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January/February Meetings

January 2—TBA

There have been some issues with confirming a speaker for this meeting. At this time nothing is definite enough to announce here.

February 6—Mike Davis

While the exact topic Mike will present is not yet available, It is expected that he will provide a summary of activities at the Lake Thoreau site. This may include some discussion on the results of comparing grazing vs. controlled burns for control of the understory.

January/February Field Trips & Events

January 11 (Sat.)—Monthly Lagoon Survey (meet at lagoon gate at 8am). Expected length is 4 hours.

January 18 (Sat.)—Sparrow trip to Pearl River county. Meet at Mid-Town Market behind Ed's Burgers for 8am departure. Optional lunch after birding in Picayune.

February 14-17—Can be done at your own feeders over the entire count time using at least 30 minute minimum observations.

February 15 (Sat.) - Window Watch. The O'Neals have graciously agreed to host this event. More details will be presented at the February meeting.

February 17 (Mon.) - President's Day Gull Run. This is full day event going from West to East along the Coast. More details at February meeting.

February 22 (Sat.) - Monthly Lagoon Survey (meet at lagoon gate at 8am). Expected length is 4 hours.

These, as well as other events, can also be seen (and downloaded) at the PWAS [website](#).

Meetings are held on the first Thursday of the month (September through May) in the Education Building at the Hattiesburg Zoo. Refreshments at 6:30 pm. Meetings begin at 7:00 pm and are open to the public.

Pine Woods Audubon Society is a chapter of National Audubon Society, Inc.



President's Corner

By the time you read this, the Christmas Bird Count season will be almost over. I am hopeful for another great count week and that we meet or exceed my goal of 90 species for this year's CBC report. I expect to have a tentative summary of our Hattiesburg Christmas Bird Count to share with you at our February meeting.

The winter counting season is not quite over yet, however. February 14-17 is the scheduled time for the Great Backyard Bird Count. This is a much less strenuous event that doesn't require going any further than your own backyard. You can visit the GBBC website for this event to get all the nitty gritty details. The executive summary is—submit as many stationary bird counts as you wish during the period. Multiple counts per day are welcomed (but there is a suggested minimum time for a count). Being a group never to miss the opportunity for a social event, PWAS plans to gather at the O'Neal's house for the Saturday morning during the event (this year Saturday, February 15) which we call a Window Watch.

I hope everyone has had a wonderful holiday season. Be sure to mark your calendar for the January meeting. I will see you at the February meeting on February 6th.

Larry Basden

Confessions of a Birding Priest

By Father Tom Margevicius, *Bird Watcher's Digest*, November/December 2019

Forgive me, birders, for I have sinned. It has been a long time since my last confession (at least, of this kind). These are my sins:

1 I have begrudged surrendering the shotgun seat in the van on birding tours. I know that, at age 55, I am among the youngest birders on many tours, and having good health, can jump out of the van, place the stool outside the sliding door, and set up a scope and tripod in a jiffy. I also have keen eyesight and am good at spotting birds through the windshield as the driver concentrates on the road. But truth be told, I covet the front mostly because the birding is better up there, plus I like it when the driver favors my company.

2 I have lied—or pretended—about knowing the identification of some birds. I want birders to be impressed with my skills and have sometimes (after the tour leader named a bird) claimed, “Yeah, I knew it all along.” Actually, I often didn't know. Tour leaders are honest, committed to the exacting art of bird identification, and do not identify a bird until they are relatively sure. They also humbly appreciate it when others can locate and ID birds. But I sometimes pretend to know, not for the benefit of the group, but to get people's admiration.

3 I have been impatient and occasionally rude toward fellow birders. We're all here for the same reason—to enjoy our feathered friends among our birding friends. But when someone still can't find that elusive vireo after I point it out for the third time, or talks too loud when I'm listening for distant chip notes, or clings to and monopolizes the tour leader, I just get annoyed and have occasionally said unkind things. I'm not proud of this.

4..I have squandered environmental resources chasing rarities. Much of the destruction of birding habitat—especially in the tropics—occurs because we in the developed world like our comfort. True, I drive an economical gas-stingy Honda Fit (my next car may even be a hybrid), but it's hard to justify why my need to see a rare shorebird should excuse burning up resources that ironically contribute to the species' decline. Plus, pursuing rarities often ends up empty. As a Catholic, this sin is especially convicting: my own Pope—a champion for the environment—took as his name the patron saint of animals, Francis of Assisi. Shame on me.

(continued on next page)

5 I have purchased unnecessary equipment. This is related to the previous sin. My Zeiss binoculars are among the best in the field, but they're 10 years old, and every year manufacturers tempt me with newer, supposedly better, binoculars, scopes, tripods, harnesses, etc. I often buy what I do not really need, again wasting money and resources. But it's so hard to resist! When the revised edition of *Sibley Guide to Birds* first appeared, even though early reviewers said wait for the second printing to correct inking problems, I had to buy it anyway. I wonder how much of my desire for newer stuff is just compensating for not getting out birding enough

6 I have occasionally played recordings to lure in birds. I know the ABA code of ethics advises against this, especially for rare and threatened species. It stresses birds by distracting them from the energy-consuming work of breeding and feeding. But I so want to see them! I do avoid harassing them and don't do it often (as little as needed to get a glimpse), but I'm ashamed to admit that I've not yet broken this habit.

7 I have been inconsistent keeping my bird feeders stocked and birdbaths filled. Sure, I could blame busyness, point out how often I am out of town, and justify it in other quasi-legitimate ways: "Hey, they're wild animals. They know where to find other food and water... I don't want to make them overdependent on human sources of nourishment." But, in truth, sometimes I'm just too lazy to make the effort.

8 I have not always voted for the most environmentally conscientious candidate. I know this is a touchy subject and politics is complicated. There are many issues to consider, and the environment is among the most important. But it's not the only concern, and sometimes I have endorsed those whose position on the environment is less than stellar. Actually, sometimes I feel politically homeless: No one party, no one candidate, stands for all the things I believe passionately about. I've made compromises, and am not sure they've all been the best.

9 I have been reluctant to show my religion when birding. Birders are a wonderfully accepting community, and they champion diversity: hence women birders, youth birders, gay birders and even Dr. J. Drew Lanham's satirical "Nine Rules for the Black Birdwatcher." Johnathan Rosen is unabashedly Jewish in his *Life of the Skies*, and numerous great birders are men and women of faith. Jesus even told his followers to "Look at the birds of the air" (Matt. 6:26). If I am honest, I am afraid to admit I'm a Catholic priest not because the community will ostracize me, but because I'm timid.

10 I have sought special recognition. This is paradoxically the flip side of the previous sin. When I take the risk to admit my identity as a Catholic priest, perhaps secretly I'm hoping birders will treat me with deference, even though all deserve equal respect. To be fair, most people (except Lithuanian speakers) cannot pronounce my last name, and "Father Tom" is so much easier to say and remember—even if I sometimes get confused with the more famous birder Father Tom Pincelli—but sometimes I just like special treatment.

These, birders, are my ornithological sins, and I'm sorry for them. Some are more serious than others, and I suppose other birders have been guilty of some of these, too, but that still doesn't excuse them. I ask your absolution, promise to do penance, and will amend my life.

Rev. Dr. Tom Margevicius is professor of liturgy and homiletics at the St. Paul Seminary, part of the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota. He has a B.S. in wildlife management and worked as an interpretive naturalist in the Ohio State Parks before service as a priest. He is also pastor of a parish in Minneapolis specializing in ministry among the deaf and hard-of-hearing. He likes to get out birding in whatever spare time he can find.

Until we begin seeing some of these "birds", we can't say that winter is here. Report any sightings to PWAS listserv or tell others about the sighting(s) at the next monthly meeting.



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The Pine Warbler

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Bird Sightings & Field Trips



The winter visitor season is in full swing. Our monthly lagoon surveys are reflecting the arrival of many species of ducks (and in large numbers). While we have not yet seen reports of the typical winter backyard visitors—Chipping Sparrow, American Goldfinch, Dark-eyed Junco, and others—I anticipate that they will soon be in the area.

As you saw in the field trips list, we are again planning to visit the MS State/USDA station in Pearl River county again. This trip has always been the source of sparrow species we don't often see in our immediate area. And, as a bonus, we might see a Barn Owl or two around the abandoned silos on the property.

If you see any “out of the ordinary” sightings, send an email to newsletter@basdenfamily.com or use the contact form on our website www.pinewoodsaudubon.com to let us know so we can include them in this section of the newsletter.