

The



Roadrunner

Newsletter of the El Paso/Trans Pecos Audubon Society

Volume 27 No. 1

February - March, 1997

DINNER and AWARDS

Annual Meeting, Sunday, February 16, 1997, 6:00 PM.

February is the month for our annual dinner and awards banquet. This year the dinner will take place at the El Paso Zoo, and be held in the Grasslands Cafe, in the Asia exhibit. Please note that the day is Sunday, February 16, and the time is 6:00 PM. The zoo closes at 5:00 PM, so come to the main gate (in the parking lot by Dudley Field) and let security know you are here for the dinner. Better yet, come early and enjoy the zoo before it closes.

The menu for the dinner will be BBQ brisket, baked beans, corn, salad, and desert(cherry or banana cream pie). The cost will be \$13.00 per person. Please contact Betty Pagel prior to February 12 if you plan to attend. Her phone number is 772-2686.

Our speaker for the meeting will be Catriona Glazebrook. Ms Glazebrook was recently as the first Executive Director of the Texas State Office of the National Audubon Society. Prior to this position, Catriona was the director of Environmental Policy Institute in New Hampshire, a faculty member at Antioch New England Graduate School and Vermont College of Norwich University, and has also worked seven years as a senior environmental attorney advising non-profit organizations, litigating environmental cases to protect wetlands, and representing national and international clients. Ms. Glazebrook will be speaking to us about the future of the National Audubon Society and Audubon in Texas. We will also be presenting our Conservation Award and Meritorious Service Award to two individuals. Please join us for dinner. It is important to our membership and is just a good time to socialize with friends that share a common interest. Hope to see you there.

UTAH - IDAHO - WYOMING - COLORADO

General Meeting, Monday, March 17, 1997, 7:30 PM

Bobs back! You enjoyed the December program, so come to the March meeting and see the rest of Bob Johnson's summer trip. For Saint Patrick's Day come and see the **GREEN** of Park city, Utah to Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado. Lots of scenery and some birds and wildlife. Even if you missed December you are welcome to come in March. The meeting will be held in the Garden Center, located at 3105 Grant St. in Memorial Park.

Duck Days at Feather Lake

by John Sproul

The water level at our Feather Lake Wildlife Sanctuary is nearing its seasonal low right now, with lots of shallow water bordered by broad mudflats. Several thousand ducks, mainly Green-winged Teal and Mallard, are in winter residence. Great Blue Herons, Great and Snowy egrets and Ring-billed Gulls are enjoying easy fishing. American Crows and Chihuahuan Ravens make sure there's never a quiet moment.

A lot of folks helped at our 6 workdays in 1996: Berttye Barnhart, Lupe Barrera, Craig Braginton, Birdie Burkett, Jane Fowler, Lucy Hunt, Bob Johnson, Fran McCarty, Jo Nagel, Betty Pagel, Cyrus Reed, Rosa Maria López-Reed, Susie Schneider, John Sproul and William Zoochie. Many thanks to one and all! Thanks also to Jim Paton for his recent donation of a spotting scope to the sanctuary.

Our workday crews accomplished a lot in 1996, but they did save a few tasks for 1997. Our next session will be Sunday, March 16. We'll start at 2 PM, work a few hours, then see how many White-faced Ibis arrive at the end of the day. Join us!

Feather Lake is located at 9500 N. Loop at Bordeaux in El Paso's lower valley. Check the calendar on the back page for dates and times it is open. Admission is free.

El Paso Environmental Center

by John Sproul

The El Paso Environmental Center, now 6 years old, is serving more and more as a focal point for citizen environmental action in El Paso. Groups using the Center in recent months have included the Border Environmental Network, Chihuahuan Desert Wildlife Rescue, El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon, the Franklin Mountains Wilderness Coalition, Friends of Hueco Tanks, Habitat for Humanity, Rio Bravo River Watchers, the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo Basin Coalition, and the Sierra Club.

The Center's continued operation has depended wholly on a small group of dedicated volunteers. Sincere thanks go to the folks who have helped in recent months: Berttye Barnhart, Erika Episcopo, Jane Fowler, Hugh Jameson, Barbara Mertig, Jo Nagel, Barbara Nehring, Betty Pagel, Mike Seidensticker, John Sproul, Daniel Valdez and Vic Ward.

The popularity of the Center's recycling program has surged recently. It needs a similar surge in volunteers to keep up with the expanded workload. Also, the Center operates without the benefit of a recycling coordinator, a volunteer coordinator, a groundskeeper, or a director. The director position has been vacant almost 4 years now. Call me at 532-9645 or stop by the Center if you wish to help in any way.

The Environmental Center is located at 800 South Piedras at Paisano. It is open Wednesday through Saturday from 9 AM to 2 PM.

The Texas Audubon Society

by John Sproul

The Texas State Office of the National Audubon Society moved from concept to reality January 6 when Catriona Glazebrook began work as its first executive director.

Catriona's background is impressive — environmental lawyer, policy analyst, scientist, educator — and well suited for her new role. Her emphasis over the past 10 years has been on the human dimensions of environmental management: working to find organizational structures

within which groups can best achieve their environmental goals. In this sense, she says she views herself as an architect.

Catriona hopes to visit all Audubon chapters in Texas over the next 6 months. On February 16, she'll be in El Paso for our chapter's annual meeting (see page 1). Join us in welcoming her to Texas!

Meanwhile, the architecture of Audubon in Texas continues to be reshaped. The process began with National Audubon's new strategic plan. It continued with the conceptual plan for the Texas State Office. Now comes the work of creating a structure that can best achieve the vision of the conceptual plan.

Representatives of Texas Audubon chapters met on South Padre Island January 17-19 to continue crafting that new organizational structure. We haven't settled on its exact shape yet. But we do know it will be known as the Texas Audubon Society, and it will work first and foremost to strengthen Audubon chapters in Texas, to bring chapters together, and to protect birds, other wildlife and their habitats in our state. □

EXTRAORDINARY RAVENS — EXTRAORDINARY SOLUTIONS

From THE BWD SKIMMER, August 1996.

There is a great deal of anecdotal evidence suggesting that common ravens are among the most intelligent of birds, although there is debate over what avian intelligence is and how to measure and describe it. One measure might be "insight," the ability to see a problem and recognize a solution without using inherited information or resorting to trial and error. Bernd Heinrich describes a study that suggests common ravens are capable of insight at a level not demonstrated by other birds ("An Experimental Investigation of Insight in Common Ravens [*Corvus corax*]," *The Auk* 112: 994-1003). Working with five birds raised in captivity, Heinrich presented the ravens with a piece of meat suspended from a tree limb by a string. The birds could not reach the meat from either the limb or the ground. Two of the birds leapt at the meat from the ground and grabbed hold of it. One bird flew to the limb, pulled once at the string, and then proceeded to pull the meat up in a multi-step process of pulling the string, laying the string on the limb, stepping on it to hold it in place, and then repeating the process seven or eight times until the meat was in reach. The bird performed the task on the

first effort, without practice. One other bird in the group later performed the same action. When food on strings was provided at a feeding site where about 50 wild ravens were present, no bird approached the strings and the birds seemed agitated and fearful of the strings. In two groups of wild ravens captured and tested in captivity, three of 14 birds pulled the meat up almost immediately and 4 of 13 did so in the second trial.

In an attempt to determine how much the ravens knew about the relation between the string and the meat, Heinrich complicated the tests with some groups by adding strings with rocks, strings with nothing attached, and by crossing the strings or dislocating the meat so that it appeared to be hanging beneath a different string. While some birds showed initial confusion when presented with these problems, most of those that had pulled strings before quickly adjusted and nearly always pulled the string with the meat. The author concludes that neither random chance nor learning can explain the "insight" shown by the exceptional individual ravens that solved the problem. Other instances of birds pulling strings to retrieve food, mostly involving finches, all resulted from extensive training before the birds learned the trick.

Birdathon '97

Believe it or not, even though there is still snow on the ground in some spots in town, its time to begin planning for **Birdathon 1997!** What is Birdathon? It's not your average bird count or fundraiser, that's for sure! Birdathon is totally unique: a boisterous and frenzied weekend of birding and our organization's most important source of income for conservation and education programs. Dedicated Birdathon counters will be wildly scurrying about throughout the land, trying to find as many bird species as possible in a single 24-hour blitz. These hardy & intrepid individuals will start early, stay out late, visit varied wildlife habitats and give their eyes, ears and bird knowledge a full workout. Why do they push themselves so hard? For the pleasure of a day afield, for the chance to collect meaningful data for a nationwide census project, for a test of their birding skills and most importantly, for a better West Texas environment. Each counter will be backed by sponsors who pledge either a given amount for each species seen or a fixed total amount. Most counters will see 50 to 100 species. A pledge of, say \$0.50 per species for 60 species would result in a Birdathon contribution of \$30. All contributions are tax-deductable. **Fully 95%** of Birdathon income goes to our named projects; 5% pays for the cost of fundraising. As usual, Birdathon '97 will take place in the Spring and we hope you can join us for a full, rewarding weekend of birding throughout the El Paso area.

We can use your help in a number of ways: -

Aid in the pre-birdathon efforts to make this year's endeavor proceed smoothly. We can use help in folding inserts, filling envelopes with Birdathon information and with getting the mailings out in the post. We also need someone that can help keep track of the funds raised and in setting up "count teams", as needed. Would you like to participate as a counter or sponsor?

-Be a counter on Birdathon day and ask a friend to join you. Be prepared for a most enjoyable experience!

-Be a Birdathon sponsor. As a Birdathon sponsor, you'll be entered in our ever-popular local drawings for a number of great prizes!

The proceeds of our 1996 Birdathon efforts benefited local & national Audubon programs equally, and the efforts of the El Paso/Trans-Pecos chapter were designated to fund the following endeavors:

EDUCATION. Birdathon was the main source of funding used in support of our Audubon Adventures youth education program and our Audubon Ecology Camp Scholarship Program. The scholarship provided a local educator with the opportunity to attend an Audubon Ecology Camp to enhance their environmental education skills.

EL PASO ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER. Funds were used to help support essential capital improvements at the center.

FEATHER LAKE WILDLIFE SANCTUARY. Our chapter manages this "Oasis in the Dessert" for the benefit of local wildlife and as a teaching tool for environmental education concepts. It's also a great place to watch birds and enjoy a pleasant hike.

NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY'S SOUTHWEST REGIONAL OFFICE. Our support helped to ensure that this NAS regional office continued to be an effective, respected voice for the West Texas environment.

Join the crowd and HELP OUT!! Please contact Nancy Wilson (833-3907) or John Kiseda (833-6212) for details.

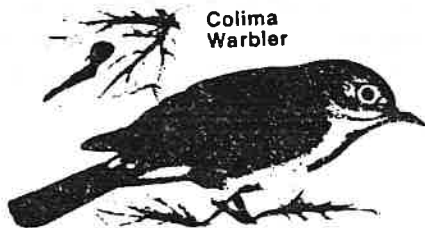
On The Trail

FORT BLISS PONDS

One of the better places to see *ducks* in El Paso is at the **Northeast Oxidation Ponds**, and quite a few wading birds are always present. This winter has shown that quite a few (10 or more) *Red-tailed hawks* are usually present, along with *Northern Harriers*. *Chipping, Song, Brewers* and *White-crowned Sparrows* are always present in the winter and possibly a *Swamp Sparrow* and a *Marsh Wren* could pop up on a reed. Paul Bingham (755-9496) will try to help you find these birds and others. Meet Paul in the parking lot of the closed Walmart store (NORWEST Bank is in the front corner) 9825 Dyer Street at 7:32 AM on Saturday the 15th of February.

DOWN THE VALLEY

McNary, Fort Hancock, and Tornillo Reservoirs are always good for *Gulls, Ducks, ??Geese, Egrets and Cormorants*. Quite a few species of passerines could also be present along with some birds of prey to include *Harris' Hawk*. You will make a quick stop at Esperanza to check out a flood control ponding area where *Vermillion Flycatchers* are possible. During lunch break at the Tornillo Rest Stop we might see the *Western Screech Owl*. Craig Braginton (877-4138) will lead the parade down Interstate 10 from Feather Lake (our sanctuary on North Loop Road) where you can meet him at 7:23 AM on Sunday March 2d. This is about a 7 hour roundtrip so bring lunch.



UP THE VALLEY

Caballo Dam and Percha Dam State Parks will be the destination for this trip. The water in the lake is always full of water birds and sometimes a rare *Gull* is present. *Mergansers* and maybe a *Loon* could be swimming around, *Cormorants* fish in the lake and the river below the dam. At Percha some good passerines are usually hopping around the bushes and maybe a *Spotted Sandpiper* could be patrolling the edge of the river. Scott Cutler (581-6071) will show you where these parks are and try to help you identify the various species. Meet Scott at I-10 and Trans Mountain Road on Sunday, March 23d, the time will be 7:18 AM.



BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK

The weekend of April 11-13 we will be looking for the *COLIMA WARBLER* in the Chisos Mountains, which are located in **Big Bend National Park**. This is the only place in the USA where this bird nests. Other great birds can also be found in the park and we will search these out.

Some of our tour already has reservations at Big Bend Motor Inn (1-915-371-2218) and others will be in the campground. Contact your leader, Bob Johnson (757-1876) for details.

On The Trail -- continued from page 5.

SOUTHEAST ARIZONA

Coronado NF: Reserve the **Memorial Day weekend May 24 - 26** for your trip to Cave Creek in Portal Az., the *Elegant Trogon* will be the bird of the trip. Details in the April - May newsletter.

SEEN ON PAST TRIPS

The seven birders that accompanied Al Gavit into the rocks at **Hueco Tanks State Historical Park on December 1** saw some good birds, including *Red-naped Sapsucker, Scrub Jay, Mountain Chickadee and Pine Siskin.*

January 18th and 19th found 15 lucky people from El Paso touring together with Nancy Wilson at the **Bosque Del Apache National Wildlife Refuge**. During a Ranger conducted tour into the back area wildlife spotted included a *Whooping Crane, an albino Sandhill Crane, Mule deer, and Wild Turkeys.* Some of the birders had not been to the Refuge before and were awed by the sunrise liftoff of thousands of *Snow Geese and Sandhill Cranes.* During the weekend various of the group saw *Hooded Mergansers, Common Goldeneyes* and many of the *61 Eagles* wintering over, also spotted was a Porcupine.

FRIENDS OF HUECO TANKS

Every Sat. and Sun. 10:00 AM and 2:00 PM

Rock Art Tours.

Sun. Feb., 16 - Bird Identification Tour 8:00 AM.

Sat. Feb., 22 - Hueco Tanks Slide Show

Rock Art & General Info. 6:00 PM.

Sat. Mar., 15 - Hueco Tanks Slide Show

Birds of Hueco Tanks. 6:30 PM

Sun. Mar., 16 - Bird Identification Tour. 8:00 AM

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

We had 18 counters combing the desert in the vicinity of Hueco Tanks SHP on Dec. 28th. The weather was pretty good and 2355 birds (10yr. avg. is 2740) in 61 species (10 yr. avg. 61.8) were recorded.

Unusual aspects were that we had **NO Coots, Horned Larks or Savannah Sparrows.** Species with higher numbers than average *Morning Dove, Brewer's(sway up) and White-crowned Sparrows.* Those with numbers lower than average were *Rock Wren, Starling, Rufus-crowned Sparrow, and Dark-eyed Junco.*

2 *Blue-gray Gnatcatchers* were spotted and these had not been seen in over 10 years.

The El Paso count had 32 people helping us to a record count of 111 species, the old was 110 in 1987. Our total birds amounted to 23,586 which above the 10 year average of 20,870.

We had no *Canyon Wrens, Brewers Sparrows* or *Lark Buntings.* Low numbers occurred with *Great Blue Herons, Wood Ducks, Northern Harriers, Red-tailed Hawks, American Kestrel, Least Sandpiper, Common Snipe, Loggerhead Shrike, Canyon Towhee, Black-chinned and Black-throated Sparrows.*

High numbers of *Pied-billed Grebe, Snow Geese, Gambel's Quail, and American Coot* were seen and we set an El Paso record for *White-winged Dove* with 1786, the previous record was 1403 in 1994. We had a *Great Egret* for the first time since 1987, and a First for the count was a *Black-bellied Whistling Duck.*

Of course the best bird for both counts was *Lawrence's Goldfinch.* Quite a few of this specie has been in the area since Oct., but prior to that only 2 documented records for Texas existed.

Observations

November 16, 1996 to January 15, 1997

Uncommon, Rare, and CASUAL sightings

A very rare sighting has the full entry *italicized, bold and underlined*. Some of the listings may not be considered RARE, but because of the season or habitat (date and/or location **bold and underlined**) they are unusual. The listing of birds here is determined using the checklist "Birds of El Paso County, Texas and Adjacent Areas" 7th Edition, October 1987. If you are unsure of a sighting, don't hesitate - report it, to Bob "WILDBIRDER" Johnson 757-1876 (recorder).

Observers: George Barnett, Flora Bittick, Madaline Gavit, Inga Groff, Richard Hermosillo, Hugh Jameson, Bob Johnson, Larry Jordan, Patricia Russell, Susie Schnieder, John Sproul, Dorothy Thomkins, Jimmy Zabriskie, Barry Zimmer, Mob-Many observers, -yd-at yead feeder, Var-Various dates within period..

Locations: Can/Canutillo, CCA/Country Club Area, CHs/Court House, Cor/Coronado Area, DMA/Doniphan Marsh, Dps/Dripping Springs, FBP/Fort Bliss Ponds, FLk/Feather Lake, Fro/Frontera, Hor/Horizon City, HTk/Hueco Tanks, KPA/Kern Place Area, McN/McNary Area, Mon/Montoya, MPk/Mountain Park, NEE/North East El Paso, NSt/North Stanton, NTb/Nations-Tobin Park Area, Sod/Sod Farm, STA/ Santa Teresa Area, TnW/Tennis West, Tor/Tornillo, VDM/Vista Del Monte, WCt/West Cottonwood Spring.

LOONS thru DUCKS

<u>Common Loon</u>	12/21	LJ	Tor
Great Egret	Var	JS	FLk
Blk.Crwnd Night Heron	12/23	JZ-yd	Can
<u>White-faced Ibis</u>	<u>Var</u>	JS	FLk
Snow Geese (15)	12/21	PR	Sod
	1/1	JS	FLk
<u>Ross's Goose</u>	12/21	LJ	McN
Wood Duck	Var	JS	<u>FLk</u>
<u>Blue-winged Teal</u>	12/7	JS	FLk

HAWKS thru WADERS

Ferruginous Hawk	12/27	BZ	CCA
Golden Eagle	11/20	BZ	NTb
Merlin	11/16	GB	Mon
<u>Peregrine Falcon</u>	12/17	LJ	CHs
	12/30	RH	CHs
Prairie Falcon	11/20	BZ	NTb
Black-necked Stilt	Var	JS	FLk
	Var	Mob	CCA
<u>American Avocet</u>	12/2	JS	FLk
<u>Lesser Yellowlegs</u>	12/15	JZ	DMA

GULLS thru FLYCATCHERS

Bonaparts Gull	11/19	JS	FLk
Herring Gull	<u>12/21</u>	LJ	McN
	<u>1/1</u>	JS	FLk
Anna's Hummingbird	11/23	FB-yd	Cor
	(4)	12/27	BZ
Red-naped Sapsucker	12/15	JZ	TnW
	12/25	MG-yd	Hor
<u>Downey Woodpecker</u>	<u>12/27</u>	<u>BZ</u>	<u>VDM</u>
<u>Hammond's Flycatcher</u>	Var. Dec.	JZ-yd	Can

CHICKADEES thru WARBLERS

Mountain Chickadee	11/25	DT	HTk
Red-breasted Nuthatch	12/9	HJ	MtP
<u>Carolina Wren</u>	<u>12/27</u>	<u>BZ</u>	<u>VDM</u>
Townsend's Solitaire	12/26	JZ	WCt
Cedar Waxwing	11/18	SS	KPA
<u>Solitary Vireo</u>	<u>12/8</u>	JZ-yd	Can
	(Cassin's)	12/14	LJ
			<u>VDM</u>
<u>Hutton's Vireo</u>	<u>12/27</u>	<u>BZ</u>	<u>NSt</u>
Orange-crowned Warbler	Var	PR-yd	STA
<u>Olive Warbler</u>	<u>12/21</u>	<u>JZ</u>	<u>DpS</u>
Common Yellowthroat	<u>12/26</u>	JZ	Fro

SPARROWS thru GROSBEAKS

Lincoln's Sparrow	12/26	JZ-yd	Can
<u>Common Grackle</u>	Var	BJ	VDM
Bullock's Oriole	<u>11/20</u>	BZ	FBP
<u>Cassin's Finch</u>	<u>11/25</u>	<u>DT</u>	<u>HTk</u>
Red Crossbill	11/19	RH	FLk
	11/25	DT	HTk
	(to rehaber)	12/10	IG
	Var	Mob	CCA
<u>Lawrence's Goldfinch</u>	<u>Var</u>	<u>Mob</u>	<u>HTk</u>
	<u>Var</u>	<u>Mob</u>	<u>CCA</u>
American Goldfinch	Var	JZ-yd	Can
<u>Evening Grosbeak</u>	<u>11/25</u>	<u>DT</u>	<u>HTk</u>

The Roadrunner

February

Sun., 9 - Feather Lake open.
2:00 PM to Sunset
Mon., 10 - Board Meeting.
Environmental Center, 7:30 PM.
Sat., 15 - Feather Lake open.
8:00 AM to Noon.
Sat., 15 - Field Trip, Fort Bliss
Ponds. See page 5.
Sun.16-Bird Identification Tour.
Hueco Tanks - 8:00 AM.
Sun., 16 - Feather Lake open.
2:00 PM to Sunset.
Sun., 16 - Annual Meeting.
6:00 PM See page 1.
Sat.22-Hueco Tanks Slide Show.
Rock Art/General 6:00 PM.
Sun., 23 - Feather Lake open.
2:00 PM to Sunset

March

Sat., 1 - Feather Lake open.
8:00 AM to Noon.
Sun., 2 - Field Trip, McNary.
See page 5.
Sun., 2 - Feather Lake open.
2:00 PM to Sunset.
Sun., 9 - Feather Lake open.
2:00 PM to Noon.
Mon., 10 - Board Meeting.
Betty Pagel, 7:30 PM.
Sat., 15 - Feather Lake open.
8:00 AM to Noon.
Sat.15 Hueco Tanks Slide Show.
Birds of Hueco Tanks, 6:30 PM.
Sun.16 Bird Identification Tour.
Hueco Tanks, 8:00 AM

March

Sun.16 Feather Lake Work Day
1:00 PM, see page 2.
Sun., 16 - Feather Lake open.
2:00 PM to Sunset.
Mon. 17 - Audubon Meeting.
7:30 PM see page 1.
Sun., 23 - Field Trip, Caballo.
See page 5.
Sun., 23 - Feather Lake open.
2:00 PM to Sunset.
Sun., 30 - Feather Lake open.
2:00 PM to Sunset.

April

Fri.,11 - Sun. 13. Big Bend,
See page 5.

El Paso Trans/Pecos Audubon Society
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