

# the ROADRUNNER.....



newsletter of the  
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Editor: John Sproul

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## CALENDAR

### PROGRAM

The next General Meeting will be MONDAY 15 SEPTEMBER. Do not go to the Garden Center in June; you'll be the only one there.

### FIELD TRIPS

SAT. 14 JUNE. TOM MAYS PARK. Meet at Tom Mays Park, off Transmountain Rd. on the west side of the Franklin Mtns., for breakfast at 6 AM. We will have stoves available; bring your own food, cups, plates and utensils. Also bring water for the trail. After fortifying ourselves, we will bird up-canyon to W. Cottonwood Spring and return around noon. Plan to walk 3-4 miles. Last year, we began this trip with the sun's first rays flashing in the wings of a soaring Golden Eagle. It will be the last field trip until September. Leader: Chef Bleicher (591-7261).

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

MON. 18 AUGUST, 7:30 PM. The next Board Meeting won't be until August, at the home of Peggy Heisel, 10423 Adonis, El Paso, ph: 821-0989.

### OBSERVATIONS - 25 April to 29 May 1980

As the length of this report indicates, it's been an active month.

#### GREBES THROUGH FALCONS

Had you been at Tornillo Lakes 26 Apr, you could have seen a Western Grebe (PJ, SJ). That spot also held an immature cormorant 9-10 May (AG, PJ, SJ), a Double-crested Cormorant (same bird?) 17 May (JDiP), 5 Cattle Egrets in breeding plumage 10 May (PJ, SJ) and 1 on 17 May (JDiP). Pintail are rare in our area in late spring but occurred at both Tornillo Lakes (AG, MG) and the Ft. Bliss Sewage Ponds (PJ) 3 May. Blue-winged Teal were also unusually widespread and abundant that day, a total of 34 being recorded

from Feather L., the Ft. Bliss Ponds, Tornillo Lakes and the Rio Grande (mob). Five Blue-winged Teal were at Feather L. 27 Apr (JF, JS) and 2 at Santa Teresa CC 4 May (JD).

Accipiters usually leave our area by late Apr, but Sharp-shinned Hawks were sighted both 25 Apr near Socorro (JC, JF) and 3 May along the road to Ft. Bliss Ponds (KZ). A search for Harris' Hawks in the lower valley 11 May indicated this species is still in steady decline locally. Just 6 adults and 1 immature were seen (JC, JF, JS). We've had scattered Golden Eagle reports: 1 over ne. El Paso 3 May (JG et al.), 1 in w. El Paso near I-10 on 12 May (DB, fide JD) and 2 in the Hueco Mtns. 12

## OBSERVATIONS (Continued)

May (JC, CT, fide JF). The Tornillo area remained the place to find an OSPREY, with 1 there 3, 9 and 10 May (AG, MG, PJ, SJ); the same bird may have been the 1 at Feather L. 7 May (AG). A Prairie Falcon was in the Hueco Mtns. 12 May (JC, CT, fide JF), and 2 in the upper valley 26 May (JD).

### SANDPIPERS THROUGH TERNS

The shorebird influx continued through early May, then faded, with most gone by mid-May. Single Long-billed Curlews were at Tornillo Lakes 25 Apr (PJ) and Ft. Bliss Ponds 26 Apr (KZ), with 2 at the Ponds 3 May (KZ). The Ponds also held 4 Baird's Sandpipers 26 Apr (KZ) and 2 on 4 May (JDiP), plus 1 Marbled Godwit 26 Apr (KZ) and 22 on 3 May (KZ). Always scan large groups of phalaropes carefully: 1 Northern Phalarope was in amongst the hundreds of Wilson's at the Ponds 3 May (KZ).

Also on 3 May, single Franklin's Gulls were at Tornillo Lakes (AG, MG) and Ft. Bliss Ponds (KZ). The next day, an adult Bonaparte's Gull visited the Ponds (JDiP). Some 15 Forster's Terns were at Tornillo Lakes the morning of 3 May and 15 were at Feather L. that afternoon (both AG, MG), probably the same group. The Ft. Bliss Ponds had about 50 Black Terns 3 May (JG et al.).

### DOVES THROUGH WOODPECKERS

A GROUND DOVE was reported regularly from the Cielo Vista area in late April-early May (EG, ElG). Single Barn Owls were seen in the upper valley 4 and 27 May, the latter flushed from a possible nest site (JD). The owl sighting of the year came with the discovery of 3 SCREECH OWLS, including a nesting pair, in Hudspeth Co. 11 May (JC, JF, JS), with 1 again spotted 17 May (JDiP). These were the first good reports of this species locally in many years.

Another exceptional find was a male WHIPPOOR-WILL at Durling's Farm 4 May (KZ).

The same bird may have been calling over Santa Teresa CC that night (JD). Also that night, a Common Nighthawk was "peenting" high over the Hueco Club e. of El Paso (JS). A male Yellow-bellied Sapsucker at Durling's Farm 27 Apr was especially noteworthy for being of the varius subspecies (KZ). It lacked the red nape of nuchalis, the common subspecies in our parts. Some observers consider these 2 separate species.

### FLYCATCHERS THROUGH WARBLERS

Empidonax flycatchers have been all over. One at Memorial Park 29 May was identified as a Willow Flycatcher (JDiP). Easier to identify was a male Vermilion Flycatcher in the Tornillo area 9-10 May (PJ, SJ). Rough-winged Swallows appear to be trying to nest at Santa Teresa CC (JD); The House Wren at Durling's Farm was seen 27 Apr (mob) and 4 May (KZ), and 1 was in e. El Paso 16-19 May (BR). Durling's also held a Brown Thrasher 4 May (KZ) and a SWAINSON'S THRUSH 17 May (JDiP). Two Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were in Radford Lot 10 May (JS), and 2 Black-tailed Gnatcatchers were in the desert near Santa Teresa CC 4 May (JD). Black-taileds, though year-round residents in our area, are seldom seen. A Bell's Vireo was in the Tornillo area 10 May (AG, MG), and single Warbling Vireos were at Hueco Tanks 3 May (JS, PH) and Memorial Park 12 and 17 May (JDiP).

Black-and-white Warblers have been more numerous than usual this spring. The female at Hueco Tanks 3 May was a first park record (KZ). Black-and-whites were also in Memorial Park 3-5 May (BB et al., JDiP), the Cielo Vista Area 4 May (RMCG, EG) and near El Paso Med. Center 5 May (SW). Single Nashville Warblers turned up at Hueco Tanks 26 Apr, Durling's Farm 27 Apr and Ft. Bliss Ponds 3 May (all KZ). A "Myrtle" Warbler was in the Tornillo area 3 May (AG, MG). A GRACE'S WARBLER, our first spring record in recent years, paused to rest in Memorial Park 27 Apr (JDiP). Equally exceptional were the PALM WARBLER in Horizon City 4 May (AG) and the

## OBSERVATIONS (Continued)

OVENBIRD and NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH at Durling's Farm 17 May (JDiP). The waterthrush was also there 18 May (JDiP). The female AMERICAN REDSTART at Durling's 30 Apr (KZ) wasn't a bad sighting either.

### MEADOWLARKS THROUGH SPARROWS

Two Eastern Meadowlarks were singing near Hueco Tanks 3 May (KZ). The year's first report of a Summer Tanager came 30 Apr, when both a male and female were at Durling's Farm (KZ). A Summer Tanager in more unusual habitat was the male at Hueco Tanks 3 May (PJ).

Some Cardinal reports from the Ysleta area recently came to light: a male and female in late March and a male in early April (IM). A male Cardinal was in an upper-valley yard 17 May, with a female now visiting that yard regularly (SM). Single male ROSE-BREASTED GROSBILLS were in the Cielo Vista area 5-7 May (JF) and the Tornillo area 17 May (JDiP). Indigo Buntings appeared at Durling's Farm 30 Apr and 4 May (KZ) and at Rio Bosque, near Socorro, 22 May (JF, JC, CT). A male Lazuli Bunting was in Chaparral Park 10 May (KK, LK) and a female in Memorial Park 29 May (JDiP). The only American Goldfinch report for the spring has been

a single bird in Radford Lot 7 May (JC). Small groups of Red Crossbills remained in the Morningside Hgts. (IS) and Memorial Park (JDiP) areas through early May and were last reported 4 May (JDiP).

A Cassin's Sparrow was in the desert near Ft. Bliss Ponds 3 May (JG et al.) and 2 were near Santa Teresa CC 26 May (JD). Recent White-throated Sparrow reports include 2 in the Radford School area 1 May (JC), the usual 2 at Durling's Farm 4 May (KZ) and varying numbers (max=3) in Mountain Park throughout May (JB). The White-throat in the Cielo Vista area left in early May (EG, ELG). Lastly, a Swamp Sparrow was at Santa Teresa CC 5 May (JD).

OBSERVERS: Bob Bleicher, Janet Brockmoller, Dave Brown, John Caraway, Jeannette Cole, Joe DiPasquale, Jeff Donaldson, Jane Fowler, Al Gavit, Madeline Gavit, Ed Gilboe, Elza Gilboe (ELG), Joe Guinn, Peggy Heisel, Perry Jamieson, Stephanie Jamieson, Kris Kohlhoff, Leon Kohlhoff, Richard McGinty, Louise Metzger, Sarah Murdoch, Betty Roberts, John Sproul, Lucille Swick, Christos Thomaidis, Sunny Wratten, Kevin Zimmer. (Report observations to John Sproul, 601 W. Yandell #25, El Paso 79902; ph: 545-5157 home, 543-6126 work.)

(FLASH: As this issue goes to press, word comes of 3 LOUISIANA HERONS at Tornillo Lakes 31 May (KZ).)

### ATTENTION, CHECKLIST FANS

With the next (September) ROADRUNNER, you will get a bonus: the soon-to-be-printed revised field checklist for birds of El Paso County and adjacent areas. It's the first revision in 6½ years. If you can't wait till then, contact John Sproul (545-5157) 'long about July.

Also, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) recently published a brochure that lists the field checklists available for different places in Texas and tells you how to get them. Entitled "Birding in Texas," it is available from the Resource Management Section, TPWD, 4200 Smith School Rd., Austin, TX 78744, or from John Sproul.

The ROADRUNNER is distributed to all members of the El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society. Nonmembers can subscribe for \$3.00 per year. Mail payments to John Sproul, 601 W. Yandell #25, El Paso, TX 79902. Make checks payable to El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society.

Deadline for the September ROADRUNNER is 27 August.

## FIELD TRIPS FOLLOW-UP

We sandwiched 2 field trips around our 3 May Big Day Count. On 27 Apr, 24 participants found 42 bird species at Durling's Farm and the Owen yard in the upper valley. On 17 May, the 8 people who ventured to Guadalupe Mtns. Natl. Park and Rattlesnake Springs encountered 31 species, including about 30 Vermilion Flycatchers at the Springs. En route, they also spotted some pronghorn with young.

For the Big Day Count, steady wind combined with morning rain meant spotty coverage of some areas, but results were still respectable. The 21 participants

managed to scare up 134 species. (We have hit 150 before.) Kevin Zimmer took individual honors by finding an even 100 species. Other participants included: Bob Bleicher, Jeannette Cole, Bob Dukes, Diane Dutton, Jane Fowler, Al and Madeline Gavit, Ed and Elza Gilboe, Joe Guinn, Peggy Heisel, Perry and Stephanie Jamieson, Kris Kohlhoff, Evan and Jo Nagel, Sid Shepperd, John Sproul, Lucille Swick and Dorothy Tobkin. All 3 May observations in the OBSERVATIONS report are from the Big Day Count.

### THANK YOU TO:

Don Rathbun - for a unique and informative talk on meteorites at our May General Meeting.

The Jack Gothards (of Durling's Farm fame) and Cornelia Owen - for enduring the thundering herd of birders in your yards, both for our 27 Apr field trip and at other times.

Joe Sanchez and Hank and Ruth Jaeckel - for letting wayward birders into your yards to pursue their quarry.

Peggy Heisel and her able assistants -- Bob Dukes, Jane Fowler, Joe and Eliza-

beth Guinn, Jo Nagel and Sid Shepperd-- for making the Chapter \$162 richer through our recent rummage sale. All Audubon members are hereby instructed to start saving unwanted items for next year, when we'll do even better.

Ed and Elza Gilboe - for hosting the pre-Big-Day-Count planning session.

Bob and Gretchen Bleicher - for hosting the tired, the dirty and the hungry at the post-Big-Day-Count dinner.

### CONSERVATION

#### SENATE ALASKA DEBATE NEARS

By the time you get your next ROADRUNNER in September, the US Senate should have voted on the Alaska National Interest Lands bill. Debate is set to begin 21 July. Under terms of a time agreement, the weak bill reported by the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee will be the focus for debate. Up to 14 amendments can be offered to this bill, 5 by supporters of stronger legislation, 9 by backers of a weak bill. Debate can't exceed 20 hours, and no filibusters are permitted. After the Senate considers

these amendments, the Tsongas-Roth Substitute Amendment may be introduced. The Alaska Coalition, to which Audubon belongs, calls this substitute bill "by far the best alternative."

The 5 strengthening amendments were introduced 22 May. They would amend the weak Committee bill to:

- improve its management provisions and include additional scenic rivers;
- increase national wildlife refuge acreage from 43 to 58 million acres;

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## EMPIDONAX IDENTIFICATION TIPS

The small flycatchers of the genus Empidonax are notoriously difficult, so similar you think you'll never tell them apart. We get 4 species in El Paso: the Willow, Dusky, Gray and Western Flycatchers. (The Willow was formerly considered conspecific with the Alder Flycatcher, and both are lumped as Traill's Flycatcher in most field guides.) Best clues for identifying these birds are song and breeding habitat. Unfortunately, all 4 only migrate through El Paso. None breed in our area.

So, do you follow Peterson and let "most of them go as just Empidonaxes?" Don't give up so easily. The following points, extracted shamelessly from David Gaines' BIRDS OF THE YOSEMITE SIERRA (1977, California Syllabus, Oakland, 153 pp) may help you out. They supplement, but do not replace, the information in field guides. They are not the last word on the subject.

Bill - The Willow and Western have larger, broader bills than the others, with the lower mandible usually pale-colored throughout, rather than usually dark-tipped as in the Dusky and Gray.

Eye-ring - The Willow lacks a strong eye-ring; the others have one. Because of the faint eye-ring, you might confuse a Willow Flycatcher with a Western Wood Pewee. The Pewee is slimmer, smoky black rather than brown above and does not constantly pump its tail.

Throat - The Western has a yellowish wash on its throat (visible only in good light); the others have whitish throats.

Back - The Western has a greenish back, the Willow a brownish-olive, and the Gray and Dusky have grayish backs.

Tail Movement - When perched, the Gray dips its tail downwards; the others jerk their tails upwards.

Some Empids are still in our area in early June. With the above points, you should be able to start sorting them out. Use these notes together with the descriptions in field guides and other sources; remember that a bird is best identified on the basis of a variety of characters rather than just one. If you have no luck now, wait till fall. They'll all be back. And remember you'll probably still have to let "most of them go as just Empidonaxes."

## CONSERVATION (Continued)

- improve national park boundaries and management;
- increase park and wildlife refuge wilderness from 34 to 53 million acres;
- increase national forest wilderness in se. Alaska in accord with Forest Service recommendations.

If these amendments pass, the bill will still fall short of the Tsongas-Roth Substitute and the strong bill the House passed last year. But it will be minimally acceptable to take to the House-Senate Conference, where differences between the House and Senate bills will be resolved. Will we see final action on Alaska in 1980? The Conference is the key. If a strength-

ened bill passes the Senate, the Conference can be brief. If a weak bill passes, forget it. Congress hopes to adjourn 3 Oct. It will recess 2-17 Aug for the Democratic Convention and 29 Aug-2 Sept for Labor Day. That does not leave enough time for the Conference to do its job should the House and Senate bills be vastly different.

Right now, Senators Lloyd Bentsen (240 Russell Senate Ofc. Bldg., Wash., DC 20510) and John Tower (142 Russell Senate Ofc. Bldg., Wash., DC 20510) aren't paying this issue much attention. Neither has committed himself, though Tower has expressed antipathy toward a strong bill in the past. Both Senators need to hear from constituents that:

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CONSERVATION (Continued)

- the issue deserves their full attention;
- the Energy Committee bill is inadequate;
- all 5 strengthening amendments must be passed to make the bill minimally acceptable; and
- the Tsongas-Roth Substitute deserves their support and cosponsorship.

A key word in the Alaska debate will be ENERGY. Our Senators should know that under both the House-passed bill and the Tsongas-Roth Substitute, 95% of Alaska's onshore lands with a "high" or "favorable" potential for oil and gas could be open to exploration and development.

SEWAGE PLANT FES OUT SOON

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will release the Final Environmental Statement (FES) soon for the proposed

wastewater treatment plant for northeast El Paso. If you submitted comments on the draft, you are already on the mailing list for the FES. If you did not submit comments and want to obtain the FES, request a copy from Mr. Clinton B. Spotts, Regional EIS Coordinator, EPA, Region 6, 1201 Elm St., Dallas, TX 75270, ph: 214/767-2716.

There is only a 30-day comment period on the FES (beginning the day its availability is announced in the Federal Register). If you want to comment on EPA's final decision with respect to the future of the Ft. Bliss Sewage Ponds, do not dawdle. The unofficial word is that EPA will continue to endorse elimination of the ponds and overflow areas, with no mitigation for loss of wildlife habitat.

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