



NEWSLETTER
of
EL PASO AUDUBON SOCIETY
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Geth Osborn White, Editor

CALENDAR

Monday
Jan. 17
7:30 P.M.

Regular meeting at Centennial Museum, U.T.E.P. Our speaker will be Ellison Rodgers, graduate student in the Biological Sciences at U.T.E.P. He will speak on "Snakes of the Desert and their Relationships to Birds." He will bring some captive specimens to illustrate his talk. This will be a good opportunity to learn about predator-prey relationships.

Saturday
Jan. 15
1:00P. M.

Wilderness and Master Plan hearing on the Big Bend National Park at City Hall, Alpine, Texas. The future of this unique mountain-desert park is involved at the hearing. Show your interest by attending or making a written statement to the Hearing Officer, Big Bend National Park, Texas 79834. The Audubon Society has a copy for borrowing upon request of the Master Plan and Wilderness Plan.

Wednesday
Jan. 19
9:00 A.M.

MID WEEK FIELD TRIP designed primarily for housewives, scout leaders and any men lucky enough to have the time. Back by noon at the latest. Meet at Country Club Road bridge over the Rio Grande to check the river for shore and water birds, the open desert and irrigation drainage ditches for wintering species. Bring coffee and friends.

Saturday
Jan. 22
7:30 A. M.

FIELD TRIP TO EXPLORE CANYONS ON EAST SIDE OF FRANKLINS. Rendezvous at entrance to McKelligon Canyon. Jim Koons will lead us to several springs on this side of the mountain. Upper canyons are actually rich in bird and animal life. It will be interesting to see wintering birds in this habitat.

Saturday,
Jan. 29
7:30 A. M.

FIELD TRIP FOR LONGSPURS to the Kerr Ranch about 100 miles up the Carlsbad Highway. Rendezvous at Memorial Park by tennis courts. Mary Bell Keefer has arranged to get permission for us explore this beautiful 100,000 acre ranch where the deer and the antelope play at the base of the Cornudas. Sage sparrows, sage thrashers, horned larks and birds of the upland grasslands should be seen. Bring lunch and water for this day trip.

CHRISTMAS COUNT, 1971.

Lackaday! This was the lament of the birders and football fans on Saturday, the 18th of December, when they scrambled out from warm covers and looked at the cold, grey dawn.

This was the annual Christmas Count Day and the Sun Bowl Classic.

Only perseverance and patriotism kept loyal fans shaking the bushes and sitting in the stands, respectively. That highly-touted Sun turned a cold (and shivering) shoulder to visitors, loyal football fans and determined bird-watchers alike. Add the Chamber of Commerce, the Sun Carnival Committees, the news media, not to mention glowing reports of natives about the remarkable climate of El Paso.

The wintering bird population is usually very cooperative for Christmas counts. They fly forth from the scrubby stuff they nestle under to give the binoculars set a chance to record them on a tally sheet which becomes a record to be studied and analyzed by scientists and eventually published in the Christmas count issue of American Birds, a scientific journal devoted to ornithology.

But not so on Saturday, our Count Day.

Up at the top of Fusselman Canyon near Trans Mountain Road, our territory for the count, Mary Moore, Lorenzo Cuesta, Geth and Ed White had trouble getting the birds up from cover and rock crevices for more than half a minute.

Cold Rufous-Sided Towhees puffed themselves out to round bowlshapes in an effort to get an insulating air pocket in their feather overcoats. Rock Wrens, which usually are bobbing from every boulder, retreated into rock crevices and gave us the briefest of cold looks.

The temperature was 34° and we had to keep wiping rain off binoculars to see at all. Little drifts of snow lingered on north slopes. Our numb hands gave up on the ball point pen which smudged in moisture on paper and we switched to lead pencil. We kept trudging down the wash and raising little flocks of birds which soon settled down in the dense underbrush. We were able to record a fair share of the little Desert Sparrow, inhabiter of the high desert washes the year round, a bird well adapted to the rigors of arid land living. We counted 96 of this species this miserable day.

Our bird club turned out 24 people to work in territories around the circumference of our count circle. It centers at the top of Sugar Loaf Mountain at 7,000 feet and describes a circle which begins at Ascarate Lake and swings north and westward along the Rio Grande to Canutillo, crosses the mountain in the vicinity of Tom Mays Park, drops down to the desert slopes of the Castner Range, includes well-groomed yards, gardens and parks in residential areas, all the pockets of water we can locate to give us as good balance as we can hope for in habitat variety.

This we have. There are the rock faces of the higher elevations of the mountains, the desert canyons and washes, water-cut arroyos of lower desert slopes, open desert, riparian habitats of irrigation drainage ditches, irrigated farms and orchards in the Rio Grande Valley, the river itself, lakes and ponds and cattle feeding lots.

Our particular challenge is to turn in a representative count for this time of year. We have a total of 312 species on our checklist which includes all the birds of the region -- breeding birds, wintering birds and migrant birds.

In counting the number of species and the number of birds we are compiling useful data about the density of bird populations. Audubon clubs in North America do this annually to contribute a body of useful data of value to ornithologists

and other scientists.

Last year a record-breaking 903 reports were published with nine states and one Canadian province contributing nearly half of all the reports.

Texas led the nation in number of counts conducted, 53 in all of Texas. California, New York and Ohio followed closely in count numbers.

As clubs get better organized and cover their circles more thoroughly, the number of counts reporting 150 or more species increases. In 1971 a remarkable 28 areas hit this elite category.

Cocoa, Florida, was tops in the nation last year in numbers of species with an incredible 205 species. Freeport, Texas lost by one species, recording 204. Obviously a warm, coastal area has all the good odds for high counts.

Last year El Paso Audubon Society reported 88 species and almost 10,000 birds. This year, in spite of temperatures just above freezing and intermittent rains all day long we tallied a total of 83 species with an estimated 6,832 birds. A loyal 24 people participated in the count this year.

We had some surprises and some unusual records.

Sunland Park's Lake produced two White-Fronted Geese in addition to the Snow Geese and single Ross's Goose wintering there for Rev. Bill Hunt's party. They also raised two Green Herons from a ditch near El Paso Country Club, birds which have the status of uncommon permanent residents.

Ruby Allen, Mrs. John K. Rose and Mrs. Edgar Dodds were the lucky ones spotting the single Cattle Egret in a field with cattle on Goggins Road. This bird is accidental in El Paso and a species to watch as it is spreading its range in the United States, having made its way to the United States via the Gulf Coast from its native Africa about a decade ago. It is doing well in its adopted country and increasing in numbers and range.

This party also had the thrill of seeing seven Whistling Swans on fishing lakes in the Upper Valley.

At Cement Lake everything appeared birdless when, circling above appeared two Golden Eagles, birds seen with increasing frequency in the El Paso area, but classed on our present checklist as rare, permanent residents.

Mary Moore was checking the field marks of the bright blue jays in her yard, looking for the necklace which distinguishes the Scrub Jay from the Mexican Jay when, lo, her bird had a bright vivid blue hue all over to mark it the Pinon Jay, a most unusual record.

The Bakers and the Baileys found a flock of wintering Chestnut-collared Longspurs near Memory Gardens cemetery. These shy, flighty birds come to our wintering grounds only when their barren high plains are snow-covered and bitter cold.

Mrs. Leigh Wilcox had a rugged little male Rufous Hummingbird at her feeder. The Wilcoxes are his sole support since he first came in October migration and now they are afraid not to keep the sugar water bottle filled.

There were more Rufous-crowned Sparrows than usual. our total count for this species was 38. It is classed as an uncommon permanent resident and this could be a changing status.

Pamela and Jim Koons, with their young son, used their four-wheel drive vehicle to work Tom Mays Park and mountains slopes on the west side of the Franklins. Their boy spotted the one Roadrunner on our list. But for a little boy's sharp eyes, he might have been missed. They also picked up the two Canyon Wrens, usually singing at elevations of 5,000 feet on bright days.

Had we been blessed with one of our usual brilliant sunny days, we could have had a super-count. Last year we had 50-60 m.p.h. winds and heavy dust part of the day to handicap us, this year permeating damp cold, but next year -- ahhh, next year! Maybe it could be perfect. Then we could hit an average of one out three. Odds, anyone?

EL PASO COUNTY CHRISTMAS COUNT
1971

1. <u>Horned Grebe</u>	3	42. <u>Rufous Hummingbird</u>	1
2. <u>Eared Grebe</u>	4	43. <u>Belted Kingfisher</u>	2
3. <u>Green Heron</u>	2	44. <u>Red-shafted Flicker</u>	20
4. <u>Cattle Egret</u>	1	45. <u>Ladder-backed Woodpecker</u>	2
5. <u>Whistling Swan</u>	7	46. <u>Say's Phoebe</u>	1
6. <u>Snow Goose</u>	12	47. <u>Steller's Jay</u>	4
7. <u>Ross's Goose</u>	1	48. <u>Pinon Jay</u>	1
8. <u>White-fronted Goose</u>	2	49. <u>Verdin</u>	3
9. <u>Mallard</u>	91	50. <u>Bewick's Wren</u>	2
10. <u>Gadwall</u>	70	51. <u>Cactus Wren</u>	3
11. <u>Pintail</u>	40	52. <u>Canyon Wren</u>	2
12. <u>Green-winged Teal</u>	2,000	53. <u>Rock Wren</u>	7
13. <u>Blue-winged Teal</u>	10	54. <u>Mockingbird</u>	6
14. <u>American Widgeon</u>	210	55. <u>Crissal Thrasher</u>	2
15. <u>Shoveler</u>	1,093	56. <u>Robin</u>	71
16. <u>Redhead</u>	12	57. <u>Ruby-crowned Kinglet</u>	7
17. <u>Canvasback</u>	2	58. <u>Water Pipit</u>	2
18. <u>Bufflehead</u>	9	59. <u>Cedar Waxwing</u>	18
19. <u>Common Merganser</u>	5	60. <u>Loggerhead Shrike</u>	4
20. <u>Cooper's Hawk</u>	1	61. <u>Starling</u>	19
21. <u>Red-tailed Hawk</u>	1	62. <u>House Sparrow</u>	649
22. <u>Swainson's Hawk</u>	1	63. <u>Western Meadowlark</u>	5
23. <u>Golden Eagle</u>	2	64. <u>Redwinged Blackbird</u>	1
24. <u>Marsh Hawk</u>	4	65. <u>Brewer's Blackbird</u>	854
25. <u>Sparrow Hawk</u>	16	66. <u>Boat-tailed Grackle</u>	181
26. <u>Scaled Quail</u>	16	67. <u>Brown-headed Cowbird</u>	2
27. <u>Gambel's Quail</u>	122	68. <u>Pyrrhuloxia</u>	6
28. <u>Common Gallinule</u>	6	69. <u>House Finch</u>	596
29. <u>American Coot</u>	87	70. <u>Lesser Goldfinch</u>	1
30. <u>Killdeer</u>	20	71. <u>Rufous-sided Towhee</u>	18
31. <u>Common Snipe</u>	13	72. <u>Brown Towhee</u>	2
32. <u>Spotted Sandpiper</u>	1	73. <u>Baird's Sparrow</u>	1
33. <u>Least Sandpiper</u>	14	74. <u>Rufous-crowned Sparrow</u>	38
34. <u>Western Sandpiper</u>	45	75. <u>Black-throated Sparrow</u>	96
35. <u>Avocet</u>	1	76. <u>Oregon Junco</u>	67
36. <u>Ring-billed Gull</u>	5	77. <u>Gray-headed Junco</u>	35
37. <u>White-winged Dove</u>	33	78. <u>Chipping Sparrow</u>	31
38. <u>Mourning Dove</u>	53	79. <u>White-crowned Sparrow</u>	124
39. <u>Inca Dove</u>	42	80. <u>Song Sparrow</u>	1
40. <u>Roadrunner</u>	1	81. <u>Chestnut-collared Longspur</u>	2
41. <u>Great Horned Owl</u>	1	82. <u>Sage Thresher</u>	1

Anna's Hummingbird appeared at the Wilcox's feeder on December 24 and is still there and will count as seen in the census period.

HUMMINGBIRDS IN EL PASO IN DECEMBER

We have a notable record in the return of an Anna's Hummingbird, if it is indeed the same bird, to the Wilcox's feeder at 3133 Federal, near Memorial Park, for three successive winters in late November or in December. In addition, a Rufous Hummingbird came in October to the feeder and remained in the neighborhood and used the food supply until the Anna's arrived on December 24th.

We assume it is the same bird. It is a handsome metallic bronze green with glowing cap and gorget of rose-red flashing into red fire when the light strikes it right. Using the same perches and squeaking its metallic little song in answer to squeaks, it has a definite personality and seems quite at home.

It is known that the Anna's species may become torpid at night through lowering of the body temperature and metabolic rate, thereby conserving energy at a time when they are unable to feed for a long period.

This species is also known to use insects heavily in the diet, stomach contents revealing a high percentage of gnats and small flies, butterflies, moths and spiders. They have also been seen following sapsuckers around and tapping this resource of food as well as eating insects attracted by the flowing sap.

All hummingbirds make use of sugar water, especially when flowers are scarce. Anna's has also been seen eating the juice of prickly pear upon finding a partially eaten tuna.

The breeding range of Anna's hummingbird is from northern Baja California nearly to the Oregon border and entirely west of the Sierra Nevada crest. It is resident in California, withdrawing only from the extreme northern part of its breeding range in winter.

Some individuals winter in southern Arizona, apparently returning to California just prior to the later winter start of their breeding season (Phillips, Marshall, and Monson, 1964).

Being so nomadic in its habits and performing no true migration may be one of the reasons why this bird makes an annual visit to El Paso. Other reasons could be its ability to withstand a colder climate, indicated by its breeding range, and an adaptability to different foods such as tree sap and cactus fruit juices.

Resplendent in metallic green, our bird has a rose-red crown and gorget which flashes fiery red in some lights. If you haven't seen him, the best approach is down the alley from Luna. He responds well to squeaks and sometimes sings his squeaky song back.

As for our later wintering Rufous, it ranges farther north than any of our other hummingbirds, breeding from about latitude 61° north in Alaska and southern Yukon southward to Oregon and southwestern Montana.

It is a very abundant migrant in the higher altitudes of the Rockies in the fall, but in spring it is rarely seen west of the Rockies, apparently following a migration route on the westward of the Rocky Mountains. It winters in Mexico.

Normally an early fall migrant, it feeds on nectar from flowers in higher mountain meadows. We have counted as many as ten birds around one clump of thistles abundant in seeps and springs in our high mountain valley (8,300 feet) of the Sacramentos near Cloudcroft, feeding and chasing through September.

Hummingbirds and Their Flowers, Karen A. Grant & Vernie Grant, 1968.

Life Histories of North American Cuckoos, Goatsuckers, Hummingbirds and Their Allies, Arthur Cleveland Bent, 1940.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Our year is up and it's time to elect officers for the coming year. Bob and Helen Barto and Mary Moore are serving as nominating committee and will present a slate of officers at our next meeting. We have voted to go national and we must elect officers to conform with their requirements, i. e. a president, a vice-president, a secretary, a treasurer and board members; we must also draft a constitution in accordance with National Audubon Society's principles.

Dues are due. We especially need your membership at this time in order to start off our near year with chapter status. This past year has seen a great rise in members of Audubon around the country as so many people saw an opportunity to join forces with other community organizations who care what is happening to their environment.

ACTION, INVOLVEMENT, VARIETY are the key words to an effective local Audubon society. The National Board of Directors have summarized the purposes of the Society:

"To promote the conservation of wildlife and the natural environment.

"To educate man regarding his relationship with, and his place within, the natural environment as an ecological system.

"To engage in any educational, scientific, investigative, literary, historical, philanthropic and charitable pursuits to further said objectives in accordance with the by-laws."

We are trying to do this locally and we need your help to reach our goals. Won't you please mail your check for \$12. individual or \$15. family to Treasurer Mrs. Clarence Shelfer, 3050 A Chandler, El Paso, Texas 79904. If you're already a member of National, please send your renewal when it falls due to the National Audubon Society.

QUAIL BLOCK

Ray Payne is the champion quail block purchaser. Helen Davis had a pick-up in quail numbers to about 50 birds coming to the block on Gschwind until someone stole the quail block. Blocks are \$4. plus tax and can be picked up at the Colonial Terrace.

RARE BIRD ALERT

We're forming a telephone chain for birds unusual to the region with each person calling the name before and after his own. If you want to be on this list please call 565-1024.

EC EC TRIP TO TUSCON

Dr. Max Bolen's Environment Conservation Education Council on which we have representation is meeting in Tucson Easter weekend to have guided tours and study of the Desert Museum there with an idea of getting one started in El Paso. This is the week-end of March 31st.

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FIRST CLASS

