

the ROADRUNNER



newsletter of the
El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society
P.O. Box 9655, El Paso, TX 79986

Editor: John Sproul

December 1980

Volume 10, Number 10

CALENDAR

GENERAL MEETING

MON. 15 DECEMBER 1980, 7:30 PM, Fiesta Room, Hillmark Apartments, 5000 Alabama St. CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS—1980. Our general meeting for December will be a planning session for our 2 Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs). We will review organizational details and finalize teams for both the El Paso and Hueco Tanks CBCs. As an added feature, Joe Guinn will give a slide presentation on El Paso birding areas and our field trips for this year past. Members and nonmembers alike are urged to be at this meeting and to participate in the CBCs. If you want to participate in a count but can't attend the meeting, contact 1 of the compilers (see below). If you need directions to the meeting room, contact Joe Guinn (566-8438).

MON. 19 JANUARY 1981. A GREAT WHITE BIRD. The life and times of the Whooping Crane.

FIELD TRIPS

SAT.-SUN. 17-18 JANUARY 1981. BOSQUE DEL APACHE NATL. WILDLIFE REFUGE. Details next mo.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

SAT. 20 DECEMBER 1980. EL PASO COUNT. Over 40 years old, the El Paso Count is probably the only CBC that includes 3 states (Chihuahua, New Mexico and Texas) from 2 nations (Mexico and the USA). Its 15-mile-diameter count circle is centered on the south end of Mt. Franklin. Last year, we had the high count in Texas for 14 species: Golden Eagle (2), Gambel's Quail (41), Ringed Turtle Dove (1), White-throated Swift (65), Black-chinned Hummingbird (2), "Red-shafted" Flicker (34), Crissal Thrasher (16), Northern Parula (1), Yellow-headed Blackbird (50), House Finch (700), Lesser Goldfinch (33), Black-throated Sparrow (440), Sage Sparrow (10) and "Oregon" Junco (189). The totals for Black-chinned Hummingbird and Black-throated Sparrow were national highs. More important, we had our all-time high number of participants, as 32 observers saw 6822 individuals of 103 species (104 if you count Mexican Duck). Other all-time highs are 104 species in 1976 and 60,200 individual birds in 1953.

Joe DiPasquale (779-5104) is compiling this year's count. Contact Joe if you can be on 1 of the count teams. Even if you can't be afield with us 20 Dec, you can still contribute by recording observations at your backyard feeder. Feeders attract and keep rarities. If you have a feeder in your yard and will be able to keep a tally of birds on count day, if even for a few minutes, contact the feeder compiler, Elza Gilboe (772-1942). Elza also will be the clearinghouse for rare-bird reports. Call her if you see something unusual, and she'll try to dispatch an observer to confirm it.

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After the count, at 5 PM, we will meet at Ed and Elza Gilboe's (1305 Oakdale, El Paso, 772-1942) for a pot-luck dinner and "species countdown." You can leave your contribution to the dinner with Elza any time that day or even the day before.

The participation fee for the count, necessary to defray the cost of publishing results in AMERICAN BIRDS, is \$1.50 for all field and feeder participants.

SAT. 3 JANUARY 1981. HUECO TANKS COUNT. The Hueco Tanks CBC, centered on a peak in the Hueco Mtns. 1.9 mi. south of US Hwy 62-180, began in 1974. Last year, the 18 observers saw 1835 birds of 54 species. The highlight was a Cassin's Kingbird, the only 1 seen on a Texas CBC in 1979-80. All-time highs are: 75 species in 1974, 3018 individual birds in 1976 and 24 participants in 1976.

Al Gavit (852-3119) is the Hueco Tanks compiler, the man to contact if you can participate. The pot-luck dinner and "species countdown" following this CBC will be at Bob and Gretchen Bleicher's (2809 Hector, El Paso, 591-7261), beginning at 5 PM. Bring dishes to the Bleicher's any time on count day or the day before.

Once again, the participation fee is \$1.50 for all participants.

OTHER WEST TEXAS-SOUTHERN NEW MEXICO CBCs

<u>Date</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Compiler/Contact</u>	<u>Phone</u>
20 Dec	Davis Mtns., TX	Pansy Espy	915/426-3999
20 Dec	Las Cruces, NM	Thom Marr	505/523-6443
20 Dec	Loving, NM	Steve West	505/745-3653
21 Dec	Lakes Avalon-McMillan, NM	"	"
21 Dec	Balmorea, TX	Frances Williams	915/694-6908
22 Dec	Alpine, TX	John Schmidt	915/837-2983
28 Dec	Chisos Mtns., TX	C. C. Wiedenfeld	915/653-7918
29 Dec	Big Bend Natl. Park, TX	"	"
30 Dec	Ruidosa, TX	Jody Miller	915/467-2651
4 Jan	Delaware R., NM-TX, or Guadalupe Mtns. Natl. Park, TX	Steve West	505/745-3653

WHAT IS A CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT?

A popular turn-of-the-century activity in rural America was the Christmas Side Hunt. Communities competed to see which could record the largest collective kill of birds on Christmas Day. Frank M. Chapman; editor of BIRD-LORE, the forerunner of AUDUBON magazine; thought little of this idea, and in 1899 he offered a nonlethal alternative: a Christmas Day spent observing birds and recording their abundance. The first "Christmas Census" attracted just 27 participants, with 25 reports submitted.

The Christmas Side Hunt has since faded into history. Not so Chapman's brain-

child: the "Christmas Census" evolved into the Christmas Bird Count, the largest cooperative ornithological exercise in North America. Last year, 33,022 participants took part in 1320 CBCs and tallied over 109 million birds. For some, the CBCs are a competitive event, an attempt to find more birds than other counts or to better the totals from previous years. For others, CBCs are a social event, when all of an area's birders gather and swap stories. Still others are most concerned with contributing through CBCs to ornithological knowledge. For all, the CBCs are excellent recreation and a highlight of the birding year.

What's involved? As many people as possible

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fan out on a selected day near Christmas and count all birds seen within a 15-mile-diameter circle. We divide into teams, each team covers a given area, and each is led by a person who knows that area. Newcomers are encouraged to take part, for they have an excellent opportunity to learn from the veterans on their team. We stress accuracy and completeness to increase the scientific value of the CBC results. The emphasis is on counting all birds seen rather than just compiling a lengthy species list and chasing rarities. We spend all day combing the count circle, then meet that night to compile the results and relive the day's events. #

THE "IDEAL" CBC

As an indicator of the existing and potential scientific value of CBCs, consider that the first 2 papers at the recent international Bird Census Symposium concerned CBCs. In 1, Robert Arbib, editor of AMERICAN BIRDS, the Audubon publication that publishes the CBC results, introduced his proposal for "ideal" CBCs. He offered 12 suggestions for improving the conduct of and record-keeping for CBCs. Next year he hopes to implement them in a limited number of CBCs that volunteer to serve as "elite" counts.

Most of the 12 suggestions involve strict adherence to the present CBC rules or more detailed reporting of results by compilers. Some should be of general interest, though:

- * Stay within the count circle.
- * Require elite counts to exceed certain minima for numbers of observers/parties.

FROM THE PEN OF THE PRESIDENT

After an absence of 2½ months, I arrived back in El Paso on 7 Nov 1980. Upon arrival, we thought we had left behind the snow of western New York, Canada, Michigan and parts of the midwest--especially after we had to run the air conditioner on the way to El Paso, as it was 85°F when we returned. Then the snow caught up with us, and on Sat. 15 Nov and Sun. 16 Nov we were back in SNOW COUNTRY--right here in El Paso, Texas!

- * Waive the participants' fee to ensure the correct number of participants is reported.
- * Stress careful data collection.
- * And, most controversial, try to gain some control over variable ability of observers.

Arbib suggested an Observer Reliability Index (RI):

$$RI = (\text{avg. hrs afield/yr}) \times (5 \text{ yrs}) \times (\% \text{ state list you've seen}) \times (0.01)$$

What would your RI be? The Texas list includes approximately 530 species. You may also want to figure your local RI, based on the El Paso Co. list of approximately 300 species. Arbib suggested people with RIs below a minimum, say 5, could not take part in elite counts.

Will his ideas take hold? Except for the RI, they should. When participants understand that they can increase the value of the counts by exercising proper care, these ideas should become the norm for CBCs and not just be limited to elite counts.

The RI probably will remain just an idea; too contrary to CBC tradition to succeed. Arbib emphasized that CBCs serve other purposes than data collection. They function on the enthusiasm of 1000s of willing participants, drawn by the opportunities that CBCs provide for recreation, social interaction, competition and amateur involvement in a nationwide enterprise. He agreed we ought not to tamper with CBC procedures too much, lest we kill that enthusiasm. #

I was glad to hear of the fine turnouts at the Audubon Chapter meetings during my absence and was in fact pleasantly surprised, and delighted, to see the good attendance at the Sat. 8 Nov field trip to the lower valley and the Sun. 23 Nov trip to Hueco Tanks State Park. Our El Paso Christmas Count and the Hueco Tanks Count, with their planning meeting, make up our December activities.

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January brings our annual elections and a need for members to fill vacating chairmanships on our Board of Directors. The Chapter will have to elect a new vice-president, as Vice-president John Sproul will become Chapter president and take office in February. Also, we must elect a secretary/treasurer. Sid Shepperd (566-2162) is chairman of the Nominating Committee. John Sproul, as the new

president, will have to appoint new committee chairpersons, and I ask you, the membership, to give him your help and support, as any club can only function through membership participation and support.

Please check the data in this newsletter regarding our El Paso and Hueco Tanks Christmas Counts and participate with us in these events. I look forward to seeing you and birding with you. /Robert P. Bleicher, Chapter President/

OBSERVATIONS - 23 October to 26 November 1980

GREBES THROUGH FALCONS

Three Western Grebes at Tornillo enlivened an Audubon field trip 8 Nov (mob). At least 2 were dark-phase birds (JF, JN), distinguished from the light phase by a black cap that extends below the eye rather than ending above it, a dull-greenish-yellow bill rather than a yellow-orange bill, and darker back, flanks and hind neck. The possibility that the 2 phases are separate species has renewed interest in their relative distributions, and El Paso birders should try to determine the color phase of Western Grebes whenever possible. The trio was still at Tornillo 15 Nov (TW). Ten Canada Geese arrived at Feather L. 26 Nov, along with 3 Snow Geese (TG, fide MG). A Snow Goose also flew over the Tornillo area 8 Nov (mob). Only Wood Duck reported recently was the male at Diez Lagos fishing camp in the upper valley 26 Oct (JD).

Another GOSHAWK appeared, this 1 an immature in the Horizon City area 22 Nov (JC). The cold November weather also brought Rough-legged Hawks, with 2 in the Newman Rd. area of n.e. El Paso 17 Nov (JD), 1 there 23 Nov (JD, PH) and 2 near the McCombs landfill 26 Nov (JD, PH). On 11 Nov, an immature and 2 adult Harris' Hawks were at 1 lower-valley location and an adult female at another (JC, JF). Golden Eagles have been reported from many locations. Two deserve note: an immature soaring over residential/commercial e. El Paso 4 Nov (SJ) and an adult perched with a flock of sparrows on a telephone line

(yes, on the wire) off Hwy 62/180 near the Hueco Tanks turn-off 23 Nov (JD, PH).

Single Ospreys have been in the bosque s. of Randle's Pool 26 Oct and 17 Nov (JD), at Cielo Vista Golf Course 5-6 Nov (EG) and at Santa Teresa Country Club in New Mexico 6 and 10 Nov (TD, fide JD). Prairie Falcon reports come regularly now. More surprising was the immature PEREGRINE FALCON in the Horizon City area 23 Nov (JC).

CRANES THROUGH WOODPECKERS

Some 19 Sandhill Cranes flew W from the Ft. Bliss Sewage Ponds 23 Oct (JD). The 1st stock pond on the road to Hueco Tanks enhanced its reputation for owls with 2 Long-eared Owls (mob) and a SHORT-EARED OWL (JD, PH, TW) 23 Nov. Among our late-migrant hummingbirds was an immature male ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD that sojourned in a Mission Hills yard 3 to at least 26 Nov (EK, PK, JS). A "Yellow-shafted" Flicker stayed in Memorial Park 8-15 Nov (JDiP).

PASSERINES

COMMON CROWS have been, well, common lately. One was cawing in the upper valley near Diez Lagos and Randle's Pool 1 Nov (JD, JDiP, KZ). Some 30 were w. of the Socorro Sewage Ponds (JD, mob) and 50 were in 2 groups at Tornillo (JD) 8 Nov. Another 50 were scattered along I-10 between Horizon City and Fabens 16 Nov (AG). First Red-breasted Nuthatch for the fall appeared in Memorial Park 10 Nov (JDiP, KK), followed by 1 at Hueco Tanks 11 Nov (DT).

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The Memorial Park bird also was spotted 15 Nov (JDiP). Single Brown Creepers were in a n.e. El Paso yard 26 Oct (JDiP) and at Hueco Tanks 11 Nov (DT).

Bluebirds appeared as early as 2 Nov, when 20 Westerns were near Santa Teresa CC (JD) and 10 were at Hueco Tanks (JDiP, KK), with 2 Mountain Bluebirds also at the tanks (JDiP, KK). The tanks held 5-6 Townsend's Solitaires 1 Nov (AG, TW) and 2 on 23 Nov (mob). The desert near Santa Teresa CC is a good place to look for Black-tailed Gnatcatchers: 1 was there 2 Nov, 2 on 3 Nov, and 2 on 10 Nov; 1 also was w. of McCombs Rd. in n.e. El Paso 13 Nov (JD).

A "Myrtle" Warbler was at Surratt's Pond 8 Nov (BB, JF), but the surprise warbler for the month has to be the male HOODED WARBLER observed from within 5 meters in Horizon City 21 Nov (MG). Six COMMON GRACKLES were near the intersection of N. Loop Rd. and Ave. of the Americas in the

lower valley 8 Nov (JD, PH) and 1 was at the 1st stock pond on the road to Hueco Tanks 23 Nov (JS, mob). A male Western Tanager w. of Randle's Pool 31 Oct (JD) was very late.

A male and female Cardinal frequented the saltcedar near the irrigation ditch n.w. of Randle's Pool 1 Nov (JD). Six American Goldfinches flew over Hueco Tanks 2 Nov (JDiP). A Sage Sparrow was at the tanks that same day (JDiP, KK) and 1 was in the desert s. of the tanks 23 Nov (JS, et al.). The fall's 1st White-throated Sparrow worked the margins of 1 of the ponds at Hueco Tanks 23 Nov (JN, JF, JS, TW).

OBSERVERS: Bob Bleicher, John Caraway, Tony Debona, Joe DiPasquale, Jeff Donaldson, Jane Fowler, Al Gavit, Madeline Gavit, Tom Gavit, Ed Gilboe, Peggy Heisel, Stephanie Jamieson, Earle King, Paula King, Kris Kohlhoff, many observers (mob), Jo Nagel, John Sproul, Dennis Taylor, Tony Worth, Kevin Zimmer. (Report observations to John Sproul, 601 W. Yandell #25, El Paso 79902; 545-5157 H, 543-6126 W.) #

FIELD TRIPS FOLLOW-UP

On 8 Nov, 19 birders gathered at Feather L., checked out the resident waterfowl and continued on to the Socorro Sewage Ponds, where we saw Horned Larks and a Ferruginous Hawk. Next was Surratt's Pond in Clint, with its congenial group of ducks and a "Myrtle" Warbler. At Tornillo, we spotted a lovely Snow Goose, 3 Western Grebes, Black-crowned Night Herons and Ring-billed Gulls. Some 61 species were seen on a fine day of birding.

On a sunny 23 Nov, 19 again proved to be our lucky number, as that many participants journeyed to Hueco Tanks. At 1 stop on the road to the tanks, we spotted 2 Long-eared Owls, a Short-eared Owl and a Common Grackle. In the park we saw 2 Townsend's Solitaires, Phainopeplas, a tiny Verdin refurbishing its nest and a Great Horned Owl snoozing in the afternoon sun. In all, 47 species were seen.
/Jane Fowler/

RUMMAGE WRAP-UP

In just a few hours of bargaining on Sat. 1 Nov, our crack sales team raised \$212 for future Audubon activities. Thanks go to Jane Fowler, Joe and Elizabeth Guinn,

Peggy Heisel, Jo Nagel and Sid Shepperd for their work that day and to all who contributed rummage for the sale. Start saving your unwanted junk now for next spring's sale. #

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The ROADRUNNER is sent to all members of the El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society. Non-members can subscribe for \$3 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 January ROADRUNNER is 31 December.

BIRDERS' HOTLINE

El Paso birders are fortunate to be living in an area that is centrally located with respect to some of the most exciting birding spots in the country. Cave Creek Canyon is just 4 hours to the west, while Tucson and Patagonia are only a few hours farther. Big Bend Natl Park is a 6-hour drive to the south, and a few hours to the north is the Gila Wilderness. To top it all off, we are equidistant from San Diego and Houston, both within reach by a long day's drive.

Rising gasoline prices have made birding trips to these areas a rarity for many of us. There is a way around the problem. The solution lies in expense-sharing. By car-pooling, gas expenses may be reduced by as much as 75%, the tab for a motel room (split 4 ways) becomes bearable, and through a little cooperative ice-chest filling, the cost of food is also easier to take. In early October I carpoled

with 2 other birders to Monterey, California, for a boat trip run by the Western Field Ornithologists. We saw shearwaters, petrels, murrelets, guillemots, auklets, seals, sharks and porpoises, and my total expense after more than 3 days and 2500 miles was about \$50. With trips of only 200-300 miles, expenses could be cut to almost nothing.

I am trying to organize a cooperative hotline for trips of this sort. If an Eared Trogon shows up in Cave Creek, we could carpool out to see it at an expense of less than \$10 per person. Likewise, if a pelagic trip is being run out of San Diego, we could make it there and back in a weekend at a very minimal cost by splitting the driving and the gas. The potential is almost limitless. If you are interested in getting on the hotline, call me at 581-0665. /Kevin Zimmer/

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