AEP Texas

Emily Fischer, Mary Kate Williams, Ellie Martin

Chaperone: Kendal Keyes

Number of species: 63

7. Cukoo Cockatoos (central coast)

AEP Texas

Libby Nash, Grecia Corrada, Daniela Carreno, Shaela Yeager

Chaperone: Emily Williamson

Number of species: 61

8. Belted Kidfishers (central coast)

AEP Texas

J.J. Coronado, Joel Coronado, Shane Johnson, Shivam Bhakta, Tyler Leonard

Chaperone: Julie Findley

Number of species: 57



Blue Merlins and Belted Kidfishers.

Big Sit!

The Big Sit! Tournament continues to be a popular event. Teams came out in all sections of the coast identifying birds within their 17-foot circle. On Sunday April 27, a major weather system moved across the coast of Texas. Some Big Sits were temporarily rained out, some were blown out with very few missing the weather event altogether. It made for an added challenge indeed.

As part of the Big Sit! Tournament, the \$3,000 Lone Star Bird Award was created. The Lone Star Bird Award is chosen by randomly drawing the name of a bird that can be seen along the entire Texas coast. Any Big Sit! team that sees this bird then goes into a drawing to determine the winner of the Lone Star Bird Award (This year's Lone Star Bird was the Wilson's Snipe). This team then picks which habitat project will receive \$3,000. Individual prizes are also given in this tournament category.



Swarovski Big Sit. Photo by Carol Jones.

1. Swarovski Big Sit

Swarovski Optik N.A., Ltd.

Iain Campbell, Cameron Cox, Ken Behrens, Sam Woods, Chip Clouse

Location: Tropical Birding Tower at High Island

Number of species: 136

Prizes: Hummingbird Feeder kits donated by Best "1" and 12th Annual special art for the 2008 Classic.

2. Groovy-billed Anis

Eagle Optics and Bird Watchers Digest

Marci Fuller, Terry Fuller, Jeff Gordon, Liz Gordon, Ben Lizdas, Bill Thompson III, Tony Bennett

Location: South Padre Island Convention Center

Number of species: 123

Prizes: Gulf Coast Bird Observatory lunch coolers donated by GCBO and 12th Annual special art for the 2008 Classic.



Groovy-billed Anis.



Port Aransas Spoonbills.

3. Port Aransas Spoonbills

Port Aransas Chamber of Commerce/Visitors Bureau

Scott Holt, Ann Vaughan, Joan Holt, Becky Corder, Bobby Sherwood,

Georgia Neblett, Francis Stokes, Tony Amos, Chris Tubbs

Location: Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center Observation Tower

Number of species: 107

Prizes: Spot 'n' Jot Birders log cards donated by Spot 'n' Jot and 12th Annual special art for the 2008 Classic.

4. Brazosport Birders

Freeport LNG

David Plunkett, Charlie Brower, Olivia Brower, Tom Taroni, Gardner Campbell,

Zane Lee, Jennifer Wilson, Dan Mooney, Lauri Mooney, Ken West

Location: Quintana Sanctuary

Number of species: 106

5. BASF Bitterns

BASF

Cecilia Riley, Mike Gray, John Arvin, Ben Wardwell,
Sue Heath, Tad Finnell, Kelly Kain
Location: San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge
Number of species: 104



Vopak Vultures. Photo by Carol Jones.



BASF Bitterns.
Photo by Carol Jones.

6. Vopak Vultures

Vopak North America

Don Verser, Mary Ann Beauchemin, Betsy Black, Marcy Brown,
Flo Hannah, Pam Smolen, Bo Verser
Location: Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge
Number of species: 91
WINNER: LONE STAR BIRD AWARD

7. Bentsen Green J's

McAllen Convention and Visitors Bureau

Joshua Rose, Mary Gustafson, Mary Beth Stowe,
Jerry Brite, Jose Uribe, Kyle O'Haver
Location: Tower at Rio Bentsen State Park
Number of species: 90

8. Coastal Bend Audubon Society

Corpus Christi Convention and Visitors Bureau

Travis Gallo, Robyn Cobb, Teresa Razo, Sally Bickley, Laura Cooper,
Leatrice Koch, Ricardo Garces, Linda May Price, Jessica Akins
Location: Corpus Christi Botanical Gardens
Number of species: 76

9. Sitting Ducks

Rockport-Fulton Area Convention and Visitors Bureau

Bron Rorex, Hilde Kaigler, Craig McIntyre, Jan Wimberley, Linda Lanoue,
Herb Wisch, Claudia Dorn, Debra Copora, Diana Rushing
Location: H-E-B Woods
Number of species: 68



Sitting Ducks.
Photo by Jimmy Jackson.



Stewart Peepers. Photo by Karen McBride.

10. Stewart Peepers

Stewart Title Company – Port Aransas

Nancy Teller, Diane Albright, Carolyn Grosse, Julie Finley, Cheryl Anz, Marc Teller
Location: Paradise Pond – Port Aransas Number of species: 67

11. McRee Ford Thunderbirds

McRee Ford

Dennis Myers, Cammy Myers, Breck Sacra, Brad Adams, Phyllis Adams, Lou Klejbuk,
Larry George
Location: Cedar Bayou Cooling Pond Number of species: 61



Photo by Earl Nottingham.

Lone Star Bird Award

\$3,000 – Donated by the Vopak Vultures

Friends of the Anahuac Wildlife Refuge, Coastal Prairie Invasive Species Control
Restoration project – Chambers County: Invasive Chinese Tallow will be treated by
applying herbicide and allow the native coastal prairie of the refuge to
continue improving toward a pre-agricultural state.

Mark Your Calendars!

We could not do this event every year without the continued support of our corporate and community sponsors, prize donors and all of the participants who come down to the Texas coast each year to compete on behalf of coastal habitat conservation. We hope you are able to continue making room in your schedule for this event in the years to come.

13th Annual Great Texas Birding Classic: Sunday, April 26 – Sunday, May 3, 2009

14th Annual Great Texas Birding Classic: Sunday, April 25 – Sunday, May 2, 2010

15th Annual Great Texas Birding Classic: Sunday, April 10 – Sunday, April 17, 2011

**For information on the Great Texas Birding Classic 2008,
contact Tournament Coordinator Carol Jones:**

In Lake Jackson: (979) 480-0999

By mail: The Great Texas Birding Classic, Gulf Coast Bird Observatory,
103 West Highway 332, Lake Jackson, TX 77566

E-mail: cjones@gcbo.org

Check us out on the Web at: www.tpwd.state.tx.us/gtbc and www.birdingclassic.org



Sponsors 2008

Great Blue Heron

\$20,000 to under \$50,000

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service –
Coastal Program

Roseate Spoonbill

\$7,000 to under \$12,500

ConocoPhillips
Reliant Energy

Black Skimmer

\$4,000 to under \$7,000

AEP Texas
Swarovski Optik

Belted Kingfisher

\$1,000 to under \$4,000

BASF
Brazosport Convention & Visitors Council
Corpus Christi Convention & Visitors Bureau
The Dow Chemical Company
Eagle Optics
Freeport LNG
Lalise & Greg Mason
McAllen Chamber of Commerce
McRee Ford
NBID Associates
Rockport-Fulton Area Chamber of Commerce
Suez LNG

Under \$1,000 and In-Kind Donations

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Bushnell
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Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology
Cornell University Press
Driftwood Wildlife Association
Jarrett Juno Ranch,
Edward Farmer & Partners
John P. O’Neill – artist
Juanita Gibson – artist
Kathy Adams Clark Productions

National Geographic Books
Naturally Curious
Panama Boutique
PMMI Printing
Rockport Adventures
Rootin’ Ridge Toymakers
Sneed Nature Art,
Gerald Sneed – artist
Spot ‘n’ Jot Birders Log
Texas A&M University Press
Thayer Birding Software
John & Gloria Tveten
Wild Birds Unlimited – Beaumont
Wild Lines, Maren Phillips – artist

Team Sponsorship

* part of sponsorship package

AEP Texas *	McAllen Chamber of Commerce *
BASF *	McRee Ford *
Bird Watcher’s Digest	Port Aransas Chamber of Commerce/Tourist Bureau
Bushnell	Reliant Energy *
Carl Zeiss Sport Optics	Rockport-Fulton Area Chamber of Commerce *
ConocoPhillips *	San Antonio Audubon Society
Corpus Christi Convention & Visitors Bureau *	Stewart Title Company – Port Aransas
The Dow Chemical Company *	Swarovski Optik *
Eagle Optics *	Travis Audubon Society
Freeport LNG *	Tropical Birding
Houston Audubon Society	Vopak North America
King Ranch	Weslaco Chamber of Commerce
Leica Sports Optics and American Birding Association	WildBird

Thank You!

The Great Texas Birding Classic is co-hosted by the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. We would like to extend our gratitude to the following people for making this year's event fly!

GULF COAST BIRD OBSERVATORY:

Cecilia Riley – Executive Director
Carol Jones – GTBC Tournament Coordinator
Karen McBride – Office Manager
Sue Heath – Web site assistance

Additional GCBO Volunteers:

- Mickey Dufilho
- Michael Gray
- Diane Richmond
- Jerry Eppner
- Jane Eppner
- Barbara Burkhart
- Michael Johns

TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT:

Shelly Plante – Nature Tourism Coordinator
Darcy Bontempo – Marketing and Web Services Branch Chief
Glenda Beasley – Marketing Manager
Carly Drees – Marketing Assistant
John Davis – Conservation Outreach Program Leader
Cliff Shackelford – Texas Partners in Flight Coordinator
Matt Wagner – Wildlife Diversity Program Director

OFFICIAL ARTIST FOR 2008:

John P. O'Neill

JUDGES:

Cliff Shackelford – TPWD, Texas Partners in Flight
Keith Arnold – Ornithologist and retired professor
Noreen Damude – Natural History writer and biologist
Bob Barth – Ornithologist and retired professor



Birding Classic judges hard at work. Photo by Carol Jones.

ADDITIONAL BEHIND THE SCENES HELP:

Sign-in table: Karen McBride
Prize distribution: Carly Drees

Thanks to all of our community partners for helping coordinate the Awards Lunch:

Beaumont Convention and Visitors Bureau
Elizabeth Eddins



Thanks to Beaumont CVB and their wonderful staff. Photo by Earl Nottingham.

Special thanks to the following for opening their gates to Classic competitors:

Coastal NWRs	Coastal WMAs
Jasper Fish Hatchery	Texas City Prairie Preserve

Private homes of our birding friends throughout the Texas coast

Thanks to all the people at TPWD who helped make this year a success:

Mike Berger	Karen Loke	Frank Robinson
Randy Brudnicki	Robert Macias	Lydia Saldaña
Tom Harvey	Cecilia Nasti	Jim Stone
Chris Hunt	Earl Nottingham	
Mark Klym	Tim Peterson	

We hope you will choose to be a part of next year's event!

Why keep coming back?

Contributed by veteran Classic competitor, Jesse Huth

I have been team captain for the TAS Towhees in the Great Texas Birding Classic for the last seven years. This means early mornings, late nights, lack of food, and LOTS of driving. Why do I insist on doing this to myself each year?

Well, it could be that I am crazy, obsessed with birding, or perhaps a bit of both. Whatever way, I keep coming back each year. I still remember my first Birding Classic. We drove down the night before and camped at a lady's house in Victoria. We got up and birded around her house until lunch, where we promptly sat down for an hour to eat. We then drove down to the coast to finish off our day with 58 birds. We just wanted to find out what the Classic was about. We got ninth place that year.

The next year we went down the day before and camped in Goose Island State Park. We birded the full day, eating on the run. Now it is sounding more like a Big Day. We got just under 100 birds that year. We started out the next year at Goose Island SP as well. We hit the area hard and came up with 102 birds. A fair number, but not enough for first place.

The next year, we decided to try the Upper Coast. I went down a week before on a "scouting" trip (more of an excuse to go birding). We started in Anahuac and moved down through High Island and Bolivar Flats. We ended up with 145 birds, enough to put us in first place! We were very happy that year.

The next year we decided to do the Lower Coast because one of our team members lived down there. It was my first trip to the Valley, and I got many life birds. We headed out around 4:00 a.m. and began our route. Despite one wrong turn that nearly sent us into Mexico, the day was spectacular. We even had a big fallout on South Padre Island! We ended with 148 birds, only to find that the ABA TropicBirds (a



Jesse (in the white shirt) and the Travis Audubon Towhees won first place in the 2005 Gliders tournament.

Photo by Mike Gray.

team new to the GTBC, sponsored by the American Birding Association and Leica Optics) had gotten over 200 birds. Now we REALLY had something to work for.

The next year we headed back up to the Upper Coast. We worked out our route a month in advance, and I went down and scouted it for one week prior to the Classic. We started in the Big Thicket area to find owls at 3:00 a.m. and moved back down to the coast, stopping at the hotspots all along the way. Again we came in second (with 160 birds), and again the TropicBirds came in first.

This time we decided we would do it right. We began planning our route a year in advance. This year, I went down with two other team members to scout for the week before. We started scouting up in Jasper, headed down to Anahuac, then High Island, Bolivar, and Sabine Woods. The day of the Classic we got up before midnight to head out to our first spot. We managed to get a Barred Owl right before the thunderstorm hit. It rained until 3:30 a.m., when we headed out again. We were at Boykin Springs at dawn to hear Red-cockaded Woodpeckers and Bachman's Sparrows start singing. After this we hit a few more spots, and headed on to Anahuac. A dragline we made earlier that week let us add a Yellow Rail to our list, and we then headed to Bolivar. After a Pomarine Jaeger that needed documenta-

tion held us up, we zoomed back to High Island. It was getting late, so we decided to skip Sabine Woods (it would have been dark when we got there). We got a tip that White Pelicans and Black Skimmers were at Smith Point, so we nabbed a Blue-Winged Warbler on the way out and headed off. With the GPS showing 43 minutes until arrival, and 42 minutes of daylight left, we sped down the empty roads. We arrived with five minutes of light to spare, nabbed the birds, then headed back to Anahuac. We found no Screech-Owls at Anahuac like we hoped, but did get a King Rail and Great Horned Owl calling. We ended this spectacular (and tiring) day of birding with 191 species of birds. The TropicBirds got ... 195. Again, we go home with second place.

I have one more year to compete in the Youth Division. We have a good route. With some tweaking, scouting, and prayer for no midnight thunderstorms, we may finally break 200 birds next year and reclaim first prize!

So, what keeps me coming back? Maybe the lifers I get on each Classic, or maybe the desire to win first place, or perhaps it is my nature lover's side that just can't bear to see all those mosquitoes go hungry. Truthfully I do not know why I like it, I just do. Maybe you should come compete and find out!



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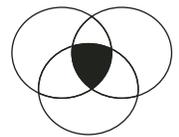
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