

the ROADRUNNER



newsletter of the
El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society
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Editor: John Sproul

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• CALENDAR

PROGRAM

19 MAY 1980, 7:30 PM, Garden Center, 3105 Grant St., in Memorial Park. METEORITES I HAVE KNOWN. Meteorites, masses of stone or metal that have reached the earth from outer space, are found more often by chance by amateurs than by people deliberately looking for them. If you spend much time in the field, as Audubon members do, odds are you have encountered meteorites. But have you known it at the time? Audubon member Don Rathbun spends plenty of time afield, knows what to look for, and has found his share of these rocks from outer space. At our May meeting, with the aid of some representative samples, Dr. Rathbun will train us in the art of finding meteorites.

FIELD TRIPS

SAT. 3 MAY. SPRING BIG DAY COUNT. Our Big Day Count will be a semi-organized, low-key affair with 3 goals: 1) to spend an enjoyable day in the field, 2) to see how many species the participants collectively can find and 3) to see which party can find the most species. Each group will have an assigned area to cover, but once you have thoroughly combed that area, you are free to wander. Unlike the Christmas Count, there are no limits to the area we can bird. We'll make area assignments the night before, Fri. 2 May, at 7 PM at Ed and Elza Gilboe's, 1305 Oakdale, ph: 772-1942. If you want to participate, but can't make this meeting, call Bob Bleicher (591-7261) evenings. Saturday, we'll rendezvous at Bob and Gretchen Bleicher's, 2809 Hector, for a pot-luck supper and to compile our results. Plan to arrive between 5 and 6 PM.

SAT.-SUN. 17-18 MAY. GUADALUPE MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK. Meet at the Bella Napoli Restaurant parking lot, corner of Montana and Yarbrough, at 7 AM. We'll stay at Pine Springs Campground (110 miles from El Paso) with an optional trip to Rattlesnake Springs. You can walk as little or as much as you want. Species that can be seen from the campground include Turkey Vulture, Golden Eagle, Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Violet-green Swallow, Steller's and Scrub Jays and Western Bluebird. Typical birds at Rattlesnake Springs in May include Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Vermilion Flycatcher, Orchard Oriole, Summer Tanager and Blue Grosbeak. The springs are also well-known for attracting vagrant species. Bring food and camping gear. Call trip leader Joe Guinn (566-8438) if you plan to attend.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

MON. 12 MAY, 7:30 PM. The Board will meet at the home of Joe Guinn, 5000 Alabama #31, El Paso, ph: 566-8438.

FROM THE PEN OF THE PRESIDENT

Into each life some SNOW may fall! That is what came to my mind when I awoke on the morning of 12 April, the day we (our chapter) were programmed to go to the Clay Miller Ranch. We had so enjoyed the trip in 1979 and were looking forward to that trip--well, thanks again to the Clay Miller's for their kind invitation and to all those willing to go.

Thanks to Wes Leonard for a real thought-provoking program on the energy problem, given at our April General Meeting. It is true that if we all "try" we can help save energy. That's why we plan ahead,

use carpools and get in our share of walking.

Please come to our General Meeting on 19 May. Dr. Donald Rathbun will be our speaker. He has found meteorites on trips off the beaten path and will tell us how to spot and identify meteorites which we could accidentally find while out birding. You will enjoy his presentation.

Remember, 3 May is our May Day Bird Count. Check the newsletter for additional data.

--Bob Bleicher

REMEMBER THE RUMMAGE

A golden opportunity to dispose of all your unneeded junk is fast approaching. Our rummage sale to raise funds for Feather Lake is Sun. 25 May. If you don't need it, we'll sell it. Bring your accumulated treasures to the home of Kris Kohlhoff, 6945 La Cadena, (581-3565) on the west side or Peggy Heisel, 10423 Adonis, (821-1269) on the east side. Call ahead to let 'em know you're coming.

If you can't deliver, call Peggy and she will arrange to pick your stuff up.

Peggy also needs: volunteers to help with the sale, card tables and clothes racks on which to show our wares, and people with pick-up trucks to transport everything. Please give Peggy, and Feather Lake, a hand.

OBSERVATIONS - 24 March to 24 April 1980

This month brought another snowstorm (12 Apr), signs of a good year for shorebirds and first arrivals for many spring migrants and summer residents.

JS) were in more typical habitat. Feather Lake has had White-faced Ibises since 13 Apr (TG, AG, JF), with over 60 now present (TG). The birds come in before dusk and leave early each morning. A single ibis was at the lake in late March (TG, fide AG) and one was at the Ft. Bliss Sewage Ponds 14 Apr (KZ).

HERONS THROUGH OSPREYS

On 21 Apr, we had our first spring record in recent years for a LITTLE BLUE HERON. The single adult was on the Rio Grande between Borderland and Country Club Rds. in the upper valley (KZ). Can anyone explain what an immature Green Heron was doing in a yard in Morningside Hgts. 10 Apr (IS, JF)? The 2 Black-crowned Night Herons at Randle's Pool 6 Apr (JF, JN,

First report of a Turkey Vulture this spring came 1 Apr from ne El Paso (SL). The first Swainson's Hawk report came 16 Apr from the upper valley (JD). A non-resident adult Golden Eagle was flying E over the Franklin Mtns. 1 Apr, both an adult and an immature were E of the

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Deadline for the June ROADRUNNER is 28 May.

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.

OBSERVATIONS (Continued)

mountains 6 Apr, and another probable immature was in that area 24 Apr (all JD). Two OSPREYS were in the Tornillo area 5 Apr (PJ, SJ), with 1 there 13 Apr (KZ). OSPREY reports from the upper valley 6 Apr (JF, JN, JS) and 14 Apr (TD, fide JD) may have been for 2 birds or a single lingering individual.

PLOVERS THROUGH TERNS

After several down years, we're getting fair numbers and a good variety of shorebirds in 1980. Three BLACK-BELLIED PLOVERS were at the Ft. Bliss Ponds 18 Apr (AC, fide KZ). Fifty Long-billed Curlews were in a field near the Fabens Port of Entry 5 Apr (PJ, SJ), with a like number several miles S and flying over the Rio Grande 13 Apr (KZ). Twelve MARBLED GODWITS appeared at the Socorro Sewage Ponds 13 Apr, and the Ft. Bliss Ponds had 1 on 14 Apr and 2 on 19 Apr (all KZ). Also at Ft. Bliss 19 Apr were a Solitary Sandpiper and 3 Baird's Sandpipers. (KZ).

The 30 Franklin's Gulls at the Socorro Sewage Ponds 13 Apr (KZ) were an unusually large concentration. One was also at Ft. Bliss Ponds 14 Apr (KZ), and a lone Forster's Tern was at Tornillo "Lakes" 13 Apr (KZ).

OWLS THROUGH WOODPECKERS

A Barn Owl was reported from the upper valley 6 Apr (JD). A male Broad-tailed Hummingbird buzzed along a ridge W of S. Franklin Peak 4 Apr (JD), and another male was in the Cielo Vista area 14 Apr (EG, ElG). On 15 Apr, a male Yellow-bellied Sapsucker visited a yard in the Radford School area (JC).

PASSERINES

Some first reported arrivals: Western Kingbird, 5 Apr in the upper valley (JD); Ash-throated Flycatcher, 8 Apr NE of El Paso (JG, SS); Olive-sided Flycatcher, 24 Apr in Memorial Park (JDiP); male Hooded Oriole, 30 Mar in a yard near

Memorial Park (JN); male Scott's Oriole, 4 Apr in Mountain Park (JB); female Townsend's Warbler, 24 Apr in Memorial Park (JDiP); and Black-headed Grosbeak, 16 Apr at Durling's Farm (KZ).

The Tornillo area had a Cassin's Kingbird 13 Apr (KZ), and a male Vermilion Flycatcher appeared in Memorial Park that day (JDiP). The 2 Scrub Jays at Hueco Tanks 19 Apr (KZ) were staying later than usual. Memorial Park continues to hold Red-breasted Nuthatches, with 2 seen 9 Apr (KZ). A Brown Creeper stayed in Horizon City 13-16 Apr (AG). Durling's Farm had a House Wren 16 Apr (KZ). Two Brown Thrashers that wintered in Mountain Park are still there (JB). Other Brown Thrasher reports were of 2 in Horizon City 28 Mar (AG) and 1 in Memorial Park 9 Apr (KZ). Two Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were at Hueco Tanks 19 Apr (KZ).

Warbler season opened 22 Apr. Five species were in Memorial Park that day, including single Nashville and Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warblers and a PALM WARBLER (JDiP). The latter was only the second record for our area, following 1 from Randle's Pool in Apr 1976. The "Myrtle" was seen 23 Apr also (KZ). Red Crossbills frequented Morningside Hgts. in small groups in late March and early April, with a maximum of 12 seen 24 Mar (IS). Two were also at Memorial Park 12 Apr (JDiP). A male Black-chinned Sparrow was in a canyon off Transmountain Rd., east side, 11 Apr (JD). The White-throated Sparrow in the Cielo Vista area has stayed over 4 months now (ElG). The 2 White-throats wintering at Durling's Farm were there 6 Apr (JF, JN, JS), with 1 also spotted and heard singing 16 Apr (KZ).

OBSERVERS: Janet Brockmoller, Al Canaris, Jeannette Cole, Tony Debona, Joe DiPasquale, Jeff Donaldson, Jane Fowler, Al Gavit, Tom Gavit, Ed Gilboe, Elza Gilboe (ElG), Joe Guinn, Perry Jamieson, Stephanie Jamieson, Steve Lopez, Jo Nagel, Sid Shepperd, John Sproul, Lucille Swick, Kevin Zimmer. (Report observations to John Sproul, 601 W. Yandell #25, El Paso 79902; ph: 545-5157 home, 543-6126 work.)

DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRDS

Below is the format the Texas Ornithological Society uses for documentation of unusual bird records for the state. It will give you an idea of the level of detail desirable for documenting rare-bird sightings. There is still much we do not know about the distribution and seasonal occurrence of birds in Texas. Careful observers can add to our knowledge, but all observations are considered unverified unless accompanied by thorough documentation. Note that a photograph is highly desirable. The old attitude that no record could be accepted without a specimen doesn't hold today. In most cases, good photographs are equally valid.

TEXAS ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN UNUSUAL RECORD

1. Species: 2. AOU No.:
(Vernacular Name) (Scientific Name)
3. Location:
4. Date(s): 5. Time bird seen: to
6. Description of size, shape and color-pattern. (DESCRIBE IN GREAT DETAIL ALL PARTS of the plumage including beak and feet coloration in addition to the diagnostic characteristics; however, include only what ACTUALLY WAS SEEN IN THE FIELD):
7. Description of voice, if heard:
8. Description of behavior:
9. Habitat - general:
specific:
10. SIMILARLY APPEARING SPECIES WHICH ARE ELIMINATED by 6, 7 and 8 above; EXPLAIN:
11. Distance: Close, Middle, Far (estimate)
12. Optical equipment:
13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and observer):
14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species:
15. What made you think this species was unusual or rare?
16. Other observers:
17. Did others agree with your identification?
18. Other observers who INDEPENDENTLY identified this bird:
19. Books, illustrations and advice consulted and how did these influence this documentation:
20. If bird was photographed, please attach pictures and describe equipment used:

..... Street Address:
Signature

Date Prepared: City and State:

Submit reports to: Dr. Keith A. Arnold, TOS Bird Records Chair
Dept. of Wildlife Science
Texas A & M Univ.
College Station, TX 77843

CONSERVATION

RECYCLING CREEPS FORWARD IN EL PASO

On 15 April, Mildred Smith, El Paso's "Tin Can Lady," addressed City Council and expressed her concern about the need to educate El Pasoans on what articles can be recycled from their own trash. There are local buyers of tin and aluminum cans and newspapers. Mrs. Smith said she would like to see a city ordinance changing garbage pick-up to only 1 day per week. Citizens would be encouraged to separate these 3 recyclable items and put them aside for a designated day each month when the Sanitation Dept. would pick them up.

Alderman Jim Scheer made the motion (and it was passed) that the Council go on record supporting a voluntary source-separation program. He volunteered to be on the steering committee. A representative from the Sanitation Dept. was asked to see that a program for picking up the recyclables be developed and the necessary information be given to Council members. /Jane Fowler/

NONGAME BILL UPDATE

S. 2181, the Senate nongame bill, was approved by the Environment and Public Works Committee in March. It should be voted on in the full Senate in the next few months. The bill has undergone some changes. The Resource Protection Subcommittee dropped the idea to finance state nongame programs with a tax on birdseed, feeders, birdhouses and bird-baths (ROADRUNNER, Feb 1980), deciding the industry is too small to support such programs. Instead, the subcommittee recommended a bill authorizing \$50 million over 4 years for planning and implementation of nongame programs. The full committee then cut that to \$20 million. The bill also directs the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to complete a study on other funding options by 1984. Even though the funds involved are a pittance, passage of this bill will not be easy, given the current budget-cutting mood of Congress.

CALIFORNIA CONDOR PROGRAM UNDERWAY, CONTROVERSY CONTINUES

Last December, National Audubon Society and 4 government agencies launched a joint program to preserve the California Condor as a breeding species in the wild (AUDUBON; March, May and Sept 1978, March 1980). Congress appropriated \$500,000 for this effort; Audubon seeks to raise a like amount to cover its own costs over the next 5 years.

Trends in the available population data for condors are ominous. Condor biologist Sandy Wilbur recently reported he was able to make 1 condor sighting for every 3.37 hours of field work in 1970-71, but only 1 for every 6.38 hours in 1977-78. In 1970-71, 10.8% of his sightings were of 5 or more condors; in 1977-78, just 1.3%. Current estimates for total population range from 15 to 35 individuals.

Based on evidence such as this, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service decided an all-out recovery program, including captive breeding, could wait no longer. The Condor Research Center now has expanded studies of condor ecology underway, and already there has been a notable success: discovery of an active California Condor nest. It is the first known evidence of nesting in 3 years. If tests with Black and Turkey Vultures and Andean Condors prove successful, the research team would like to trap some California Condors in Sept. Two would be fitted with radio transmitters and released. If an immature female were caught, it would be kept as a mate for Topatopa, the condor in the Los Angeles Zoo.

If the 2 radio-equipped birds showed no ill effects after 1 month, up to 8 more birds would be trapped and fitted with transmitters. (All trapping would stop on 1 Feb 1981 to avoid interfering with breeding.) These birds would be monitored to determine the ones best suited for a captive-breeding program. Each step in this sequence leading to captive breeding would be taken only after successful

CONDOR (Continued)

results at the previous step. Captive breeding already has been accomplished with Andean Condors. Ultimately, captive-reared California Condors would be released to the wild to bolster the existing population.

The program is controversial. Some people say more reliable population estimates should be obtained before attempting captive breeding. Others oppose any sort of "hands-on" work with the birds, fearing it will only cause them to slide closer to extinction.

To conduct the trapping and radio-tagging, the Condor Research Center needs a permit from California's Fish & Game Commission. The Commission's 30 May meeting,

when the permit request will come up, promises to be a stormy session. Friends of the Earth is trying to rally opposition to the permit, saying the program will do the birds more harm than good. California Audubon chapters are split down the middle over this controversy. (To express your opinions on the permit request, write: California Fish & Game Commission, 1416 Ninth St., Sacramento, CA 95814.)

Audubon is actively seeking contributions to fund its share of the condor recovery program. If you want to contribute, send checks, payable to National Audubon Society, to: National Audubon Society, attn: John Steward, 950 Third Ave., New York, NY 10022. Indicate with a cover note that the donation is for the California Condor Project.

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