



Great Texas Birding Classic

April 24 ~ May 2, 2010

WINNERS REPORT



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 P. O'Neill is featured on the cover and depicts the orioles of South Texas.

THANK YOU!

The Birding Classic staff would like to extend a warm thank you to all participants, our host community the Harlingen Convention & Visitor Bureau, our sponsors, and special guest and master of ceremonies Father Tom Pincelli for making the 14th Annual Great Texas Birding Classic such a great success! Thank you for your support in our effort 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 68 additional sponsors, including corporations, small businesses, artists, foundations and individuals.
- ☞ 218 people participated in the competition.
- ☞ A total of 37 teams with birders from nine states (TX, PA, OK, CO, CA, MI, VT, WI, NJ) competed in all categories.
- ☞ We had 15 youth teams participate and 12 Big Sit! teams.
- ☞ The combined species total seen or heard by all teams during the Birding Classic this year was 344! To see which birds were seen by the winning teams, go to www.gcbo.org
- ☞ Over the past 14 years, winning teams have donated \$736,500 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.



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



TAMUG WildBirders.

Photo by Andrew McInnes 2AM Photography.

Thanks to the Harlingen Convention and Visitors Bureau for hosting our Awards Brunch on Sunday, May 2. A Catered Affair on Jackson and our special guest and master of ceremonies, Father Tom Pincelli, were also instrumental in making the concluding event a wonderful celebration.

2010 GTBC CONSERVATION GRANT GRAND PRIZE WINNERS

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

Environmental Partners

RRI Energy

Bill Baker
Tom Roberts
Andy Dietrich

\$20,000 Conservation Grant (listed on page 3).
The winning team received the first place prize of framed 14th Annual special art for the 2010 Classic, tripods donated by Swarovski Optik NA, and *Gulls of the Americas* donated by Houghton Mifflin.

Number of species: 308



Photo by Mike Gray.

SECOND PLACE

ConocoPhillips Cranes

ConocoPhillips

Tony Frank, Dan Jones, David Sarkozi

Individual prizes for second place were one year subscriptions to Birds of North America online donated by The Cornell Lab of Ornithology, one copy each of BirdJam Maker, Stokes Field Guide to Bird Songs Western Region CDs and Stokes Field Guide to Bird Songs CDs all donated by BirdJam, and runner-up certificates with special art for the 2010 Classic.

Number of species: 294



Photo by Mike Gray.

CONSERVATION GRANT GRAND PRIZE MONEY FOR THE BIRDING CLASSIC 2010

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 place in the Weeklong Tournament won the privilege of awarding \$20,000 to the habitat conservation project of their choice. The following project was the recipient of the Weeklong Conservation Grant Grand Prize.

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

Columbia Bottomlands acquisition

The Columbia Bottomlands are a beautiful network of wetlands, prairies and bottomland hardwood forests running inland along the floodplains of the Brazos, San Bernard and Colorado rivers. The estimated remaining acreage of bottomland hardwood forest is 177,000, down from an original estimated 700,000 acres. These bottomland forests harbor huge live oaks and other trees, underneath which grows a rich understory of shrubs, vines and herbaceous plants. These dense forests provide temporary or permanent residence for over 237 species of birds, including neotropical migratory songbirds.

ENERGY SAVER – COAST WIDE

This was the third year for the tournament with a little greener twist. The basic rules were that a team had to travel a minimum of 50 miles in a motorized vehicle 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 \$7,500 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. And this year two of the teams extended their routes by doing a significant piece of their birding by bicycle. Be sure to read the article by Ron Weeks and team as they share the adventures of the Eagle Eyes. Did someone say Red-tailed Hawk?



Weslaco Slice of Good Lifers.

1. Weslaco Slice of Good Lifers (lower coast)

Weslaco Chamber of Commerce

Martin Hagne, Dan Jones, John Yochum

Number of species per mile: 3.52 (176 species)

Individual prizes were framed special art certificates for the 2010 Classic, Owl Shacks donated by Owl Shack and Birders Journal Kits donated by D.J. Darling Co. Rite-in-the-Rain.

\$7,500 Energy Saver Conservation Grant – Valley Land Fund Salineno Enhancement Project, submitted by Valley Land Fund

Restoration project – The project will focus on removal of invasive plants, prepare ground, purchase and plant native plants, and improve the irrigation system for the newly planted shrubs and trees.

2. Whooping Craniacs (upper coast)

Greg & Lalise Mason and GDF Suez NA

Greg Mason, Lalise Mason, Jamie Schubert, Woody Woodrow

Number of species per mile: 3.4 (170 species)

Individual prizes were books *Peterson Field Guide to the Birds of Eastern & Central North America* donated by Houghton Mifflin and runner-up certificates with special art for the 2010 Classic.

3. Eagle Eyes (Gliders) (upper coast)

Independent

John Hale, Jason Oehring, Stephen Spears, Ron Weeks

Number of species per mile: 3.32

166 species – Only 10 species behind the winning team!

Chaperones: Linda Hale, Sandy Spears, Vickie Oehring



Whooping Craniacs. Photo by Mike Gray.

The Eagle Eyes Tournament Day

Ron Weeks

John Hale (14, from College Station), Jason Oehring (14, from Cypress) and Stephen Spears (13, from Houston) and I started our day shortly after 4 a.m. We emerged from the hotel rooms and assembled our gear including our mountain bikes. The bikes were the key to our route enabling us to reach beyond the minimum 50 miles that must be reported by every “Energy Saver” Big Day team. The other big part of our team were “the moms” who acted as our support crew. Linda Hale, Vickie Oehring and Sandy Spears kept us safe from traffic, helped haul the bikes and offered moral support throughout the day.

The dawn chorus at Double Bayou Park started slowly with the overcast skies. We added many needed species that are not present along the immediate coast: Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, American Crow, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker and more. We also added a few bonus birds. The best of which was three-note call that John pointed out. Black-billed Cuckoo! Our Red-headed Woodpecker location nearby yielded a half dozen of this beautiful woodpecker but no Yellow-throated Warbler that had also been singing there for the past week.

We headed off as a line of bikes into the coastal prairie. Not being in a car has its advantages as one can hear all along the way. We clicked off several species singing along the road ... Sedge Wren, Eastern Kingbird, Dickcissel and Painted Bunting. Then some magic ... Upland Sandpiper called. As we stopped and watched them, Whimbrels called and began to fly in. A short while later Northern Bobwhite called – a bird we had not planned on getting as this area had been burned badly with salt water surge during Hurricane Ike. We pulled into Anahuac NWR a little tired but in good spirits.

We quickly headed to the Willows. Luck was with us. The male Western Tanager and White-crowned Sparrows that had been there the day before were still present. A nearby Lincoln's Sparrow was in full song, but no Swamp Sparrows as had been there the weekend before. Near Shoveler Pond, we were greeted by White-rumped, Stilt and Semipalmated Sandpipers. We also added several Least Bitterns, King Rail, many Fulvous Whistling-Ducks, a single Purple Gallinule and many Marsh Wrens. On the back side we added Seaside Sparrows and our only Tree Swallow of the day. A last check of a wetland near the visitor center allowed us to add Sora and Northern Waterthrush and as we left Stephen spotted a Western Kingbird! Back on the road again with the bikes.

I realized we were short on raptors as might be expected with the strong south winds which steer overland migrants north and not around the bend of the Texas coast. I called forward in the line to keep an eye out for Red-tailed Hawk. The leader heard Red-tailed Hawk and thinking I had one, hit the brakes. In seconds, everyone but Jason who quickly veered out of the line was in a tumbling heap on the asphalt. Fortunately, we

slowed before colliding and we were able to continue on albeit a bit bruised and scraped up. We gathered ourselves and trucked on eastward a few more miles before I realized that the boys were starting to labor under the pace. It was time to rack up the bikes and start our driving portion of the day. We already had 117 species but many to go ... we hoped.

We motored into High Island with four hours of time to drink in migrants. I was hopeful as I had tallied 20 species of warblers the previous day with similar strong winds. However, this day would be different. As Tropical Birding's Sam Woods posted, “Putting it bluntly, this was a quiet day for High Island.” We added only seven species of warblers to our total despite hours of dredging the woods. As we left High Island, we had a pulse of luck when we found a Bronzed Cowbird with our staked Yellow-headed Blackbird.

The Bolivar Peninsula still looks like a war zone with virtually no trees and only a few homes rebuilt. But it does remain home to many waterbirds. Even though we could not access the beaches due to the strong winds pushing the tide over them, we were able to bird Rollover Pass. There we finished off of our eight species of terns and four species of expected gulls (pink Franklin's being the flashiest). Avocets, Marbled Godwits and even an American Osytercatcher allowed us to rely less on the sure to be flooded out Bolivar Flats.

Bolivar was indeed flooded badly with the wind-driven tides and we spent more of our time on Retillon Road itself. Nothing on the first pass but later we were able to add the hoped-for White-tailed Kite and Long-billed Curlew. At this point, we encountered a problem – our 50 miles were about up. So back on the bikes for the drive to ferry landing for our last gasp Rock Pigeons. Rarely does one celebrate pigeons, but we did! Next up was Frenchtown Road where I had seen Virginia Rail, Hudsonian Godwit and Nelson's Sparrow the day before. As luck would have it the godwit was still there. And with some work we had two Nelson's Sparrows. We biked back into Port Bolivar and added our last and 167th bird of the day, White-winged Dove.

We were tired and sore, but satisfied with our adventurous day. We'll be back next year!

ADULTS – Lower Coast Only



Redcrowns. Photo by Carol Jones.

1. Redcrowns

Harlingen Convention & Visitors Bureau

Martin Hagne, Huck Hutchens, Kyle O'Haver,
John Yochum

Number of species: 201

Prizes: First place prize of framed 14th Annual special art for the 2010 Classic, tours on the Skimmer to view Whooping Cranes and other birds of the central coast donated by Rockport Adventures, Spot-n-Jot note cards donated by Spot-n-Jot and TPWD Wildlife Viewing Trail caps donated by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. The team will also get to pick the Lower Coast project for a \$7,500 conservation grant.

2. Border Birders

*The Dow Chemical Company and
Houston Audubon Society*

Susan Heath, Javier de Leon, Tad Finnell, Jesse Huth
Number of species: 175

Prizes: Birders Journal Kits donated by D.J. Darling Co. Rite-in-the-Rain, Golden-cheeked Warbler book donated by TPWD and runner-up certificates with special art for the 2010 Classic.



Border Birders. Photo by Mike Gray.

ADULTS – Central Coast Only

1. Swarovski Roadside Hawks

Swarovski Optik N.A., Ltd

Joel Simon, Clay Taylor, Jim Sinclair and Jon McIntyre

Number of species: 187

Prizes: First place prize of framed 14th Annual special art for the 2010 Classic, trip certificates for three-hour tours of South Bay donated by SPI Dolphin Research & Sealife Center and *Peterson Field Guide to the Birds of Eastern & Central North America* donated by Houghton Mifflin. The team will also get to pick the Central Coast project for a \$7,500 conservation grant.

2. Apomado Falcons

Independent

Ray Allen, Vicki Allen, Bob Ayres, Robert Potts, Jay Pruett

Number of species: 150

Prizes: *Peterson Field Guide to the Birds of Eastern & Central North America* donated by Houghton Mifflin, and Wildlife Viewing Trail T-shirts donated by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

ADULTS – Upper Coast Only

1. TAMUG WildBirders

WildBird and KOWA

Susan Knock, Nikki Darwin, Laurissa Noack, Jason Perry, Katie St. Clair, Andrew McInnes (mentor)

Number of species: 196

Prizes: First place prize of framed 14th Annual special art for the 2010 Classic, *Peterson Field Guide to the Birds of Eastern & Central North America* donated by Houghton Mifflin, Opposable Chums DVDs donated by Jason Kessler and hats and T-shirts for Wildlife Viewing Trail donated by TPWD. The team will also get to pick the Upper Coast project for a \$7,500 conservation grant.



TAMUG WildBirders.

Photo by Andrew McInnes 2AM Photography.

2. The Grey Feathers

Independent

Patricia Bowen, Carol Scherer, Shirley Smith

Number of species: 170

Prizes: Birders Journal Kits donated by D.J. Darling Co. Rite-in-the-Rain, runner-up certificates with special art for the 2010 Classic, and Wildlife Viewing Trail T-shirts donated by TPWD. The Grey Feathers were also the first team to register and pay their fees so they were the recipients of the Birding Classic Calendar featuring art from all previous Birding Classics. These exclusive calendars were created specifically for the winning team that got their entry in first!

SECTIONAL CONSERVATION GRANTS

Sectional Conservation Grants of \$7,500 each were awarded by the winning sponsored team of each section of the coast to the habitat conservation project of their choice.

The following projects were recipients of the Sectional Conservation Prizes.

LOWER TEXAS COAST \$5,000 – Donated by the Redcrowns

Colonial Waterbird Sanctuaries in the Lower Laguna Madre – Submitted by Audubon Texas

The primary activity of this project will be predator control with a secondary need for vegetation work and beach clean-up. (This project was submitted at the \$5,000 level.)

CENTRAL TEXAS COAST \$7,500 – Donated by the Swarovski Roadside Hawks

Hans & Pat Suter Wildlife Refuge Restoration/Enhancement – Submitted by Corpus Christi Convention & Visitors Bureau

This project will include repairs to the existing boardwalk and benches, install a photography blind, and remove invasive guinea grass and Brazilian Pepper Tree in the sanctuary.

UPPER TEXAS COAST \$7,500 – Donated by the TAMUG WildBirders

Osceola Plantation Acquisition – Submitted by The Conservation Fund

Contribute to the acquisition of a 1,500-acre addition to the San Bernard NWR. It is one of the highest priority properties for protection in the Columbia Bottomlands.

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. TOS/TAS Towhees (central coast)

Texas Ornithological Society, Travis Audubon Society

Additionally supported by Amy Die, Betty Walters, Debra Engler, Eileen Young, Field Guides Incorporated, Jackson Walker, San Antonio Audubon Society, Theresa Banks, Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc., TOS - Outside Donations
Christian Walker, Caleb Dye, Irene Smith, Austin Walker

Chaperone: Mr. Walker

Number of species: 213

Prizes: First-place prize of framed 14th Annual special art for the 2010 Classic, one year subscriptions to Birds of North America online donated by The Cornell Lab of Ornithology, iPod speakers donated by Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, and caps donated by TPWD.



TOS/TAS Towhees.

2. Tropicbirds (upper coast)

Independent

ABA Young Birders Team (www.aba.org/yb/tropicbirds/)

Harold Eyster, Chelsea, MI; Neil Gilbert Orange, CA; Spencer Hardy, Norwich, VT;
Andy Johnson, Ann Arbor, MI; Marcel Such, Lyons, CO

Chaperones: Chip Clouse, Charley Hesse

Number of species: 206

Prizes: Birds of My State software donated by Thayer Birding Software, *Peterson Field Guide to the Birds of Eastern & Central North America* donated by Houghton Mifflin, Wildlife Viewing Trail caps donated by TPWD, and second-place certificates with the 14th Annual special art for the 2010 Classic.



Harlingen Harris's Hawks.

3. Harlingen Harris's Hawks (lower coast)

L&G Engineering, L&G Engineering Lab and San Jacinto Enterprises
Hannah Smalley, Zachary Britten, Carolina Garza, Erika Gutierrez,
Christine Medrano

Chaperone/Mentor: Mark Conway

Number of species: 100

Prizes: Certificates with the 14th Annual special art for the 2010 Classic and *Peterson Field Guide to the Birds of Eastern & Central North America* donated by Houghton Mifflin.

4. Kingfishers (lower coast)

Independent

Rebecca Sova, Catheryn Brough, Loryn Brough,
Teresa Sova, David Tovar

Chaperone/Mentor: Gabriel DeJong, Beverly Brough

Number of species: 84

5. John Jay Blue Jays (central coast)

Independent

Alyssa Bennett, Christine Chen, Robert Siguaw

Chaperone/Mentor: Mike Scully

Number of species: checklist was not available for judge review



Kingfishers.

TEARING IT UP IN TEXAS

by Neil Gilbert from the Tropicbirds team

Well, it's over. Yesterday afternoon I got back from birding the Upper Texas Coast for the Great Texas Birding Classic on the ABA Tropicbirds team. I'll try to write up a few more detailed posts, but for now I'll post some statistics of the trip.

- 207-species of birds on the Big Day (final count – 206 after judging)
- 2-boxes of Poptarts consumed
- 12-hours of sleep (spread out over three nights)
- 1-adult male Painted Bunting found stunned under a gas station window
- 26-species of warblers
- 1-armadillo
- 8-life birds
- 1-Yellow Rail
- 1-Jalapeno/cheese/bacon burger from Whataburger
- 6-bags of jerky consumed
- 1-Fork-tailed Flycatcher missed by a matter of hours
- 1-expedition through poison oak, chiggers, and underbrush to see Bachman's Sparrow
- 3-Purple Gallinules
- 1-tree backed into

It's pretty easy to tell that I had a lot of fun. Not only was the birding spectacular, but the company of four other enthusiastic young birders (Andy Johnson, Harold Eyster, Marcel Such, and Spencer Hardy) and two excellent leaders (Chip Clouse and Charles Hesse) was unparalleled.

For more from Neil about his team's Big Day, check out the entertaining extended story on pages 18-19.



TOS/TAS Towhees.



Kingfishers. Photo by Carol Jones.

ROUGHWINGS (13-year-olds and under)

1. Rockport Roadrunners (central coast)

Rockport-Fulton Area Chamber of Commerce

Savannah Rozacky, Emily Duprie, Olivia Smith

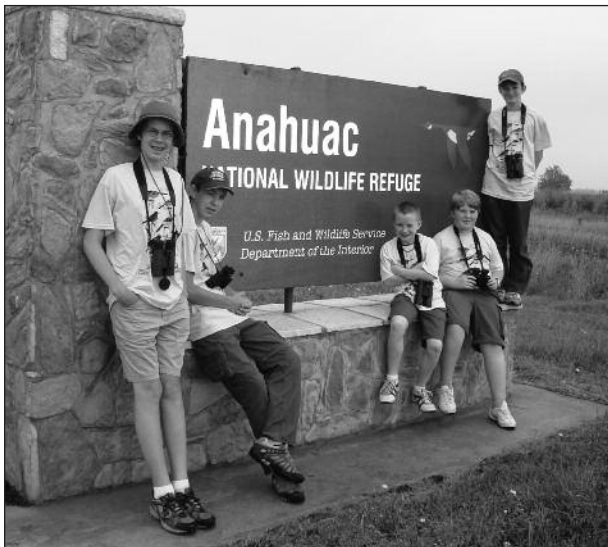
Chaperone: Dale Pogue, Valerie Smith, Gayle Rozacky

Number of species: 124

Prizes: Eagle Optics Raven binoculars donated by Eagle Optics, *Hummingbirds of Texas* signed by the author and donated by Cliff Shackelford, Texas Birds Publications Collection donated by TOS, Wildlife Trail T-shirts donated by TPWD, and the first-place prize of framed 14th Annual special art for the 2010 Classic.



Rockport Roadrunners. Photo by Mike Gray.



2. Emerging Eagle Scouts II (upper coast)

Independent

Jerry Kohler, Luke McFall, Ryan Butler, DJ Wiren, Jordan Mintz

Chaperones: Kathie Holder and Jennifer McFall

Number of species: 104

Prizes: Young Birders Guides donated by Houghton Mifflin, Texas Birds Publications Collection donated by TOS, *Texas Bats* donated by TPWD, and the second-place prize of 14th Annual special art for the 2010 Classic.

Emerging Eagle Scouts II. Photo by Kathie Holder.

Saving a Fluff Ball

The Emerging Eagle Scouts II

We stopped to take a photo of the boys at the property sign into Anahuac. As we approached the sign, a baby Killdeer entered the road from the other side just as a truck was turning into Anahuac. We motioned the truck to stop. The baby Killdeer ran to the edge of the road but was now over the culvert running under the road. He ran along the edge of the road over the culvert and jumped. The boys were worried he was in the water and ran to see where he was. The baby was hiding in the dewberry tangle on the steep embankment beside the water filled bar-ditch. One of the boys saw this little fluff rear-end sticking out barely in the dewberries. How he saw the baby I do not know. We did not think he would have made it out of the dewberry tangle, and if he did, he would surely tumble down the steep embankment into the water. We decided we needed to retrieve him from his predicament. I jumped down and picked him up. He immediately started to cry out and the 'parent' started to do the broken wing display. I sat him down a good ways away from the road. He took off running as fast as his little legs would carry him, calling in alarm the entire way. We were relieved that he was now safe and watched as it seemed he could not stop from the total sheer fear of what just happened to him. He ran right past the adult as if they were not there, calling in alarm the entire way. It seemed that he would not stop until his little legs would move no more. Being as he was now safe, it was OK for us all to get a chuckle out of this. The adult had to run to catch up to him to let him know he was now safe. We took our photo, returned to the van, and headed into Anahuac.



Findley's Falcons. Photo by Julie Findley.

3. Findley's Falcons (central coast)

Independent

Charlotte Ramsden, Hank Brennan, Grace Flood, Kyle Jones
Chaperone: Julie Findley

Number of species: 98

Prizes: Young Birders Guides donated by Houghton Mifflin, Texas Birds Publications Collection donated by TOS, *Endangered and Threatened Animals of Texas* donated by TPWD, and the third-place prize of 14th Annual special art for the 2010 Classic.

4. TOS Roughwings No Name Team (upper coast)

Texas Ornithological Society

Travis Younts, Owen Bradford, Cooper Raterink

Chaperones: Fred Collins, Mr. Younts

Number of Species: 97

5. The Curlew Cousins (upper coast)

McRee Ford

Victoria Baker, Ryan Baker, Lauren Copeland

Chaperone: Bill Baker

Number of species: 96

Curlew Cousins. Photo by Lauri Baker.



ConocoPhillips Kestrels. Photo by Carol Jones.

6. Flaming Flycatchers (central coast)

Independent

Eric Anderson, Hunter Frost, Toby Suphahai,
Traver Traux, J.R. Walling

Chaperone: Lori Anderson; Mentor: Reta Pearson

Number of species: 93

7. ConocoPhillips Kestrels (upper coast)

ConocoPhillips

Matthew Simpson, Garrett Simpson,
Drew Trevino, Dylan Trevino

Chaperones: Cecilia Riley, Cindy Jordy

Number of species: 86

8. Weslaco TOS Fledglings (lower coast)

Texas Ornithological Society

Gabriel Silva, Ali Ayala, Pablo Ayala,
Celeste Garcia, Ben Ortiz

Chaperone: Susan Hoehne, Kyle O'Haver

Number of species: 75

9. Montclair Martins (central coast)

Independent

Samuel Mack, Maisie Boehmer, Gregory Giageos,
Benny Katz, Ysabella Martinez

Chaperone: Shelly Veit

Number of species: 50

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. 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 Least Flycatcher). This team then picks which habitat project will receive \$3,000. Individual prizes are also given in this tournament category.

This year half of the teams recorded over 100 species. That's a Century Day sitting in one place! And the locations were evenly distributed along the whole coast. I found that to be quite remarkable. We had the highest number of species ever recorded by a Classic Big Sit! team this year which was very close to the any location, all time high record for a North American Big Sit.

1. Groovy-billed Anis

Eagle Optics & South Padre Island Convention Center

Marci Fuller, Terry Fuller, Michael O'Brien, Ben Lizdas

Location: South Padre Island Convention Center

Number of species: 143

Prizes: *Peterson Field Guide to the Birds of Eastern & Central North America* donated by Houghton Mifflin, Bass Pro Shop \$10 gift cards donated by Bass Pro Shops, and certificates with 14th Annual special art for the 2010 Classic.

Groovy-billed Anis.



Port Aransas Spoonbills.

Photo by Mike Gray.

2. Port Aransas Spoonbills

Port Aransas Chamber of Commerce/Visitors Bureau

Scott Holt, Mikael Behrens, Becky Corder, Suzette Freeman, Joan Holt, Charles Lohrmann, Glenn Martin, Georgia Neblett, Bobby Sherwood

Location: Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center Observation Tower

Number of species: 125

Prizes: Best "1" Hummingbird feeder kits and second-place certificates with 14th Annual special art for the 2010 Classic.

3. McRee Ford Thunderbirds

McRee Ford

Dennis Myers, Bill Baker, Lauri Baker, Andy Dietrich, Camy Myers, Breck Sacra, Tom Roberts, Carolanne Smith

Location: Cedar Bayou Cooling Pond

Number of species: 112

Prizes: Spot-n-Jot birders field note cards donated by Spot-n-Jot and third-place certificates with 14th Annual special art for the 2010 Classic.



McRee Ford Thunderbirds.

4. Knightbirds

Corpus Christi Convention & Visitors Bureau
Jo Creglow, Robert Creglow, Mel Cooksey, Margie DeClemente, Carmen Hagopian, Phyllis Hibdon, Art Olsen, Barbara Olsen, Leah Pummill
Location: Packery Channel
Number of species: 111

5. Bitterns

Brazosport Convention & Visitors Council
Cecilia Riley, John Arvin, Reba Craft, Tad Finnell, Mike Gray, Susan Heath, Kay Lookingbill, Robert Lookingbill, Aaron Sanchez, Jennifer Sanchez
Location: San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge
Number of species: 109



Bitterns. Photo by Carol Jones.



Southmost Sitters.

6. Southmost Sitters

McAllen Chamber of Commerce
John Yochum, David Benn, Martin Hagne, Danny Hoehne, Susan Hoehne, Huck Hutchens, Katherine Miller, Max Pons, Joe Uribe
Location: The Nature Conservancy's Southmost Ranch
Number of species: 103

7. Swarovski Optic Sitting Hawks

Swarovski Optik N.A., Ltd.
Joel Simon, Mike Clifford, Libby Even, Dane Ferrell, Miles Merwin, Vicki Simon, Clay Taylor
Location: Hazel Bazemore County Park
Number of species: 98

8. Brazosport Birders

Freeport LNG
Tom Taroni, Charlie Brower, Olivia Brower, Gary Brooks, Bea Harrison, Jim Harrison, Zane Lee, Tom Morris, David Plunkett, Jennifer Wilson
Location: Quintana Sanctuary
Number of species: 91

9. Vopak Vultures

Vopak North America
Don Verser, Mary Ann Beauchemin, Betsy Black, Marcy Brown, Gary Gray, Flo Hannah, Pam Smolen
Location: Smith Oaks, High Island
Number of species: 90



Brazosport Birders. Photo by Bea Harrison.

10. Stewart Title Peepers

Stewart Title Company – Port Aransas
Nancy Teller, Diane Albright, Duffy Albright, Tommie Burke,
Julie Finley, Carolyn Grosse, Sarah Jane Wise
Location: Paradise Pond – Port Aransas
Number of species: 85
WINNER: LONE STAR BIRD AWARD

11. Coastal Bend Audubon Society

Corpus Christi Convention & Visitors Bureau
Scott Large, Jon Anderson, Rachel Brewton,
Sally Brinkley, Judd Curtis, Keith Johnson, David Newstead,
Matt McCauley, Rosalie Rossi, Emily Williamson
Location: Corpus Christi Botanical Gardens
Number of species: 82

12. Sitting Pretty

Independent
Matt Dozier, Chris Steinke
Location: The Woodlands
Number of species: 12

**LONE STAR
BIRD AWARD**

**\$3,000 –
Stewart Title Peepers**

**Brazilian Pepper Tree
Removal and Control
City of Port Aransas Nature Preserve**

The Nature Preserve includes a number of stands of Brazilian Pepper Tree and this project will focus on their removal and replacement with native plants tolerant of the harsh conditions.

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.

15th Annual Great Texas Birding Classic:

Saturday, April 9 – Sunday, April 17, 2011

**For information on the Great Texas Birding Classic,
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

Welcome to...

Harlingen

T E X A S

Dutch Name,

Texas Wild.

Visit rgvbirdfest.com
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April 9–17, 2011

THE BIG DAY

by Neil Gilbert from the Tropicbirds team (also found at <http://ocbirding.blogspot.com/>)

0300 hours

We've been awake for an hour, but our bird list stands at only one: a Northern Mockingbird singing across the street from the Tropical Birding house where we were staying at High Island. A fierce wind rips through the treetops at Smith Oaks, where we are listening for owls.

I can't blame the owls for remaining silent on such a windy night.

We trudge back to the car, our minds still dull with sleep. Somehow, every speck of dust and crumbled leaf manages to blow into my eyes and get wedged between my contacts and eyeballs.

0600 hours

All is silent save for the whispering breeze in the pines and a few distant Chuck-will's-widows chanting the night away. We had already heard Chucks; Eastern Screech-Owl is our real quarry here in the Piney Woods well over a hundred miles northeast of High Island. Raising my chin, I whistle through a large glob of saliva on the back of my tongue, making a trembling whistle that sounds vaguely like a screech-owl.

Nothing.

I continue whistling for a minute, and then—"There!" Spencer, one of my teammates, whispers and gestures off to the woods to our left. No one else heard it, but fortunately it continues calling so the rest of us can hear its muffled whistle. Another joins it, and then another.

0900 hours

I lean over the backseat of our fifteen-passenger van (dubbed the "Smelly Sanderling") and rummage through the large cardboard box of food in the trunk. "Don't run into anything!" I shout over my shoulder to Chip, who is behind the wheel. Apples—no, dried apricots—no, JERKY—yes!

"Gotcha!" I hiss as I snag three bags from the jumbled box. "Wild Chicken Barbecue, A1 Beef Strips, or Tender Beef Nuggets," I announce.

"Let's try the A1," Spencer decides.

After a brief tussle, I manage to rip open the bag. The sharp scent of A1 sauce invades the interior of the van, adding to the mixed aromas of dirty socks, mud, and dried mango slices. Stuffing a couple slabs into my mouth, I pass the bag to the waiting hands a couple rows up in the van. The jerky tastes like leather soaked in A1 sauce—which is basically what it is.

Suddenly, someone shouts "HAWK!" through a mouthful of the jerky. Chip reacts instantly, whipping the van to the shoulder with alarming speed. Doors fly open, feet crunch on the gravel, binoculars rake the sky. There it is—a small, slim bueto with pale crescents at the end of its wings. "Red-shouldered," I shout, directing my teammates to the bird. "Got it?"

"Yup," "Yep," "Yup," "Uh-huh!"

"Let's go. GET IN THE CAR!" I yell, following my teammates as they plunge back into the depths of the Smelly Sanderling. We were stopped for less than twenty seconds.

"We're out of jerky," Marcel announces as we speed away from the scene.

1200 hours

Large portions of many big days are spent driving. It's only noon, but we have already been awake for ten hours, and the two and a half hour drive from the Piney Woods to Winnie is taking its toll. I glance over and notice my teammate Harold is sleeping, his head slumped against the window as he gently snores.

Sleeping is a cardinal sin on big days.

I jab him mercilessly until he wakes up.

1500 hours

Afternoons are generally less productive than mornings for birds, yet we are still racking up the birds. We did not pass the one hundred mark until past noon, but in slightly less than three hours of afternoon birding we have found over sixty new species!

Bolivar.

Most of the morning was spent either tracking down breeding passerines in the Piney Woods or sitting in the car scanning for raptors and trying not to fall asleep. Dozens of new species awaited us on the Bolivar Peninsula. The first few minutes at Rollover Pass were exciting, indeed—terns! plovers! gulls! herons!

Now, however, we are cleaning up. Standing on the edge of Frenchtown Road, we scan the shorebird-laden ponds for uncommon species. “TEXAS TRUCK!” someone yells. We hurriedly shuffle farther off the road as the oversized pickup roars by. Returning my eye to the scope, I pick through the ranks of dowitchers and Dunlin, hoping for a...

“Hey, can I borrow the scope for a sec? I think I see a Baird’s,” I quickly surrender the scope to Andy, who zeroes in on a sandpiper the rest of us had passed over. “Yup—Baird’s!” We cluster around the scope, each peeking through for a second before moving aside so the next teammate can see it.

“Baird’s—good!” our British mentor Charley Hesse exclaims. “We need to be getting to High Island...”

1800 hours

High Island. If you are a birder, you’ve probably heard of it. It’s famous.

We are finding out exactly why as we frantically chase new birds as the daylight fades. At times, we barely move at all, too busy picking through the dozens of warblers filtering through the trees to keep walking down the trail. Other times, we sprint down the trail in a ragged pack after that alleged Canada Warbler, or Bay-breasted Warbler, or...

A brilliant male Scarlet Tanager flashes through the mulberry tree just overhead, yet I ignore it. We’ve already seen dozens. Big Days are no time to appreciate birds; the last hour of daylight is particularly hectic. A clump of leaves quivers in a nearby oak—I nail it with my binoculars and am quickly greeted by the flaming orange throat of a male Blackburnian Warbler. I ignore it, too. On any other day, I could spend an hour watching a single Blackburnian Warbler. But today is a Big Day.

Tennessee Warbler...Black-and-white Warbler...Golden-winged Warbler...Baltimore Oriole...Red-eyed Vireo...Magnolia Warbler...Swainson’s Thrush...Blue-headed Vireo...with every new migrant, our list creeps closer to two hundred.

I whip my binoculars to my eyes for perhaps the five hundredth time in the last half-hour. A new face pops out from behind a leaf. “CHESTNUT-SIDED!” I yell. My teammates hustle into position and quickly find the bird. Yet another species added to the list of birds we can ignore for the next six hours.

2100 hours

“Who-who who who, who-who who-WHOOO?” My Barred Owl imitation is so pathetic that we can’t help but laugh. In reality, it’s not that funny—but when you’ve been awake for nineteen hours, almost anything seems funny. Even tripping over a pebble...

I try to whoop again. And once again, it sounds like a gagged tomcat.

My crude imitation is enough to fool (or seriously tick off) the local Barred Owl. Only a couple of us are looking up when it flashes over—a big, blocky bird, the white spots in its wings glowing in the moonlight. It apparently isn’t very impressed, since it remains silent and never reappears.

But it was enough. Two people are enough for it to count.

0000 hours

It’s over. Actually, it ended fifteen minutes ago when we filed up the steps into the Tropical Birding house (our base of operations) at High Island. I lie on the thin, lumpy mattress, joking with my teammates and not even trying to sleep. I’ve been birding nonstop for twenty-two hours, but I do not feel tired. Yet.

I blame those two bowls of ice cream.

It’s over.

What a week!



Border Birders.



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