



The Roadrunner

Newsletter of the El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society

El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society

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The e-Roadrunner

The Roadrunner is now also available electronically as a PDF file. If you would like to receive our newsletter in this way via e-mail, just send a note to John Sproul at jsproul@utep.edu.

El Paso/Trans-Pecos
Audubon Website!

Updated information about upcoming field trips, calendar of upcoming events, and recent bird sightings.

www.trans-pecos-audubon.com



THE MEXICAN DUCK IS BACK

On June 30, the North American Classification Committee of the American Ornithological Society (AOS) released the 61st supplement to the AOS's Check-list of North and Middle American Birds. The report summarizes changes the committee made in the check-list between 15 April 2019 and 15 April 2020. One change was particularly relevant for our corner of the world.

In 1886, Robert Ridgway of the United States National Museum published the first description of a new species of duck that naturalists with the Mexican Geographical and Exploring Commission had collected in southern Mexico. He gave it the name Mexican Duck (*Anas diazi*, in honor of Augustin Diaz, the director of the Commission). Over time, ornithologists found that its range extended to southeastern Arizona, New Mexico, and Trans-Pecos Texas ... and that it was known to hybridize with the closely related Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*).

Despite the evidence of hybridization, the Mexican Duck continued to be recognized as a full species, in part because there had been no quantitative assessment of the levels of hybridization. That changed in 1977 when John Hubbard at the University of New Mexico presented such an assessment based on a traditional hybrid-zone index of plumage characters of specimens from Canada to southern Mexico. Based on Hubbard's studies, the Classification Committee decided in 1983 to reclassify *diazi* as a subspecies of *A. platyrhynchos*.

This was not a clear-cut, straightforward decision. Hubbard himself noted that his recommendation to reclassify *diazi* "must be regarded as tentative and subject to revision." Back then, we simply lacked the analytical tools to measure gene flow and genetic differentiation among closely related taxa like the members of the North American mallard complex (Mallard, Mexican Duck, American Black Duck and Mottled Duck).

It is a different world today. Genetic studies are revolutionizing our understanding of avian taxonomy. Recent work on the North American mallard complex has strengthened the case for considering the Mexican Duck distinct from the Mallard. Based on these studies, the Classification Committee decided to recognize the Mexican Duck once again as a full species.

And it should be noted that one of the lead researchers on the genetic studies that led to this latest taxonomic change was Dr. Philip Lavretsky with the Department of Biological Sciences at The University of Texas at El Paso!

El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society

Officers

President: Scott Cutler, 581- 6071
Vice President: Jane Fowler, 598-2448
Secretary/Treasurer: Eddie Chew, 587-9589

Committees

Conservation: Kevin Floyd, 613-6354
Education: Kathleen Whelen, 820-1895
Field Trips: Star Posada, 407-6442
Hospitality: vacant
Membership: Elizabeth Chase, 539-1191
Newsletter Editor: Kathleen Whelen, 820-1895
Programs: Susie Schneider, 542-3041
Publications: Jane Fowler, 598-2448
Publicity: Heather Rivera, 212-2825
Sanctuary: John Sproul, 545-5157
Website: vacant
Facebook: Kevin Floyd, 613-6354

The Audubon Foundation of Texas



represents Texas
Audubon chapters in the Earth Share of Texas
payroll deduction plan for charitable giving.

General Meeting; Via Zoom Link September 21, 2020 6:00pm Dr. David Angerstein

The El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society is going virtual for the September General Meeting! Check the website and your email for a joining link in September to be sure and attend this meeting.

Located around the Arenal in La Fortuna, Costa Rica, we will introduce you to the [ASIS Wildlife Rescue Center](#) through a virtual tour of the facilities, the animals that are being cared for as well as the daily regimen and education programs that are implemented at the center. We will elaborate on our current projects & how you can get involved.

El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society
<http://www.trans-pecos-audubon.com>

Join us on Facebook!



There is now an El Paso Audubon Society group on Facebook. Our aim is to provide a space for people around El Paso to share pictures, sightings, and other information about birds and conservation.

All levels of pictures are welcome. If you are looking for help with identification, please include the location and date of the picture, as both are important with narrowing the possibilities.

Conservation Organizations

Greater Big Bend Coalition
<https://greaterbigbend.wordpress.com/>

Chihuahuan Desert Education Coalition
<http://www.chihuahuandesert.org>

Second Chance Wildlife Rescue
<https://www.secondchancewildliferescue.org>
Josie Karam (915) 920-7867

El Paso Zoo (915) 212-0966
www.elpasozoo.org

Stick House Sanctuary
<https://www.facebook.com/epwildliferescue>
(915) 219-2365

Keystone Heritage Park 581-7920
www.keystoneheritagepark.com

Asombro Institute
(Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park)
(575) 524-3334 www.asombro.org

Friends of Rio Bosque 747-8663
www.riobosque.org

Southwest Environmental Center
(575) 522-5552
www.wildmesquite.org

Franklin Mt. Wilderness Coalition
www.franklinmountains.org/

Celebration of Our Mountains
www.celebmtns.org

Let's "Fly" into Action! Audubon's Birdathon 2020!

Birdathon counters are already "in training" in preparation for Birdathon 2020. It all takes place October 3 & 4.

What is Birdathon, you might ask?

One thing is for sure, it's not your average bird count or fund raiser! Birdathon is unusual and different: a wild weekend of SOCIAL DISTANCE birding and our organization's most important source of income for conservation and education programs.

We hope you can join us for a full, rewarding weekend of birding by being a **sponsor** and possibly even a counter.

Birdathon 2020 will benefit the following programs and projects:

CHAPTER OPERATIONS

Your support allows our chapter to work alongside other organizations to support conservation & education.

RIO BOSQUE WETLANDS PARK

Each year, this site along the Rio Grande becomes more valuable as habitat for birds and other wildlife.

AUDUBON TEXAS

Our support helps keep National Audubon's state office an effective voice for birds, other wildlife and their habitats in Texas.

EL PASO-AREA WILDLIFE REHABILITATORS

Our support will help three deserving wildlife-rehabilitation programs in the El Paso area, **The El Paso Zoo Raptor Rehabilitation Program**, **Second Chance Wildlife Rescue** and **Stick House Sanctuary**, care for injured or orphaned birds for release, where possible, back into the wild.

How Birdathon Works

On the weekend of **Oct. 3 & 4**, our dedicated Birdathon counters will be busy scouring the countryside, trying to find as many bird species as possible, in a single 24-hour blitz. These hardy, energized and 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 in the field, 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 identify 50 to 100 species. A pledge of, say \$0.50 per species for 60 species would result in a contribution of \$30. Over 95% of Birdathon income goes to the programs and projects; less than 5% to fundraising (printing, paper and postage).

Looking for someone to sponsor for Birdathon? This year's outstanding counters are a dedicated bunch, most of whom are experienced Birdathoners. If you supported one of these people last year, please give them a call and sponsor them again. If you don't know any of the counters personally and don't know whom to choose, please give Jane (598-2448) a call.

At press time, our confirmed counters for this year's Birdathon include:

- | | | |
|----------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Eddie Chew | John Kiseda | John Groves |
| Scott Cutler | Jim Paton | Susan Schneider |
| Lucretia Chew | Richard Hermosillo | Kevin Floyd |
| John Sproul | Joe Cancellare | |

Please pick one or more individuals and give them your support!

Whether it's \$0.25 per species or \$1.00 per species or any given amount, we hope you will consider a pledge to Birdathon 2020. Please pick one or more counters to sponsor and return the enclosed coupon today.

Your generosity and support help make Audubon Birdathon a success.

EI Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society BIRDATHON 2020

Thank you for your generous Birdathon pledge!

Your gift is tax deductible as allowed by law

YES! I'll sponsor _____
for \$ _____ per species for each species she/he finds on
Birdathon 2020 or for a flat amount of \$ _____.

I will add a bonus of \$ _____ if my Birdathon counter sees a

**Please make checks payable to
EI Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society.**

**My tax deductible gift of \$ _____ sponsoring
_____ is enclosed.**

From: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

Please return this form by Oct. 1st to:

**Eddie Chew
390 Flemish Cir.
EI Paso, TX 79912**

AT FEATHER LAKE

A storm on July 25 brought Feather Lake its most significant shot of water since early March. Water depth at the inlet reached 2.55 feet. Much, but not all, of the basin flooded. You can probably guess what else the storm flows brought. Some people still have not embraced the idea that trash should not be dumped in stormwater drains.

In late June, the National Audubon Society released updated Guidelines for COVID-19 and Outdoor Conservation Activities. Here is the relevant language for activities like workdays at Feather Lake:

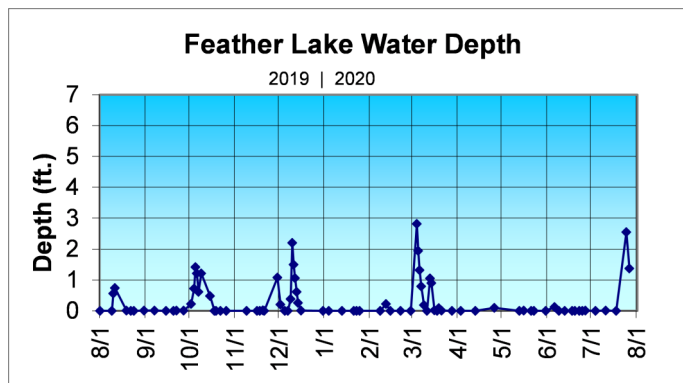
If not prohibited by a Shelter-in-Place order (SIP) or modified SIP, you may move forward with small (generally 15 people or less) scale stewardship and monitoring activities where you can have staff and/or volunteers follow, at minimum, these Safety Measures

- ✦ **Work mainly outdoors;**
- ✦ **Maintain appropriate physical distance, a minimum of 6 feet from others;**
- ✦ **Wear cloth masks;**
- ✦ **Properly sanitize equipment; and**
- ✦ **Wash hands or use hand sanitizer frequently.**



Supervisors must provide staff and volunteers with either the opportunity to wash their hands with soap and water regularly or the ample use of hand sanitizer.

Following this guidance, we held a Feather Lake workday August 8. The next one will be **Sat., October 10**, starting at **8 a.m.** Feather Lake is located at 9500 North Loop at Bordeaux in El Paso, 0.3 miles west of Americas Ave.



Audubon at

Rio Bosque Wetlands Park



The trails at Rio Bosque Wetlands Park continue to be open for birding and other outdoor recreational activities.

If you visit, keep your group size small, maintain appropriate social distancing and wear a mask.

Group events like tours and workdays are still not taking place at the park, but that could change.

For up-to-date information on tours, birds and water conditions at Rio Bosque, check www.riobosque.org.

Birdathon 2020

The El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon's annual fundraiser, our Birdathon, is taking place on the weekend of October 3-4, 2020.

Postponed from its usual spring occurrence due to the coronavirus pandemic, our intrepid counters will be out doing their best to see as many different species as possible while being mindful of social distancing and working individually or in small groups.



El Paso/Trans-Pecos
Audubon Society
P.O. Box 972441
El Paso, Texas 79997

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**National Audubon Society
Chapter Membership Application.**

Yes, I'd like to join. Please enroll me as a member of the National Audubon Society and the El Paso/Trans-Pecos Chapter.

Send AUDUBON magazine and my membership card to address below.

Check for \$20.00 enclosed payable to National Audubon Society

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State ____ Zip _____

**National Audubon Society
Chapter Membership Data Center
PO Box 97194
Washington, DC 20090-7194**

Local Chapter Code **C1ZW100Z**

Dates to Remember

August

Sat 8: **Feather Lake Workday**
refer to guidelines page 2

Mon 10: **Board Meeting**

No General Meeting

September

Mon 14: **Board Meeting**

Mon 21: **General Meeting**
(Virtual)



October

3 & 4: **Birdathon**

Sat 10: **Feather L. Workday**

Mon 12: **Board Meeting**

Mon 19: **General Meeting**
(virtual)



Be safe!

www.trans-pecos-audubon.com

El Paso/Trans-Pecos Local **Chapter Only Membership** Your \$15.00 will help support chapter activities & you'll receive *The Roadrunner* delivered to your mailbox. Make checks payable to the El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society

Name: _____
Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Mail to: EPTP Audubon P.O. Box 972441 El Paso, Texas 79997