

TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE

BIRDS

OF

SHELDON LAKE
STATE PARK AND
ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING CENTER



A FIELD CHECKLIST

2017

Cover: Illustration of Great Blue Heron by Rob Fleming.

INTRODUCTION

Sheldon Lake State Park & Environmental Learning Center (SLSP) is about 20 miles northeast of downtown Houston, one of the country's largest metropolitan areas. During a workweek, trucks and trains sail past SLSP going to or from industry nearby the park. Daily commuter traffic flows past the 2,800 acres of habitat placed just off the road. Corporate jets and airplanes fly overhead arriving and departing from Bush Intercontinental Airport with travelers from all around the world. Needless to say, this piece of habitat is a natural island in a sea of city and industry.

The history of SLSP dates back to the early 1940s. A Works Progress Administration project created Sheldon Reservoir in 1943 as a water supply for industries along the Houston Ship Channel in support of the war. At the conclusion of WWII, the reservoir was transferred to the City of Houston and used as a surface water supply. With the completion of Lake Houston in the early fifties, the city sold the reservoir and adjacent land to the Texas Fish, Game and Oyster Commission, which later became Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). The area was managed by the TPWD Wildlife Division as Sheldon Wildlife Management Area (WMA). A few years later, the Sheldon State Fish Hatchery was added in the southeast corner. By the late 1960s, with the encroachment of the City of Houston, Sheldon WMA was designated surplus and daily management operations were shut down. In 1984, management of the property was transferred to the State Parks Division of TPWD and the area was designated as Sheldon Lake State Park. Today the park is 2,800 acres with approximately 1,200 acres as the reservoir. Over the last 30+ years, many phases of development have been completed, including several new structures and trails throughout the former hatchery site and the restoration of 400 acres of former farmland into historic native tallgrass prairie. In 2011, the John Jacob Observation Tower was opened to the public and in 2014 the entrance to the park was moved to the north side allowing visitors to enjoy a scenic tour of the park.

The SLSP you visit today offers an incredibly diverse ecosystem comprised of a variety of habitat types. Sheldon Lake is a mix of open water with emerging Bald Cypress trees. The lake has also been used as a highly productive waterbird rookery, supporting hundreds of nesting pairs of ibis, herons, egrets, Anhingas, and Roseate Spoonbills since the 1980s. The main water source for the lake is Carpenters Bayou, which includes hundreds of acres of emergent wetlands, Bald

Cypress swamp, and mixed bottomland forest. The park's entrance road meanders through 2 miles of restored tallgrass prairie and wetlands where unique species such as Le Conte's Sparrow, Northern Harrier, American Bittern, and various species of secretive rails can be found. Many of the hiking trails transect what once was an active fish hatchery. The hatchery ponds are no longer used as a working fish hatchery and are managed for wildlife habitat. While walking the trails, Wood Duck, Gray Catbird, Common Gallinule, and a mixture of vibrant warblers are expected during the right time of year.

Like most wildlife, birds select where they spend their time based on certain environmental factors. These factors are what attract or deter a bird to use and stay in an area and include things such as vegetation composition, food sources, human disturbance, and many others. The greater variety of quality habitat a site can offer, the greater diversity of bird species can be expected to frequent a site.

With the abundance of habitat in close proximity to one of the largest metropolitan areas in the country, it is natural to find a diversity of wildlife at SLSP. Each habitat type holds a variety of species that changes throughout the seasons with different plants, insects, and other prey populations blossoming through the year. In the winter it is easy to find Cedar Waxwings gently whistling in the treetops and in the summer you cannot miss seeing a Yellow-crowned Night-Heron.

While birding at the park, please observe basic safety tips and park rules and regulations which are in place for the safety of park visitors and the wildlife. Only park in designated parking areas and not along the roadway to bird. Secure your vehicle and belongings. Keep in mind that alligators and venomous snakes, such as eastern cottonmouths, can be found in the park.

This checklist and information was collected through the efforts of thousands of citizen scientists and birders that submit their bird sightings to eBird. This valuable resource compiles data and allows everyone access to sighting information. This, and other citizen science-based resources, allow you to contribute and take part in helping us understand where birds are and what they are doing to better protect and conserve species and their habitats. Park Rangers, Cullen Ondracek and Hannah Buschert, used this resource while updating this checklist to have the most recent information and sightings. In addition to rangers, SLSP is fortunate to have many wonderful birders, including the Lake Houston Area Nature Club, which regularly lead bird walks and participate in other 'birdy' park events. For current information about birding SLSP, please

call the main office at (281) 456-2800 or check eBird.org. Report sightings of unlisted and rare species to park staff.

Nomenclature and organization for this checklist follow the 7th edition of the American Ornithologists Union *Check-list of North American Birds* as currently supplemented.

Please help us protect the natural avian communities in our parks by not using playback tapes of bird songs. Frequent use of these tapes disrupts essential territorial behavior and may lead to nest failure. Thank you for your cooperation.

LEGEND

Seasonal Occurrence

Sp – Spring (March, April, May)

S – Summer (June, July, August)

F – Fall (September, October, November)

W – Winter (December, January, February)

Abundance

The likeliness of encountering a species in proper habitat

A – Abundant: Always present and usually multiple individuals

C – Common: Encountered most outings

U – Uncommon: Usually present but not encountered most outings, low individual numbers

O – Occasional: Not always present but usually encountered at least once during specified season

R – Rare: Observed once or twice per year, not expected every year

X – Extremely Rare: 1-2 sightings or recurrent individual

CHECKLIST

	Sp	S	F	W
_____ Black-bellied Whistling-Duck	A	A	U	O
_____ Fulvous Whistling-Duck		R	R	
_____ Greater White-fronted Goose			O	O
_____ Snow Goose.....			U	U
_____ Ross's Goose.....			R	O
_____ Cackling Goose.....				R
_____ Canada Goose.....			R	R
_____ Wood Duck	O		C	U
_____ Gadwall	O		U	C
_____ American Wigeon			O	U
_____ American Black Duck.....				X
_____ Mallard.....	O		U	C
_____ Mottled Duck.....		U	O	O
_____ Blue-winged Teal.....	A	O	U	U
_____ Cinnamon Teal.....				R
_____ Northern Shoveler	O		O	C
_____ Northern Pintail.....			O	U
_____ Green-winged Teal.....	O		O	U
_____ Canvasback.....				U
_____ Redhead.....				R
_____ Ring-necked Duck.....	R		U	C
_____ Greater Scaup.....				X
_____ Lesser Scaup.....	R		R	O
_____ Common Goldeneye.....				X
_____ Hooded Merganser.....	R			O
_____ Red-breasted Merganser.....	U			
_____ Ruddy Duck.....				U
_____ Least Grebe.....			X	X
_____ Pied-billed Grebe.....	A	C	A	A
_____ Horned Grebe.....				R

	Sp	S	F	W
_____ Eared Grebe				R
_____ Rock Pigeon	U	O	O	O
_____ Eurasian Collared-Dove	U	C	U	O
_____ Inca Dove		O		R
_____ Common Ground-Dove.....			R	
_____ White-winged Dove.....	O	O	O	R
_____ Mourning Dove.....	A	A	A	C
_____ Groove-billed Ani.....	X			
_____ Yellow-billed Cuckoo.....	C	U		
_____ Common Nighthawk	R			
_____ Chimney Swift	U	C		
_____ Ruby-throated Hummingbird.....	O	C	A	
_____ Rufous Hummingbird			R	
_____ Yellow Rail			X	
_____ King Rail.....	R			R
_____ Clapper Rail.....			R	
_____ Virginia Rail.....				R
_____ Sora.....	O		R	R
_____ Purple Gallinule.....	C	A	O	
_____ Common Gallinule.....	A	A	A	C
_____ American Coot.....	C	O	C	A
_____ Sandhill Crane			R	R
_____ Black-necked Stilt.....	U	C		
_____ American Avocet.....		O	O	
_____ American Golden-Plover	U			
_____ Semipalmated Plover			X	
_____ Killdeer.....	A	C	A	A
_____ Upland Sandpiper	U	U		
_____ Stilt Sandpiper		O	R	
_____ Sanderling.....	R			
_____ Dunlin			X	

	Sp	S	F	W
_____ Baird's Sandpiper	R			
_____ Least Sandpiper	R	R	R	O
_____ White-rumped Sandpiper.....	R			
_____ Buff-breasted Sandpiper	R		R	
_____ Pectoral Sandpiper	U		R	
_____ Semipalmated Sandpiper		R	R	
_____ Western Sandpiper		X		
_____ Long-billed Dowitcher				
_____ Wilson's Snipe			O	R
_____ American Woodcock			O	R
_____ Spotted Sandpiper	O	U	O	R
_____ Solitary Sandpiper	O	C	O	
_____ Greater Yellowlegs.....	C	R	C	U
_____ Willet.....	R			R
_____ Lesser Yellowlegs.....	U	R	O	U
_____ Wilson's Phalarope	R			
_____ Bonaparte's Gull	R			
_____ Laughing Gull	O	A	O	U
_____ Franklin's Gull			R	
_____ Ring-billed Gull	U		O	C
_____ Herring Gull	O		R	U
_____ Lesser Black-backed Gull	R			
_____ Least Tern.....	X			
_____ Caspian Tern.....	R		R	
_____ Black Tern.....		R		
_____ Forster's Tern	R	O		R
_____ Royal Tern	O			
_____ Wood Stork		O	U	
_____ Neotropic Cormorant.....	U	C	A	C
_____ Double-crested Cormorant.....	C	R	A	A
_____ Anhinga	C	A	A	A
_____ American White Pelican.....	R		O	U

	Sp	S	F	W
_____ Brown Pelican	R		R	R
_____ American Bittern	U		U	O
_____ Least Bittern	R	R		
_____ Great Blue Heron.....	A	A	A	C
_____ Great Egret	A	A	A	A
_____ Snowy Egret.....	A	C	A	A
_____ Little Blue Heron	C	A	A	C
_____ Tricolored Heron.....	C	A	C	C
_____ Reddish Egret.....	R		R	
_____ Cattle Egret	A	A	C	O
_____ Green Heron.....	C	A	C	O
_____ Black-crowned Night-Heron	U	C	O	R
_____ Yellow-crowned Night-Heron.....	A	A	U	R
_____ White Ibis	A	A	A	A
_____ Glossy Ibis	R	O		
_____ White-faced Ibis.....	U	C	U	U
_____ Roseate Spoonbill.....	C	A	U	O
_____ Black Vulture.....	C	C	C	C
_____ Turkey Vulture	C	U	A	A
_____ Osprey.....	R	R	O	U
_____ White-tailed Kite			R	R
_____ Swallow-tailed Kite.....	R	R		
_____ Mississippi Kite.....	O		O	
_____ Northern Harrier	O		U	C
_____ Sharp-shinned Hawk	R		O	O
_____ Cooper's Hawk	O	O	C	U
_____ Northern Goshawk.....				X
_____ Bald Eagle	U		C	U
_____ Harris's Hawk.....				R
_____ White-tailed Hawk			R	R
_____ Red-shouldered Hawk	U	O	A	A
_____ Broad-winged Hawk	U		C	

	Sp	S	F	W
_____ Swainson's Hawk.....	O	O	R	
_____ Red-tailed Hawk.....	C	O	C	A
_____ Great Horned Owl.....			R	R
_____ Barred Owl.....			R	R
_____ Belted Kingfisher.....	U	O	A	C
_____ Red-headed Woodpecker.....		O	O	
_____ Red-bellied Woodpecker.....	C	A	A	A
_____ Yellow-bellied Sapsucker.....	O		U	C
_____ Downy Woodpecker.....	U	C	A	A
_____ Hairy Woodpecker.....			R	
_____ Northern Flicker.....	R		U	O
_____ Pileated Woodpecker.....	O	U	O	O
_____ Crested Caracara.....	U	O	O	U
_____ American Kestrel.....	O		C	C
_____ Merlin.....	R		O	O
_____ Peregrine Falcon.....	R		U	O
_____ Monk Parakeet.....			X	
_____ Olive-sided Flycatcher.....		X		
_____ Eastern Wood-Pewee.....	U	R	U	
_____ Yellow-bellied Flycatcher.....		R	R	
_____ Acadian Flycatcher.....	R	R	O	
_____ Alder Flycatcher.....		U		
_____ Willow Flycatcher.....			X	
_____ Least Flycatcher.....	R	O	R	R
_____ Eastern Phoebe.....	U		A	A
_____ Vermilion Flycatcher.....			O	U
_____ Ash-throated Flycatcher.....				R
_____ Great Crested Flycatcher.....	U	O	U	
_____ Great Kiskadee.....	X	X	X	X
_____ Couch's Kingbird.....			X	X
_____ Western Kingbird.....	X	X		X
_____ Eastern Kingbird.....	C	C	U	

	Sp	S	F	W
_____ Scissor-tailed Flycatcher	C	C	U	
_____ Loggerhead Shrike.....	U	U	U	U
_____ White-eyed Vireo	C	C	U	O
_____ Bell's Vireo			X	
_____ Yellow-throated Vireo	O	O	R	
_____ Blue-headed Vireo.....	O			U
_____ Philadelphia Vireo	X			
_____ Warbling Vireo	R		R	
_____ Red-eyed Vireo	O	U	O	
_____ Blue Jay.....	C	C	A	C
_____ American Crow.....	A	C	C	A
_____ Fish Crow	U	U	O	O
_____ Horned Lark.....				R
_____ Northern Rough-winged Swallow.....	U		U	O
_____ Purple Martin	U	U	O	O
_____ Tree Swallow	U		U	U
_____ Bank Swallow	O	R	O	
_____ Barn Swallow.....	C	C	U	
_____ Cliff Swallow	C	U	O	
_____ Cave Swallow	O	U		O
_____ Carolina Chickadee.....	A	A	A	A
_____ Tufted Titmouse	C	C	C	C
_____ Red-breasted Nuthatch	R			R
_____ Brown-headed Nuthatch	R			
_____ Brown Creeper			O	O
_____ House Wren.....	O		U	U
_____ Winter Wren			O	O
_____ Sedge Wren	U		U	U
_____ Marsh Wren.....	O		U	O
_____ Carolina Wren	C	C	C	C
_____ Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	C		C	A
_____ Golden-crowned Kinglet	O		O	U

	Sp	S	F	W
_____ Ruby-crowned Kinglet.....	U		U	A
_____ Eastern Bluebird.....	U	O	U	C
_____ Gray-cheeked Thrush	O			
_____ Swainson's Thrush.....	U			
_____ Hermit Thrush.....	O		O	U
_____ Wood Thrush.....	R			
_____ American Robin.....	O	R	C	A
_____ Gray Catbird	U		U	U
_____ Brown Thrasher	U		U	U
_____ Northern Mockingbird.....	A	A	A	A
_____ European Starling.....	C	U	U	C
_____ American Pipit.....	O		O	C
_____ Sprague's Pipit.....				O
_____ Cedar Waxwing.....	U			C
_____ Ovenbird	O			
_____ Worm-eating Warbler	O			
_____ Louisiana Waterthrush.....	O	U	O	
_____ Northern Waterthrush.....	O		U	
_____ Blue-winged Warbler.....	O			
_____ Black-and-white Warbler.....		O	O	R
_____ Prothonotary Warbler.....	O	U		
_____ Tennessee Warbler	U		O	
_____ Orange-crowned Warbler	U		U	C
_____ Nashville Warbler	O		U	
_____ Mourning Warbler.....			O	
_____ Kentucky Warbler	O			
_____ Common Yellowthroat	U		U	U
_____ Hooded Warbler.....	U		O	
_____ American Redstart.....	O		O	
_____ Cerulean Warbler	O			
_____ Northern Parula.....	U		O	
_____ Magnolia Warbler.....	U		R	

	Sp	S	F	W
_____ Bay-breasted Warbler	O			
_____ Blackburnian Warbler	O			
_____ Yellow Warbler	U		U	
_____ Chestnut-sided Warbler	U			
_____ Palm Warbler			O	O
_____ Pine Warbler	U	U	C	C
_____ Yellow-rumped Warbler.....	C		A	A
_____ Yellow-throated Warbler.....	R		R	
_____ Prairie Warbler.....			R	
_____ Black-throated Green Warbler.....	U		O	
_____ Canada Warbler.....	R			
_____ Wilson's Warbler	O		O	O
_____ Yellow-breasted Chat	U		O	
_____ Grasshopper Sparrow.....	O		O	O
_____ Le Conte's Sparrow			U	U
_____ Nelson's Sparrow.....			R	
_____ Chipping Sparrow.....			U	U
_____ Clay-colored Sparrow			R	R
_____ Field Sparrow			O	U
_____ Lark Sparrow.....			R	
_____ Fox Sparrow				O
_____ Dark-eyed Junco.....				
_____ White-crowned Sparrow			R	O
_____ Harris's Sparrow.....				O
_____ White-throated Sparrow.....	C		C	C
_____ Vesper Sparrow			O	O
_____ Savannah Sparrow	C		C	A
_____ Song Sparrow	U		U	U
_____ Lincoln's Sparrow.....	U		U	C
_____ Swamp Sparrow.....	U		C	C
_____ Green-tailed Towhee.....				O

	Sp	S	F	W
_____ Spotted Towhee	R			
_____ Eastern Towhee				R
_____ Summer Tanager	U	O	U	
_____ Scarlet Tanager.....	R			
_____ Northern Cardinal.....	A	A	A	A
_____ Rose-breasted Grosbeak.....	U			
_____ Blue Grosbeak.....	O	R	O	
_____ Indigo Bunting.....	U	U	U	
_____ Painted Bunting.....	U	C	O	
_____ Dickcissel.....	O	R	O	
_____ Bobolink	R			
_____ Red-winged Blackbird.....	A	A	C	A
_____ Eastern Meadowlark.....	U	R	U	U
_____ Yellow-headed Blackbird.....	R			
_____ Rusty Blackbird			R	R
_____ Brewer's Blackbird.....	R			R
_____ Common Grackle.....	C	U	U	U
_____ Great-tailed Grackle.....	A	A	C	C
_____ Bronzed Cowbird.....	R			
_____ Brown-headed Cowbird.....	U	O	O	O
_____ Orchard Oriole.....	U	U		
_____ Baltimore Oriole.....	U		U	
_____ House Finch	O		R	
_____ Purple Finch.....			R	R
_____ American Goldfinch.....	U		U	C
_____ House Sparrow.....	U	U	U	U
_____ Northern Red Bishop.....			R	
_____ Scaly-breasted Munia.....			U	O

CITATION

Ondracek, C., Buschert, H. D., Comstock, R., & Carey, D. F. 2017. Birds of Sheldon Lake State Park and Environmental Learning Center: A Field Checklist.

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.**



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