

The
Pine Warbler



Piney Woods Wildlife Society Newsletter - March 2021





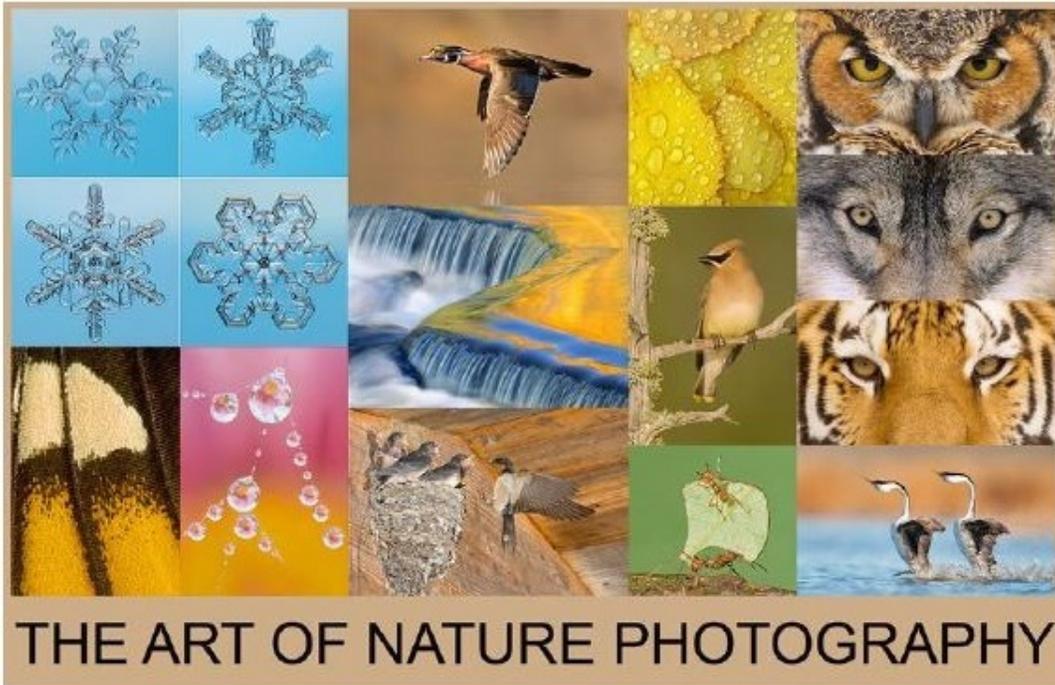
PWWS Virtual Program Wednesday Mar 17th at 7 PM

"Finding Your Own Unique Vision" by Steve Gettle



Gettle Photography

worlds to explore



Join Piney Woods Wildlife Society on Wednesday, March 17th, at 7 p.m. for a wonderful virtual presentation by Steve Gettle entitled "Finding Your Own Unique Vision". The presentation will be via Zoom and you must pre-register (for free) at this link to be able to join in:

https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_GYSqkh0HQWq2GSZc7thSWA

Program: "Finding Your Own Unique Vision"

Throughout our journey as photographers we continue to grow. Most of us start off simply drawing a rectangle around a pretty part of the world and pushing a button. Then we move into wanting more control, to have the ability to use different lenses and settings to realize our own creative vision in our images. Then the next step is many of us will begin to emulate other photographers as we work toward ultimately finding our own unique photographic style. In this program Steve will use many behind the scenes images to illustrate his own personal journey in nature photography as he searches to find his own unique vision.

About Us

Steve and Nicole lead nature photography tours to exciting destinations around the world. They enjoy sharing their knowledge of the natural world and helping people capture amazing images of our planet. Steve has over 30 years of nature photography experience and has been recognized through numerous awards. These include being a multi-award winner of the BBC's Wildlife Photographer of the Year and recognized in the prestigious Nature's Best photography contest. His images are often featured in National Geographic and other nation-wide publications. Nicole has over 15 years of nature photography experience and enjoys discovering and sharing wild connections with others.

Website: <https://stevegettle.com/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/steve.gettle>

Steve Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/stevegettle>

Nicole Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/nicolesudduth>



Steve Gettle -- photo by Carlos Hernandez



Steve Gettle -- photo by Carlos Hernandez

Feather Fest in Galveston April 15-18

By Claire Moore



19TH ANNUAL

Feather Fest

BIRDING & NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY FESTIVAL

April 15-18, 2021 • Galveston Island

This year, Galveston's Bird Festival, called Feather Fest, WILL happen with in-person field trips on April 15-18. They have implemented many changes because of Covid including no buses and no in-person headquarters. Additional events are scheduled for before and after the festival including dates from Tuesday, April 13, through Monday, April 19.

Galveston Island is one of the top locations in the country for birding especially because the Texas coast is on the Central Migration Flyway. The island has a rich variety of natural habitats including beaches, wetlands, grasslands, woods, ponds, and bays.

The web site for Feather Fest is <https://www.galvestonfeatherfest.com/> and contains all the information that you will need if you wish to attend. The web site gives you the ability to search by day, leader, skill level and activity level.

Major Changes implemented to minimize risks of Covid:

NO Buses – All field trips will be met at site field trips. We hope you will enjoy the freedom that having your own transportation provides!

NO Headquarters – There will be no festival HQ. Our friendly volunteers will check you in and give you your necklace pouch when you report to your first field trip.

NO Onsite Registration – All registration will be online. Once the festival begins, we will post the field trips with openings on our website and we'll keep it updated throughout the festival. If there is a trip you would like to register for, you'll be able to do so by calling our registration team at 832-459-5533.

NO Onsite Vendors – but you'll be able to shop online with our vendors in between field trips and during down time.

NO Social Events – Although we will not have a 2021 Raptors Uncorked, stay tuned for an all new dinner and show for FeatherFest 2022!

Wishing you the luck of the Irish

Photos by Claire Moore



Five baby Egyptian Geese at WindRose's Eagle Lake! Crazy timing! My local contact says that they are a couple weeks old now. Amazing that the parents have kept them alive thru this terrible weather! - Photo by Claire Moore



Five baby Egyptian Geese at WindRose's Eagle Lake! My local contact says that they are a couple weeks old now. Amazing that the parents have kept them alive thru this terrible weather! - Photo by Claire Moore



Black-Bellied Whistling Ducks at WindRose's Eagle Lake - Photo by Claire Moore



WindRose's Eagle Lake with ice still in a couple of the sheltered corners - Photo by Claire Moore



Bald Eagle Parents Get Buried By Snow While Incubating Eggs

Rain, shine, or snow, one Bald Eagle pair in southern Pennsylvania refused to abandon their eggs

In early March, thousands awaited news of the fate of a single nest. Logging

into live stream pointed at an active Bald Eagle nest at Codorus State Park in southern Pennsylvania, viewers awaited news of the fates of two adult eagles incubating eggs after a wintry squall had dumped up a half-foot of snow on the park the night before; it was enough to cover up the mother eagle right up to her neck. Onlookers bit their nails: Would the parent eagles freeze? Was it even possible for them to swap places? Would the eggs survive?

Morning came, and parent eagles and their eggs were just fine. See the fascinating video here: <https://www.audubon.org/news/bald-eagle-parents-get-buried-snow-while-incubating-eggs>

“You could put an eagle in a chest freezer and open it the next morning and the eagle would be standing there looking at you,” naturalist Jack Hubley told Lancaster Online. (Ed. note: Throwing a raptor in the refrigerator is generally not a great idea.) Eagles, and many other types of birds, are well-suited for even the snowiest of winters; their feathers are fantastically insulating, and they can lift and lower their feathers to regulate heat. Even better, they have a single patch on their bellies that aren’t covered in feathers, to enable easier transferring of heat from the mother eagle to the eggs.

This month's heroic parenting notwithstanding, Bald Eagles have made a pretty amazing comeback across the Keystone State; in 1983, there were only three nests in the entire state, all clustered in the rural northwestern corner. By 2013, the Pennsylvania Game Commission counted 252 nests statewide.

Update: The chicks have successfully hatched! Watch them on the [live stream](#).



Happy St. Patrick's Day

Note from PWWS President

My people,

I cannot believe March is already here. Do hope you all made it through this last awful cold spell without much damage. I think we all deserve a wonderful spring and a much, much better rest of this year. Our virtual meetings have been great and we will continue those until we can meet in person safely again. Let us take care of each other and count the blessings we do have. The goldfinches blessed us with their beauty along with the flocks of robins and our Tomball Bald Eagles have just hatched an eaglet to give us joy.

Happy St. Pats and a virtual hug to each of you,
Kathy, Your President

THE INVADERS – NUTRIA

By Cheryl Conley, TWRC Wildlife Center



Nutria - Photo by Cheryl Conley

I was surprised when I asked a few friends if they'd ever heard of nutria and most of them had not. Hope this helps bring about some awareness of this invasive little critter. Simply stated, an invasive species is a non-native plant, animal or insect that is non-native and can cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health.

There is one invasive animal that is often mistaken for a beaver or otter and it's called a nutria. They were brought to the United States from South America for their fur and were kept on fur farms. Some escaped and in the 1940's many were released into the wild when the fur market collapsed. Nutria are now considered one of the most ecologically harmful species on the planet. They can be found in 40 states and all areas of Texas except for the Panhandle and extreme west Texas.

Nutria are large rodents weighing up to 20 pounds but are smaller than beavers which can weigh up to 50 pounds. They have orange teeth, are semi-aquatic and multiply very rapidly having up to 3 litters every year. They have partially webbed hind feet to aid in swimming. Their eyes, ears and nostrils sit high on their heads so they are able to keep their heads above the waterline. They have valves on their mouths and nostrils that seal out the water when they are submerged. Nutria have a rat-like tail while beavers have broad flat tails. One sure way to distinguish a nutria from a beaver or otter are the whiskers. Nutria have white whiskers while beavers and otters have black whiskers.

So why are they considered invasive? Nutria live in burrows that are connected

by tunnels that are dug near rivers, canals and lakes causing erosion and flooding. They eat native wetland plants and will eat the entire plant—roots and all. Because the roots are eaten, the plants will not grow back. Additionally, with the root system gone, the soil is destabilized which causes erosion. In addition to wetland plants, nutria eat many agricultural plants like rice, corn, wheat, sugar, peanuts and more. They may even dine on your vegetable garden or newly planted grass.

Because of their burrowing behavior, flood-control and water-retaining levees are damaged. They also burrow into the flotation supports under boat docks, under building foundations, roads, streams, and dams. The damage weakens the structures and can cause them to lean, sink or even collapse.

Not only are nutria bad for our environment, nutria are host to many diseases and parasites including tuberculosis, septicemia, tapeworm, liver flukes, and nematodes. According to the Fish and Wildlife Service, it can be a real health hazard for domestic animals, livestock and people to drink or swim in water that is contaminated with nutria feces and urine.

For information on controlling nutria, contact the nearest office of TexasAgriLife Extension-Wildlife Services.

TWRC Wildlife Center is a wildlife rehabilitation facility that treats injured and orphaned wildlife. We also serve as a resource for your wildlife questions. We can be reached at 713-468-TWRC or check our website at www.twrcwildlifecenter.org.

CREATOR'S CANVAS-HUMMINGBIRDS OF RANCO NATURALISTA, COSTA RICA - PART 5

The Brown Violetears and their Cousins!

Photos By Wayne Easley



Brown Violetear Casa Rancho, Costa Rica., oct. 10 11 19 R (1) - Photo by Wayne Easley

From: Wayne Easley easley57@yahoo.com

Date: Sun, Nov 17, 2019, 6:54 PM

Subject: THE HUMMINBIRDS OF RANCHO NATURALISTA-PART 5/THE BROWN VIOLETEARS AND THEIR COUSINS!

At first glance, the Brown Violetear seems to be a rather large dull hummingbird. But wait, keep watching when the bird shows some aggression or when it is mating. It transforms itself into something akin to a beautiful decorated Christmas Tree. Those bright violet auriculars flare out and the throat turns a glittering green. "I fooled you! You thought I was just another mill of the run hummingbird? Well look again!" It is a creature of tremendous beauty. The marvelous world of nature never ceases to amaze me!

Brown Violetears visit a variety of flowers but they will also come to nectar feeders. During the nesting season, the females busy themselves gathering spiders and small insects their two nestlings. "And where is daddy?" we might ask. He is off defending his favorite patch of flowers and looking to start a brand new family. Like most of the hummingbirds, the female, once she has mated, builds the nest, lays the two white eggs and raises the chicks. The nest is so compact that even on cold nights, the fledglings are nice and warm. Following a couple of weeks in the nest, the young go their separate ways. No bonding with this family!

Here at Rancho Naturalista, the Brown Violetear is fairly common. In the highlands of Costa Rica, we have the Green Violetear but it is not to be

expected here at Rancho. Down in South America, especially in the Andes Mountains, one can find the largest of the violetears, the large Spectacled Violetear. I hope that your future travels include seeing one or more of the impressive violetears.

Pictures 1-4 show the Brown Violetears of Rancho Naturalista here on the Caribbean side of Costa Rica

Pictures 5-6 portray the Green Violetears not to be expected at Rancho) of higher elevations in Costa Rica

Pictures 7-8 show the Spectacled Violetearsthat range from Venezuela to Peru and Bolivia in South America.



Brown Violetear at Casa Rancho, Costa Rica., Oct. 29-19 R (1) - Photo by Wayne Easley



Brown Violetear, Casa Rancho, Costa Rica, 10-28-19 R (- Photo by Wayne Easley



Brown Violetear, Casa Rancho, Costa Rica Oct. 28, 2019 R - Photo by Wayne Easley



Brown Violetear Hummingbird, Costa Rica date uncertain R (2) - Photo by Wayne Easley



Green Violetear (7-21-11) LG (1) - Photo by Wayne Easley



Green Violetear, Highlands of Costa Rica, July of 2011 R- Photo by Wayne Easley



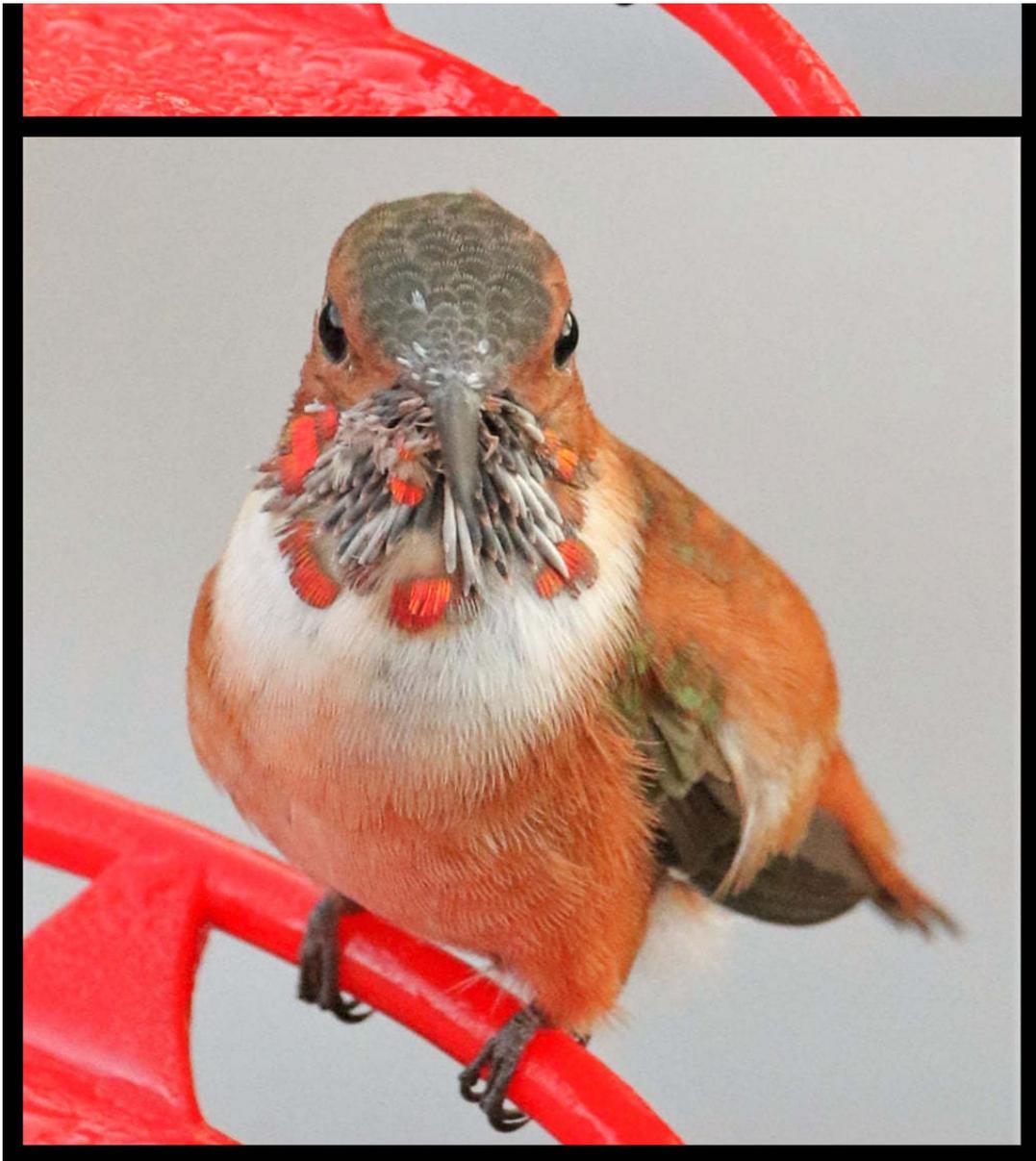
Sparkling Violetear, Inca Trail in Peru 8-29-12 R - Photo by Wayne Easley



Sparkling Violetear - Photo by Wayne Easley

Photos by Sandy Crystal





Unbelievable Morning Visitor! This is an adult male Rufous Hummingbird with whiskers (aka gorget pin feathers). Have not had a rufous hummingbird to document in the backyard since 2014. YAY!!! Clear Lake City (Houston) Texas - 2-23-2021 - Photo by Sandy Crystal



Pine Warbler - Put some suet on the trunk of the palm tree in the backyard. Got four different warblers in twenty minutes! They were hungry. Clear Lake City (Houston) Texas - 2-21-2021 - Photo by Sandy Crystal



Yellow-throated Warbler - Clear Lake City (Houston) Texas - Photo by Sandy Crystal



Yellow-rumped Warbler - Backyard Clear Lake City (Houston) Texas - Photo by Sandy Crystal



Orange-crowned Warbler - Backyard Clear Lake City (Houston) Texas - Photo by Sandy Crystal

I ventured out for more than a few miles from home yesterday for the first time in three months (I have been recovering from a surgery). I picked Texas City Dike as my destination! It was good for the spirit and soul.



Rudy Turnstone - Photo by Sandy Crystal

HAPPY SAINT PATRICK'S DAY

Photos by Bill Miller



Rufous Hummingbird. Photo by Sue Miller



Crested Caracara - We don't see these often at the house and usually just flying over. This day they stopped by to join some Black Vultures in eating something dead. - Photo by Bill Miller



Pine Warbler - New for the yard. — at The South 0.40.Pine Warbler 2/12/2021 - Photo by Bill Miller



Savanna Sparrow - 2/12/2012 - Photo by Bill Miller



Even the lizards in our yard know to wear masks this year!! - Photo by Sue Miller



Sue Miller's Art Fence made from aluminum cans - Photo by Bill Miller

North Dakota 2017

Photos by Jim Snyder



Hiking the South Unit today. - Photo by Jim Snyder



Feral horses - Photo by Jim Snyder



More wild horses! - Photo by Jim Snyder



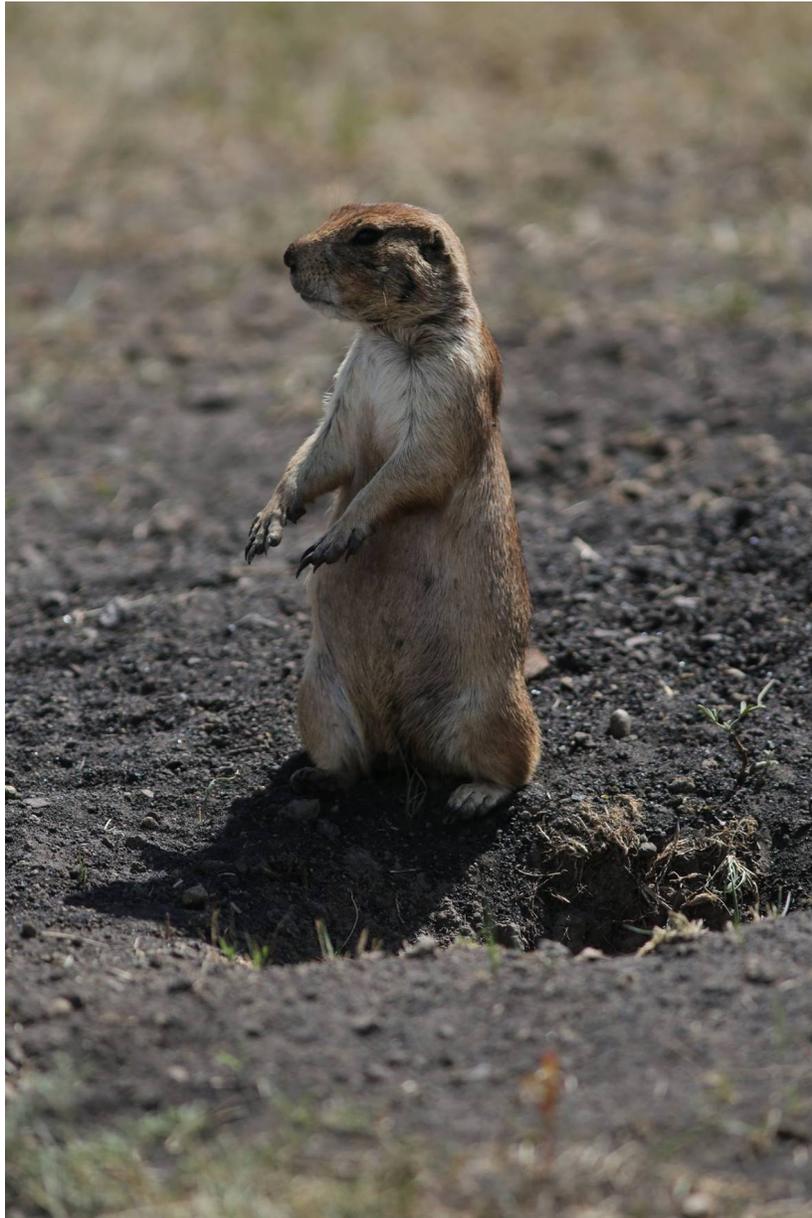
Another terrific formation in TRNP (North Unit) - Photo by Jim Snyder



Bentonite clay - Photo by Jim Snyder



Weidemeyer's Admiral - by Jim Snyder



Prairie Dog - Photo by Jim Snyder



This large petrified tree stump can be found along the North Petrified Forest Trail in TRNP. - Photo by Jim Snyder



Regal Fritillary. Due to loss of habitat, this butterfly is becoming exceedingly difficult to find. I last found it 30 years ago in Missouri! Photo by Jim Snyder



'Baird's' Old World Swallowtail, male dorsal - Photo by Jim Snyder



This incredible lily was at the top of the trail. - Photo by Jim Snyder



Lignite coal - Photo by Jim Snyder



Petrified log in bentonite along Jones Creek Trail. - Photo by Jim Snyder



Petrified wood with Little Missouri River valley in the background - Photo by Jim Snyder



Melissa Blue, male ventral - Photo by Jim Snyder



Melissa Blue, male dorsal - Photo by Jim Snyder



Clouded Sulphur, female - Photo by Jim Snyder



Ottoe Skipper - Photo by Jim Snyder



'Siva' Juniper Hairstreak, male - Photo by Jim Snyder



Atlantis Fritillary - Photo by Jim Snyder



Tawny-edged Skipper - Photo by Jim Snyder



I was stopped by this group of bison on the Caprock Coulee loop trail so I had to turn around and go the opposite direction. A 4.5 mile hike just turned into 9 miles! - Photo by Jim Snyder



Way down in Painted Canyon Theodore Roosevelt National Park). Looks like something out of Alice in Wonderland!



Two-tailed Swallowtail - Photo by Jim Snyder



Greater Short-Horned Lizard (Phrynosoma hernandesi), - Photo by Jim Snyder



Spotted Towhee, male - Photo by Jim Snyder



Clark's Day Sphinx Moth - Photo by Jim Snyder



Afranius Duskywing, male - Photo by Jim Snyder



Another bison just cruising down the road - Photo by Jim Snyder



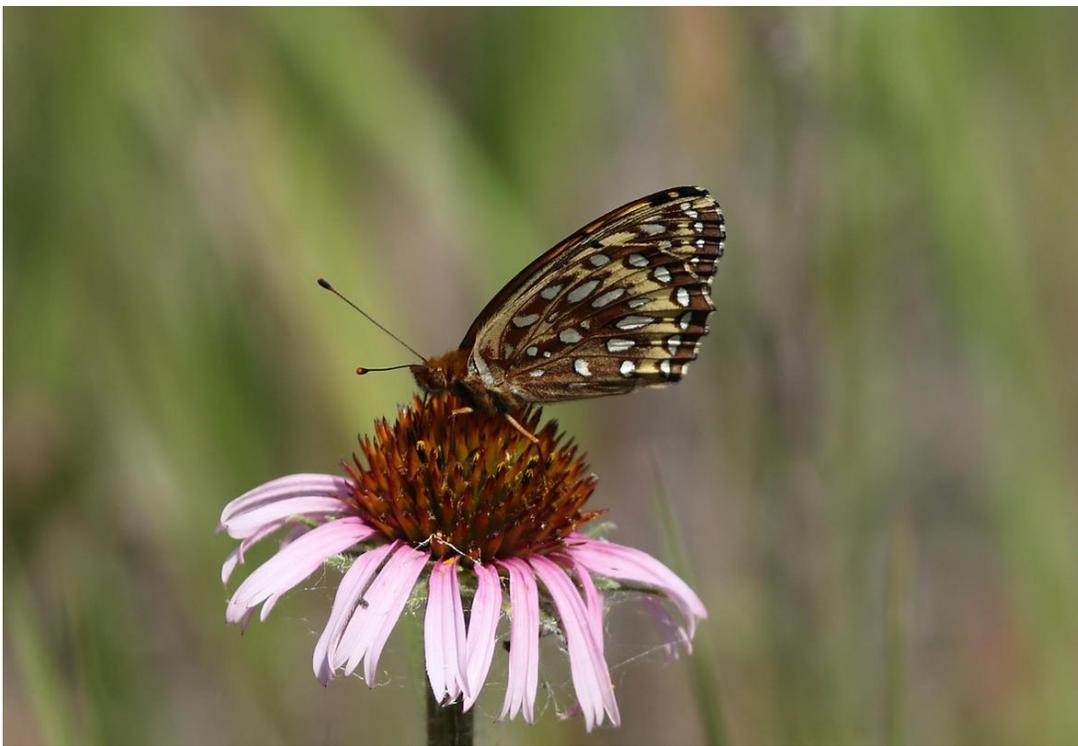
Mormon Fritillary - Photo by Jim Snyder



Anise Swallowtail, male - Photo by Jim Snyder



Aphrodite Fritillary female dorsal - Photo by Jim Snyder



Great Spangled Fritillary - Photo by Jim Snyder



This petrified tree is about seven feet tall! It took a bit of cross country bushwhacking to reach it. — at Jones Creek. - Photo by Jim Snyder



Coral Hairstreak - Photo by Jim Snyder



Bronze Copper, male dorsal — at Maah Daah Hey Trail. - Photo by Jim Snyder



"Bison back scratch" - Photo by Jim Snyder



American Bison - Photo by Jim Snyder



Pronghorn Antelope - Photo by Jim Snyder



The Maah Daah Hey Trail is a non-motorized trail that stretches for 145 miles through the Little Missouri National Grasslands in Western North Dakota.



Little Missouri River in the distance. — at Theodore Roosevelt National Park. - Photo by Jim Snyder



Mead's Wood-Nymph ventral - Photo by Jim Snyder



American Bison calf with "bodyguards" - Photo by Jim Snyder



Wild Turkey - Photo by Jim Snyder



Little Missouri River in the distance. — at Theodore Roosevelt National Park. - Photo by Jim Snyder



North Dakota sunflowers. — at Green River Goldens at Wild Bill's Ranch.- Photo by Jim Snyder



Sunset in the Badlands — in Medora, ND. - Photo by Jim Snyder



You don't see one of these walking down the middle of the road everyday. — at Theodore Roosevelt National Park - North Unit. - Photo by Jim Snyder



Chasing Birds at Peckham Park - Katy

Photos by Paul Gregg



Mary Jo Peckham Park - Photo by Paul Gregg

If you have the eBird app on your phone or computer, you can have eBird send you an eBird alert for the county of your choosing. The alerts involve unusual bird sightings in your area. I receive notices for Harris, Chambers, Liberty, and Jefferson counties. In the last few weeks, a Black-throated Gray Warbler female has been seen and photographed at the Mary Jo Peckham park in Katy, TX. The BTGW's range is as far east as El Paso, out in west Texas and shouldn't be in the Houston area. Carol and I decided to visit the park and look for the bird on Jan. 31. It was a beautiful, sunny, cool weekend and there were lots of people at the park, enjoying a picnic, or just happy to be out of their house on such a day. As we approached the entrance, I saw a man with binoculars, heading toward the parking lot. He said he was going to get his camera and lens and told us where we could find the bird by going to the northwest part of the park and looking for a couple photographers! We found the photographers, as well as the bird and it was flying in and out of branches on a large oak tree. It was feeding on sap in the holes drilled by the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (photo included). I took probably 75 photos of the BTGW and 3 of the better photos are included.

When you go for an usual bird at an area, you don't forget other birds that might show up. The Ruby-crowned Kinglet perched where the warbler liked to perch and I got a decent photo of it. We decided to walk around the trail that circles the large pond there and a good number of Yellow-rumped Warblers were

flitting from tree to tree and one gave us a nice pose. As we walked, we noticed the Muscovy Duck with 23 ducklings following her around. I took a photo of them and made it into a panorama, but when I saw the one duckling framed by the neck and head of the mother, I heavily cropped the photo to result in a nice shot of the two. The ducklings and mother came out of the water and one little one made a nice shot. A couple families came near the ducklings and they didn't appear afraid of people and their mother wasn't alarmed when a toddler tried to get too close.

Harris Co. precincts and some subdivisions have nice parks to visit. Sometimes you might find an unusual bird to report to eBird. So get out and enjoy God's wonderful creation and bring your binoculars and camera.

Enjoy,

Paul Gregg, SMSGT, USAF (Ret.)



Muscovy Duck and duckling - Photo by Paul Gregg



Muscovy Ducks - Photo by Paul Gregg



Muscovy duckling - Photo by Paul Gregg



Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker - Photo by Paul Gregg



Ruby-crowned Kinglet - Photo by Paul Gregg



Black-throated Gray Warbler - Photo by Paul Gregg



Black-throated Gray Warbler - Photo by Paul Gregg



Black-throated Gray Warbler - Photo by Paul Gregg



Yellow-Rumped Warbler - Photo by Paul Gregg



Northern Cardinal - Photo by Paul Gregg

**Greetings from the finally un-frozen Gregg compound!
2-20-2021**

Photos by Paul Gregg

Greetings from the finally un-frozen Gregg compound!

When the Arctic blast hit Texas and our area just north of Houston, TX, we had prepared our outdoor plants with freezer cloth covering and two heat lamps under the sheets. So when the power went off for around 33 or 34 hours, we figured most of those plants were lost. SO . . . what does a photographer do when he cannot work on his computer? He points his camera out the back door windows and takes photos, of course. I'm having fun getting to know my new Canon R6 mirrorless camera, but am having to use my prior 100-400L lens on it with an adapter. Light was bad a lot of the time, but I've been able to get some pretty high ISO photos and process them in Lightroom CC and Topaz with some decent results, though I need to get better in processing.

Anyway, many of you know there's been an irruption this year in which birds show up in places and numbers where and when they aren't usually found. Here's a link to an informative article: [Inside the Massive Winter Irruptions Known as Superflights | All About Birds All About Birds](#). Birds and Blooms also has a good article: [Bird Irruption: A Sudden Surge of Birds - Birds and Blooms](#) Since the birds are here by the numbers, our Wild Birds Unlimited store in Kingwood has been almost going out of bird seed and feed as customers come in and tell us "they are eating me out of house and home!" The main high numbers of birds have been the American Goldfinches (see a cold goldfinch in attached photo), and Pine Siskins (see attached photo). Pine Siskins aren't too afraid of humans and as I was putting out seed the other day, I held up the bowl and one perched on it and began eating. That made my day! Yellow-rumped Warblers have worked the ground on our back yard with maybe a dozen of them almost at our back door and on the ground. Check out the photo where you can see that Yellow-rumped Warblers have yellow feathers under the crown of their head.

American Robins have been showing up everywhere. We have seen a few places where there were so many we couldn't count them, but we have had only one or two show up daily in our back yard. I love the photo of the "Mad Robin" I took the other day when the snow was on the ground. It has me wondering if the "Angry Birds" cartoon has a mad robin for a character. We have had the usual residents show up, and I'm happy with the Northern Cardinal male and female photos, especially the portraits. (I have a stand with a board on it about 10 feet out our back door and birds flocked to it for seed (and photos). Imagine my surprise when a Brown-headed Cowbird showed up at the seed. BUT. . a flock of them, with European Starlings and a few Red-winged Blackbirds showed up to ransack the yard and feeders. We've had a couple male House Finches with females. The Red-bellied Woodpeckers come to bark

butter we put out as well as our seed feeder. We've had Pine Warblers and Orange-crowned Warblers and even had a surprise visit by a Dark-eyed Junco (photos NOT included). The photo of the 3 House Sparrows on the frozen, snow covered bird bath is one of my favorites. Two have snow on their beaks and I think they were eating snow to get liquid. The one on the branch appears to have its eyes closed.

We may have lost some food in the fridge when we were out of power off and on for those days, but we surely enjoyed the feathered drama that has been happening for weeks now, come sunshine, rain, sleet, or snow!

Enjoy,

Paul Gregg, SMSGT, USAF (Ret.)



Brown-headed Cowbird - Photo by Paul Gregg



Northern Cardinal - Photo by Paul Gregg



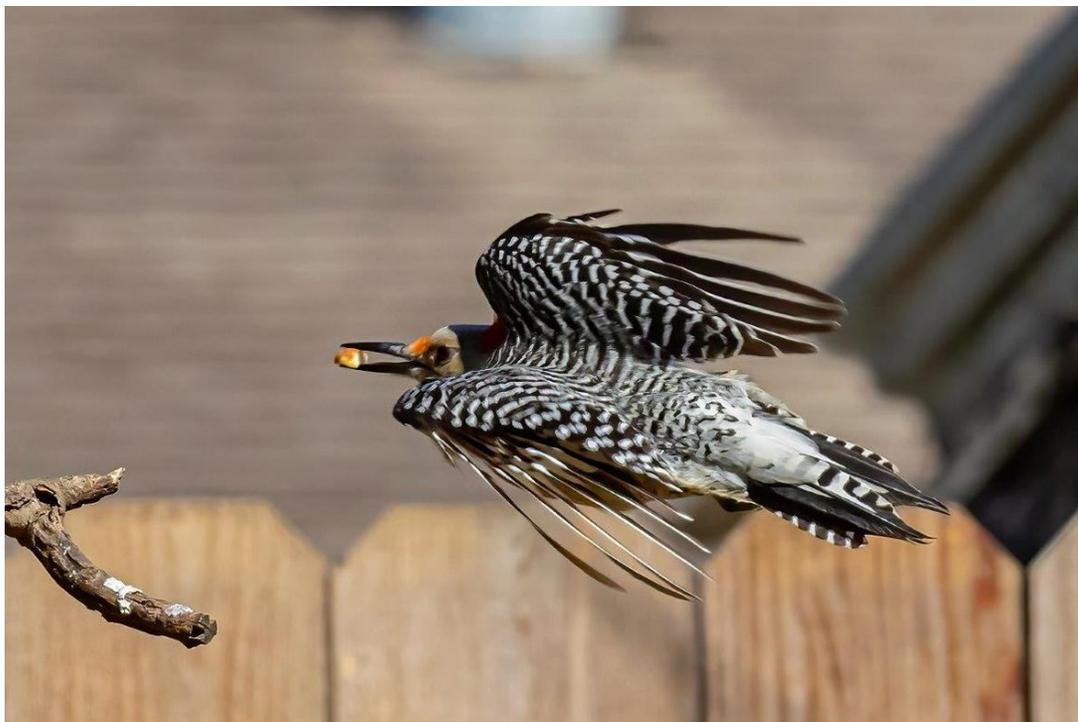
Brown-headed Cowbirds - Photo by Paul Gregg



Yellow-rumped Warbler - Photo by Paul Gregg



American Goldfinch - Photo by Paul Gregg



Red-bellied Woodpecker - Photo by Paul Gregg



American Goldfinch - Photo by Paul Gregg



Pine Siskin - Photo by Paul Gregg



Northern Cardinal - Photo by Paul Gregg



House Sparrow - Photo by Paul Gregg



American Robin - Photos by Paul Gregg



House Finch - Photo by Paul Gregg



Birding Adventures & Photos by Hank Arnold

POD Only a Rufous



Rufous Hummingbird. Photo by Hank Arnold

First off, both Tom Stehn and Ray Little responded to my picture of the Whooping Crane sitting on the ground.



Whooping Cranes on the ground - Photo by Hank Arnold

For those of you unfamiliar with those names, that's 50 years of experience with Whooping Cranes, which in itself is mind boggling.

They both said there's nothing wrong.

From Tom:

Whoopers are simply resting as you surmised and are fine.. I think the beautiful weather may have been a factor - but I can't articulate why that would be. Whoopers are good at sitting since the females incubate eggs for 28+ days. They just don't do it very often.

From Ray:

I think the resting Whooping Crane has just reached the ANWR from the last Leg of his Migrating trip. He needs to rest.

After I sent that yesterday I did recall some times I have seen Sandhill Cranes sitting on the ground, so next time I won't be so alarmed.

Yesterday was an absolutely beautiful day down here, so Upper Management

and I spent some time at Virginia's house watching the feeder in the morning.

We stayed about an hour and had 3 visits from the Rufous, but none from the Buff Belly.

I was hoping to get a better picture of the Buff Belly in the bright light, but he never showed up.

When we left I texted Susan and Virginia that we were leaving and only saw the Rufous.

Susan fired back a terse corrective interview about my choice of the the word "ONLY" for having a Rufous Hummingbird, and that's a valid criticism.

There are people, especially photographers, all over the world for which sitting 17 feet from a Rufous Hummingbird would make their birding year, and I need to be more respectful of the opportunity.

Later we wandered over to Mr. Weeden's property because it's been a while.

We did see the Harlan's Hawk, but she was at least 1000 yards away.

The lake was very quite, with some Pintails sunning in the shallows.

On the way out we saw this guy, and there is a level of discussion as to what it might be,...



He was sitting on a phone pole we couldn't get closer to, and looking almost directly into the sun. There are several more pictures in the link, with the green tints being from the wind blowing branches in the way along the sight line.

At the time I thought it might be a Merlin, but now we're thinking either Coopers or Red Shoulder.

Hopefully we'll get word from above, via Uvalde (Nan), as to what exactly this bird is.

The last few pictures are from a Red Tail off in the distance who saw something on the ground, hovered in the wind, then folded his wings and dropped into the bushes.



He didn't come back up right way, so some rat or snake probably met his not-so-honorable ancestors, there.

Here are the rest of the pictures...

20201211 - Portland - Hank Arnold (smugmug.com)

<https://hmarnold.smugmug.com/POD/20201211-Portland/>

I chose as the Picture Of The Day our good friend Vinnie The Vermilion, who comes out to see us every time we visit the lake. He's posing for a Christmas

scene that I just couldn't pass up. I really think he likes having his picture taken. I can move in pretty close and he goes right about his business of helping Mr. Weeden with any insect problems.

So let's review the scoring, in 4 hours of birding over 2 days of light birding I saw Whooping Cranes, Burrowing Owls, a Vermilion Flycatcher, a Harlan's Hawk, and a Rufous Hummingbird at close range and in good light.

Must be clean living...

Now for our flight for the day...

Yesterday went over well, with kind comments on both the setting and the music. Tom was surprised, as was I, that Flamingos and Kazakhstan went together in any combination.

Birdie Wilkinson pointed out that they visited the Serengeti and saw thousands of flamingos, so today I thought I would cover the over end of their migration...

POD - Hank Arnold (smugmug.com)

<https://hmarnold.smugmug.com/MSFS2020-Master/POD/i-3z5Tmk8/A>

I might need to start a credits roll at the end, because Nancy chose, researched the ID, and downloaded the picture for birds of the Serengeti.

If anyone wants a flight in specific location get with Nancy with a list of suggested birds to share with everyone.

We are swamped with Queen Butter flies. Probably 40 at once. 5 or so Monarchs.

As an attempt to make up with my bee girlfriends after shutting them out for the Ruby Throat migration, I also put out plates with hummingbird juice after the cold snap.

I'm thinking that videos of 100 happy females of ANY species would make a nice study, and 960 frames per second comes to mind.

Tycho and I are probably going to spend the day out with them, and give the hawks the day off

POD Skimmer Trip 1



Whooping Crane - Photo by Hank Arnold

For this cold and wet Sunday, we're going on a Skimmer trip.

For those of you that don't know, the MV Skimmer is a boat that leaves and returns to Fulton Harbor during the winter months for tours up in the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, specifically to see Whooping Cranes.



I have had the pleasure of attending one of these trips probably 30 times, and

each time I see something new and exciting.

As a follow-up for our migration series getting the cranes down here, I thought I would do a flight covering the normal cruise route.

Turns out it takes too long to fly the entire route in a video constrained by a single piece of music, so today we're going to fly just the first half, leaving Fulton Harbor and heading up into the refuge with images from a trip in February or 2018...

POD - Hank Arnold

(smugmug.com)<https://hmarnold.smugmug.com/MSFS2020-Master/POD/i-zBGTkxS/A>

POD - Hank Arnold (smugmug.com)

Here are more images of the first half of that trip...

<https://hmarnold.smugmug.com/POD/20201206-Skimmer-1/>

That's more pictures that I would normally share, but since none of us are going to BE on today's trip, I'm thinking we have the time.

We saw several cranes catch crabs, and it was the first time I was able to watch the process that close...

First he flips off the claws, then the legs.

Then he stabs a hole right in the back of the carapace, and that's the end of any arguments.

At that point he flips open the back and pops the bottom half, with all the meat in it, up in the air to get it turned around, then down the hatch.

The entire show is finished in under 60 seconds.

To truly experience a Skimmer trip, you have to do it sitting next to Ray Little.

Again, for those of you that don't know, he was the "naturalist" that got eco-tourism trips into the refuge to see the Whooping Cranes started back in the 70's, when nobody cared about the birds and everybody said tours to the refuge wouldn't work financially.

Today it's a thriving industry with visitors from all over the world.

The owner, captain, Cruise Director, and lead singer for the Skimmer is Capt

Tommy Moore, who introduces Ray to the crowd every time we go as his "teacher and mentor".

At 97, Ray isn't fond of cold, so the opportunities for me to take him have to be chosen carefully, but they are wondrous.

The entire 3 hour trip he keeps up a rambling monologue of intensely interesting facts about all the different birds that can be seen. Since he can't see the birds himself very well anymore, you have to call out the name of the bird to get the information storehouse up there in his head unlocked.

If you say "Crested CaraCara", he say's something like "Mexican Eagle" and starts on some story of a CaraCara doing something interesting he saw many years ago.

"Kingfisher" gets "Watch the steep banks along the shore for small holes they dig to nest in. The steeper the bank the better, but they always dig the hole above where any wave can reach"

"White Tailed Hawk" : "People say White Tails don't eat fish, but I've seen them take large fish in shallow water, then drag them up on the beach".

I mean, how cool is that?

It helps if you call out the OLD name for birds, because he's not used to the new names yet - its only been 25 years.

Northern Harrier is a "Marsh Hawk" and White Tailed Kites are "Black Shouldered Kites".

Merlins are "Pigeon Hawks" and Kestrels are "Sparrow Hawks".

Maybe another 25 years and he'll start using the new names.

Since he can't see for squat anymore, sometimes I'll throw in a bird we can't really see to get some juicy tidbit about it.

Next time we go out I'm going to try "Look! Pterodactyl!" to get some story of something cool a pterodactyl did 65 million years ago, when Ray was just a young sprout.

By the time we get up into the refuge, all the smart tourists have come over to sit close to Ray, because he doesn't talk so loud anymore.

Next week we'll do the return leg, with an exciting fight over control of a strategically placed post between an Osprey and a Brown Pelican...

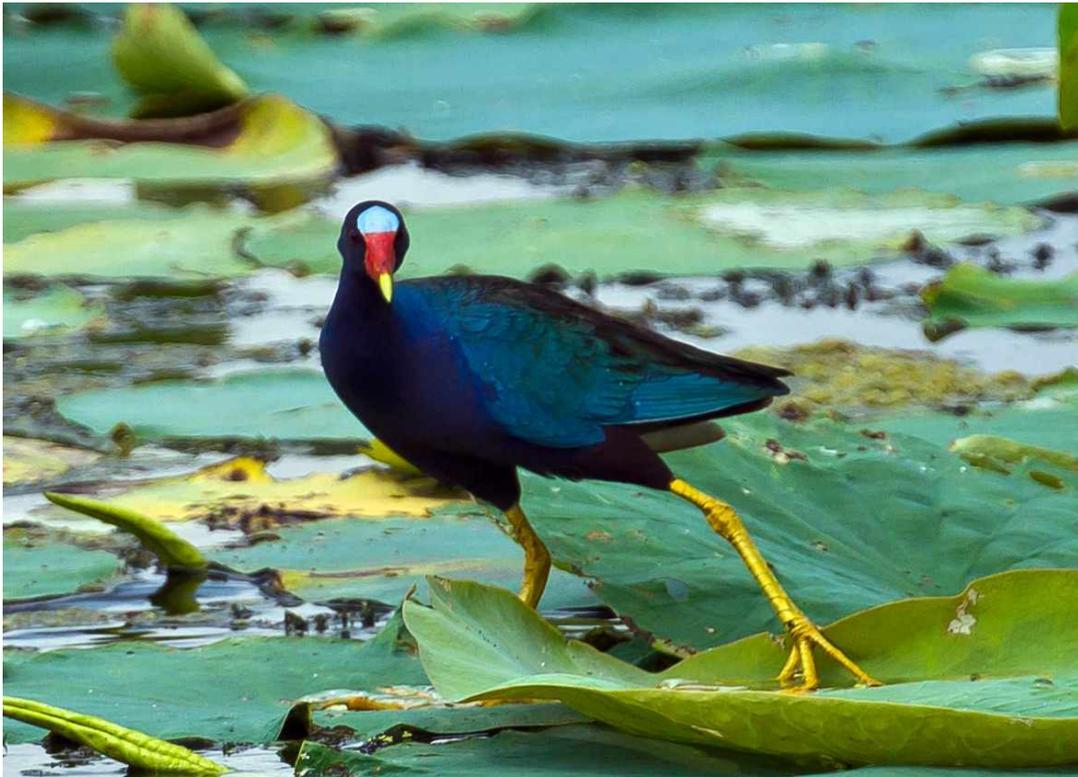


Osprey and Brown Pelican - Photo by Hank Arnold

(I'm including it because I knew you didn't believe me)

Emerald Isle





Today's flight is going to be a birding sanctuary in Ireland, so I thought I would include as our own local birds, images from the greenest place I know of, Brazos Bend State Park.

Brazos Bend has always been one of our favorite haunts, and we only very rarely miss the opportunity to detour there for a visit.

Everyone has a list of favorite birds, and for Nancy, the Primo spot is probably Purple Gallinules.

I don't care how much trouble I'm in, if I take her to Brazos Bend, It helps my cause. Depending upon how stupid the thing was I that did, it might not be sufficient groveling to finish that act in the play that is our lives, but it at least gets us to where the guy is messing around with the rope that lowers the curtain.

On this particular day not only did we see Purple Gallinules, but one put on a song and dance presentation atop the Lilly pads...



20201217 - Brazos Bend - Hank Arnold (smugmug.com)

<https://hmarnold.smugmug.com/POD/20201217-Brazos-Bend/>

For today's flight, I was looking for interesting places to fly in Ireland, and came upon what amounts to a birding nature preserve off the coast, stuck out into the Atlantic Ocean named Skellig Michael. In several places it is "Skelling" Michael, so I don't understand the interchangeable "n", but then I don't hang out with leprechauns on a regular basis.

My first guess is that "Skelling" is a word in some Irish dialect, and the "n" comes from some auto-correct algorithm.

If so, its nice to know that they struggle with that as much as we do.



Here is a description of the island from a tourist website, showing both spellings...

Skelling Michael

One of the most ruggedly beautiful places to go in Ireland is Skellig Michael. A pyramid-shaped, craggy island about 8 kilometers from the southwestern town of Port Magee, the island is a huge tourist attraction.

However, since it's part of the nesting grounds for a number of birds, access to the island is monitored and there are strict rules on how many people can step foot on it each day.

There are a few reasons to visit this stunning landscape, one being the views and secondly, the abundant wildlife.

On the boat ride and on the island itself, there are a number of important sea birds that use the islands for nesting.

You can see puffins nesting all around Skellig Michael with their colorful beaks and comical walk. They are easily within a few feet of the paths, if not on them, and you can get some stunning photographs.

There is also a lot of Catholic history associated with the island. Pictured is a beehive hut where monks from the St. Fionan's Monastery used to live.

They also would climb the more than 600 steps to the small boat dock to retrieve their food rations each day. Guides within the monastery walls will tell you all about their history and monastic lives while you are there.

If you want to visit Skellig Michael, you can either take a boat trip around the island or take an excursion to the island, but both of these fill up quickly due to its conservation quotas. Plan way ahead, but by no means miss it.

What I didn't know when I chose that island was that it was also the set location for Luke Skywalker's retirement community in "Star Wars - The Force Awakens".



Doubtless he's in lockdown and that's as close as she's allowed to get.



Turns out that the movie was carefully planned to not disturb the birds, but once word got out it was the site of the filming, they had to shut down all human visitors to the island...

<https://www.radiokerry.ie/skellig-michael-now-closed-public/>
Skellig Michael now closed to the public | Radio Kerry

Here is another interesting story about how the Puffins caused a script change...

<https://www.birdsandblooms.com/birding/bird-photography/puffin-porg-star-wars/>

Puffin to Porg: How Nature Inspired Star Wars - Birds and Blooms

My suggestion is that they just issue light sabers to the Puffins



Puffins

Problem solved

<https://hmarnold.smugmug.com/MSFS2020-Master/POD/i-fDfrXsF/A>



Big Stone Lodge - Dennis Johnston Park

709 Riley Fuzzel Road

PWWS meetings are held at the Big Stone Lodge at the new Dennis Johnston County

Park at 709 Riley Fuzzel Road.

The directions to get there are much the same as to the Nature Center. Aldine-Westfield turns into Riley Fuzzel Road just northeast of Spring so there are several ways to get there.

1. Take the Rayford/Sawdust exit and go east on Rayford Rd. At Grand Parkway (99), turn right on the Grand Parkway frontage road. Go 2 miles (staying on the frontage road) watching for the Johnston Park sign on your right just before you get to the Hardy Toll Road overpass; or,
2. Take Louetta Road east from I45 to where it deadends into Aldine-Westfield. Turn left on Aldine-Westfield until it deadends into Riley Fuzzel Road. Turn right onto Riley Fuzzel Road and go only 0.5 miles to the park entrance on your left just after passing under Hardy Toll Road; or,
3. Take Aldine-Westfield north from Mercer Arboretum until it deadends into Riley Fuzzel Road. Turn right onto Riley Fuzzel Road and go only 0.5 miles to the park entrance on your left just after passing under Hardy Toll Road.

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Last Name(s):		First Name of Member(s):
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Pine Warbler will be delivered by E-mail Only		
Annual Membership Fee \$15.00* Additional Contribution \$ _____ Total \$ _____		Mail this form and check made payable to PWWS to: Piney Woods Wildlife Society P.O. Box 189 Spring, TX 77383-0189
*Per Household – Includes <i>The Pine Warbler</i> newsletter New _____ Renewal _____ Rejoining _____		

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Please send all new address changes and any corrections to cdmoore3@gmail.com (Claire Moore) and add PWWS to the subject line.
Thank you.



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