

**ORNITHOLOGY 101 IN SOUTH TEXAS  
A LEARN-ABOUT-BIRDS WORKSHOP**

**OCTOBER 28–NOVEMBER 2, 2016**

**LEADERS: DENVER HOLT & BARRY LYON  
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**By Denver Holt**

We had a great time on our second Ornithology 101 Workshop. Our group size was smaller than in 2015 and, consequently, more manageable and focused. After incorporating the suggestions from the 2015 workshop participants, we took the next step in developing a unique, educational workshop.

We began each morning with a PowerPoint program and discussion on bird biology, ecology, and evolution. We then ventured into the field to discuss these topics as we identified birds. Co-leader Barry Lyon brought a wealth of knowledge on Texas birds and their identification, migratory habits, and bird topography, and gave a detailed overview of feather identification.

We covered the evolution of birds as suggested by the fossil record, morphology, and recent molecular techniques. We discussed current theories on the evolution of feathers and bird flight. We paid particular attention to the diversification of birds into the world's habitats, as birds attained the ability of sustained flight. Throughout the course we were emphatic in pointing out how flight gave birds the ability to access every habitat type in the world, and how habitats influenced the evolution of many bird traits. Indeed, from flightless ground dwellers such as Ostriches, to the somewhat terrestrial tree-climbing chachalacas, to the ocean-soaring albatrosses, to the high-soaring raptors that slip over the world's highest mountain ranges, and to the underwater "flying" penguins, there is no habitat or niche that birds have not called home.

In conjunction with the occupation of the world's habitats, the next significant trait of birds was the evolution of an astounding diversity of bills. It is the evolution of this incredible assortment of bills that has enabled birds to obtain or capture the diverse food resources needed to survive. Bills serve in maintenance, protection, and sexual selection, among other uses. On this tour, our choice of visiting a diversity of habitat types allowed us to see the many examples of the extraordinary array of bill shapes and sizes that birds have evolved.

We also spent considerable time discussing bird plumage color. We discussed how feather structure and light provide the many examples of iridescent colors, as seen in hummingbirds, and the blues in bluebirds. We talked about the chemical makeup of some foods and how the natural pigments found in certain food types influence color pigments, as in cardinals and orioles. We also delved into the complicated color patterns of Green Jays and other species that can use both structural and biochemical influence to achieve color. A Common Pauraque provided a superb example of subtle but effective camouflage color and patterning.

We had great opportunities to discuss different flight methods such as thermal soaring in cranes, hawks, and vultures, dynamic soaring in albatrosses and shearwaters, and the powered flight of falcons and grouse.

In each of these and many more topics, we used data from current research in a host of avian topics to explain the life of birds.

# **BIRDS**

## **WATERFOWL**

GADWALL  
AMERICAN WIGEON  
MOTTLED DUCK  
BLUE-WINGED TEAL  
CINNAMON TEAL  
NORTHERN SHOVELER  
NORTHERN PINTAIL  
GREEN-WINGED TEAL  
REDHEAD  
RUDDY DUCK

## **GUANS, CHACHALACAS & CURASSOWS**

PLAIN CHACHALACA

## **GREBES**

LEAST GREBE  
PIED-BILLED GREBE

## **CORMORANTS**

NEOTROPIC CORMORANT  
DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT

## **ANHINGA**

ANHINGA

## **PELICANS**

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN  
BROWN PELICAN

## **HERONS, EGRETS & BITTERNS**

GREAT BLUE HERON  
GREAT EGRET  
SNOWY EGRET  
LITTLE BLUE HERON  
TRICOLORED HERON  
REDDISH EGRET  
CATTLE EGRET  
BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON  
YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON

## **IBISES & SPOONBILLS**

WHITE IBIS  
WHITE-FACED IBIS  
ROSEATE SPOONBILL

## **NEW WORLD VULTURES**

BLACK VULTURE  
TURKEY VULTURE

## **OSPREY**

OSPREY

## **HAWKS, EAGLES & KITES**

WHITE-TAILED KITE  
NORTHERN HARRIER  
SHARP-SHINNED HAWK  
COOPER'S HAWK  
HARRIS'S HAWK  
WHITE-TAILED HAWK  
RED-SHOULDERED HAWK  
RED-TAILED HAWK

## **RAILS, GALLINULES & COOTS**

CLAPPER RAIL (HEARD ONLY)  
AMERICAN COOT

## **CRANES**

SANDHILL CRANE

## **STILTS & AVOCETS**

BLACK-NECKED STILT  
AMERICAN AVOCET

## **PLOVERS & LAPWINGS**

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER  
SEMIPALMATED PLOVER  
KILLDEER

## **SANDPIPERS & ALLIES**

SPOTTED SANDPIPER  
GREATER YELLOWLEGS  
WILLET  
LONG-BILLED CURLEW  
MARBLED GODWIT

RUDDY TURNSTONE  
SANDERLING  
DUNLIN  
LEAST SANDPIPER  
WESTERN SANDPIPER  
SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER (NOT SURE)  
SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER (PROBABLE)  
WILSON'S SNIPE

## **GULLS, TERNS & SKIMMERS**

LAUGHING GULL  
HERRING GULL  
CASPIAN TERN  
ROYAL TERN  
BLACK SKIMMER

## **PIGEONS & DOVES**

ROCK PIGEON (INTRODUCED)  
EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (INTRODUCED)  
WHITE-TIPPED DOVE  
WHITE-WINGED DOVE  
MOURNING DOVE

## **OWLS**

EASTERN SCREECH-OWL

## **NIGHTJARS & ALLIES**

COMMON PAURAQUE

## **HUMMINGBIRDS**

RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD  
BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRD  
RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD (JUVENILE MALE)  
BUFF-BELLIED HUMMINGBIRD

## **KINGFISHERS**

RINGED KINGFISHER  
BELTED KINGFISHER  
GREEN KINGFISHER

## **WOODPECKERS**

GOLDEN-FRONTED WOODPECKER  
LADDER-BACKED WOODPECKER

## **FALCONS & CARACARAS**

AMERICAN KESTREL  
MERLIN  
PEREGRINE FALCON

## **AFRICAN & NEW WORLD PARROTS**

GREEN PARAKEET (INTRODUCED)

## **TYRANT FLYCATCHERS**

BLACK PHOEBE  
EASTERN PHOEBE  
VERMILION FLYCATCHER  
GREAT KISKADEE  
TROPICAL KINGBIRD  
COUCH'S KINGBIRD  
SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER

## **SHRIKES**

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE

## **VIREOS**

WHITE-EYED VIREO  
BLUE-HEADED VIREO

## **CROWS, JAYS, & MAGPIES**

GREEN JAY

## **SWALLOWS**

BARN SWALLOW

## **CHICKADEES & TITS**

BLACK-CRESTED TITMOUSE

## **PENDULINE TITS**

VERDIN

## **WRENS**

HOUSE WREN

## **GNATCATCHERS**

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER

## **THRUSHES & ALLIES**

CLAY-COLORED THRUSH  
AMERICAN ROBIN

## **STARLINGS**

STARLING (INTRODUCED)

## **NEW WORLD WARBLERS**

BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER  
ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER  
COMMON YELLOWTHROAT  
YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER  
WILSON'S WARBLER

## **BUNTINGS, SPARROWS & ALLIES**

CHIPPING SPARROW  
SAVANNAH SPARROW

## **CARDINALS & ALLIES**

NORTHERN CARDINAL

## **TROUPIALS & ALLIES**

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD  
EASTERN MEADOWLARK (HEARD)  
GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE  
BRONZED COWBIRD  
HOODED ORIOLE  
ALTAMIRA ORIOLE

## **SISKINS, CROSSBILLS & ALLIES**

LESSER GOLDFINCH

## **OLD WORLD SPARROWS**

HOUSE SPARROW (INTRODUCED)

# **MAMMALS**

## **SQUIRRELS, PRAIRIE DOGS & MARMOTS**

EASTERN FOX SQUIRREL

## **RABBITS & HARES**

EASTERN COTTONTAIL

## **DOGS**

COYOTE (HEARD)

## **WHALES, DOLPHINS & ALLIES**

BOTTLE-NOSED DOLPHIN (MOST LIKELY)

# **REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS**

AMERICAN ALLIGATOR

RED-EARED SLIDER