

The Roadrunner

Newsletter of the El Paso/Trans Pecos Audubon Society

Volume 28 No. 9 June & July 1999



FROM THE PRESIDENTS AERIE

Hello to all our members. I am reviving a column that started during my first term as president (1985-1987). I try to cover a few things that you should be aware of but do not need an entire article to explain. Some subjects might be critical and others rewarding.

I would like to tell you about my personal interest concerning birds. First I am basically a bird watcher, secondly I am interested in educating others about birds, primarily young folks. I am not a National Environmentalist. However, as a promise to you, I will not let my interests interfere with the chapters goals and directions.

Now I would like to chastise all of you. We schedule Feather Lake appreciation days every other month, the same 2, 3 or 4 people show up. No one is asked to do more than they are physically capable of and no more than a couple hours are needed. In May you missed a free breakfast of pancakes, bacon, orange juice and coffee (or tea) before activities started. **PLEASE** try to come out more often, the next get together will be on Sat. July 31 at 8 AM.

Our education program is taking great strides forward, thanks to Elizabeth Chase, our past president and education committee chair. When you see her thank her for all her efforts.

Another thankless job has been done by Charles Simpson, the scheduling of hosts for Feather Lakes wintertime openings on Sat. and Sun., please thank him also. Charles is also undertaking the supervising and probably alot of the work of remodeling of the education building including the pathway into the ramada, you will be surprised when you see the completed product.

Bob "Wildbirder" Johnson
Pres. EPTPAS



GOLDEN
EAGLE

Inside The Roadrunner	
Chapter Info.....	2
Sanctuary News.....	3
Environment.....	4
Local Info	5
On the Trail	6
Observations.....	7
Calendar.....	8

Texas Bird Magazine Debuts

The Texas Ornithological Society is pleased and proud to announce the appearance on June 1 of its new publication, TEXAS BIRDS, the first statewide magazine for Texas birders. The debut issue includes articles by Mark Adams and Kelly Bryan, Keith Arnold, Gerry Green, David Sarkozi, and Ro Wauer, who is the magazine's features editor. A regular column on birding locations is edited by Jean Martin, while Matt White helps sort out Texas Review Species and Joel Simon oversees the book review section. Seasonal sightings will soon be reported soon under the eye of Brent Ortego.

Accompanied by expert photography, the magazine has something for everyone, from beginner to veteran-- the discovery of Botteri's Sparrow in the Trans-Pecos, an essay on the whooping crane, a lively history of the Texas Bird Records committee, an extended observation on Buff-bellied Hummingbirds, a look at the research effort at UT-Pan American, and much more.

TEXAS BIRDS is published twice a year. Subscribe by joining the Texas Ornithological Society at one of six levels: Student \$14; Active \$20; Family \$25; Sustaining \$40; Life \$300; Life with Spouse \$400 (life memberships may be made in yearly installments). Members also receive the TOS Bulletin. Main inquires to TOS, c/o Jolene Boyd, 401 Pinn Oak, Ingram, TX 78025.

A limited number of copies of the magazine may also be available at selected nature and wild bird stores. Help promote inquiry and education about the state's birds and bird habitats by supporting TEXAS BIRDS. For more information about the magazine, call or fax Shannon Davies, Editor, at 512/327-3183 or email her at smdavies@aol.com.

BIRD CHECKLIST ADDITIONS RIO BOSQUE & KEYSTONE MARSH BIRD SIGHTINGS

by, John Kiseda

If you go birding at the Rio Bosque or Keystone Marsh site during the next few months, please contact me and let me know what birds you found during your trips. I am continuing to attempt to "add to" the bird checklists that have been compiled for these two areas and there are still many gaps in the list. For example, I have not yet been able to document that anyone has seen a ladderback woodpecker or any species of oriole, towhee or goldfinch at Keystone Marsh and I would think that some of these birds should have been observed using this site. Many common to our area birds aren't documented for both sites. Contact John Kiseda in the evenings at 833-6212

El Paso/Trans Pecos Audubon Society

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About the Roadrunner:

Roadrunner is your newsletter. We welcome your contributions. For further information, you may contact
Bob Johnson: 757-1875
Kathleen Whelen 822-1319
Elizabeth Chase:
email: echase@socorro.k12.tx.us

FEATHER LAKE NOTES

by, John Sproul

Thanks to a great group of volunteers, we had Feather Lake open to visitors on dates during our October 1998 -April 1999 visitor season. Our stellar crew included: Craig and Darbie Braginton, Barbara Buck, Elizabeth Chase, Jean and John Coyle, Betty and Weldon Fisbeck, Jane Fowler, Beth and Bob Garcia, Kerry Ann Gardner, Al and Madeline Gavit, Vince Giordano, Lucie Hunt, Hugh Jameson, Bob Johnson, Larry Jordan, John and Kathy Kiseda, Betty Pagel, Flora Pittard, Roxanne Schroeder, Charles Simpson, and John Sproul. Many thanks to all, and special thanks to Charles Simpson for his dedicated work coordinating our public-use program.

Thanks are also due to the hard-working students from Hanks High School who spent the afternoon of April 25 removing nonnative saltcedar and planting native seepwillow cuttings within the basin. If you are inspired by their contributions and want to help also, join us Saturday, July 31 for our next workday. We'll enjoy Feather Lake's mid-summer beauty and work a few hours on sanctuary projects. The gates open at 8 a.m. Feather Lake is located at 9500 North Loop at Bordeaux, 0.3 mi. west of Americas Ave.

**Workday at
Feather Lake
Saturday, July 31, 1999
8:00am**

Special thanks to:

The Franklin Mountain's Wilderness Coalition for their slide presentation on the Future of Castner Range. The meeting was held on April 19th at Feather Lake.

and to

Dr. Richard Worthington, biology professor at University of Texas at El Paso, for the presentation of of Mountain Island Biotic Diversity in the Southwest.

Looking Back: Feather Lake

Feather Lake Wildlife Sanctuary is a wonderful wildlife habitat and a wonderful resource for El Paso. It didn't just spring magically into being. We enjoy this beautiful setting today thanks to the hard work of Audubon Members in the mid-1970s.

The year was 1974. Just 5 years earlier, the City of El Paso had built a stormwater-detention basin along the Mesa Drain in what was then a fairly rural area in El Paso's lower valley. A productive wildlife habitat was developing at this sight and Audubon member Bill Hunt, who lived in the area, was observing its progress. He alerted other Audubon members, who began visiting the basin to study its birds. The local Audubon chapter was on the upswing again. The chapter had lost its charter in 1966 due to lack of activity. In 1970, it began a revival, one that culminated with chartering of the El Paso/ Trans-Pecos Audubon Society in May 1974. The group was full of enthusiasm and anxious to pursue a worthwhile conservation project.

The storm water basin in the lower valley had a few young cottonwoods along its shores and some nice cattail and bulrush stands, but its surroundings were largely open and sparsely vegetated. Still, Audubon members like Eddie and Lucretia Chew, Al Gavit, Joe Guinn, Bill Hunt, Charlie Jensen, and Geth and Ed White had a vision of what it could someday be. In June 1974, Bill Hunt and Geth White met with Dale Tate, the City's Parks and Recreation Department director, and broached the idea establishing a wildlife sanctuary and education area at the site.

Tate was highly receptive. The discussions expanded, the planning began in earnest, and in July 1975 Audubon submitted a formal proposal to the city to establish Feather Lake Wildlife Sanctuary. The El Paso Parks and Recreation Board and the City Council quickly approved this proposal. Next, a lease agreement had to be prepared. The City Council approved this agreement on February 12, 1976, and Feather Lake Wildlife Sanctuary was a reality!

Next time you visit Feather Lake and enjoy its beauty, give some thanks to those visionary Audubon members of the mid-1970s who made it all possible.

Mountain Plover Observations Sought

In February, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed listing the Mountain Plover as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. Populations of this species have declined by about 50% since 1966, and only 8,000-10,000 birds now exist. The Audubon Society of Greater Denver, in conjunction with the Colorado Bird observatory, is seeking reports of Plover sightings to better understand present populations, range, and migration patterns of species.

Information requested includes:

- 1) date of observation
- 2) number of birds
- 3) location of the bird sighting
- 4) whether other observers were present
- 5) the bird's activities
- 6) the habitat where it was found.

You can submit Mountain Plover reports to: Plover Steering Committee, 17410 E. Nichols Place, Aurora, Co 80016.

Support Wildlife Conservation Organizations

The El Paso Herpetological Society

Contacts for the El Paso Herpetology Society are Mike Ross at 585-6947 and Stella Jimarez at 751-3772. Meetings occur at the El Paso Zoo at 7:00pm on the first Thursday of each month. Typically there is a guest lecturer at each meeting.

Chihuahuan Desert Wildlife Rescue, Inc.:

Board Meetings; all are "open" meetings and held at the El Paso Environmental Center at 800 S. Piedras.

Visit the CDWR website at:
www.whc.net/cdwr

Visit the El Paso Zoo website at:
www.whc.net\epzoo

DONIPHAN MARSH

Contact: Carol Miller at 584-7088

Visit the KAPPA website at: www.keystone-site.org

PEREGRINE
FALCON



Feather Facts

presented by
Eastwood Heights Elementary
Junior Audubon Club

Peregrine Falcon by Annette Hernandez

The Peregrine Falcon is the fastest bird that flies. It's wingspan is 2.5 to 3.5 feet long. The Peregrine's whole body length is 15 to 24 inches long. The adult Peregrine Falcons are slate blue to dark grey down their backs. The head is black, the beak is yellow, and the feet are dark yellow. The Peregrine's habitats are in open countries, cities, and cliffs. They don't build nests, but instead lay their eggs on the face of a cliff. Peregrines prey on other birds. Their favorites are Mourning doves, White-winged doves, pigeons, and ducks. Peregrines are on the endangered list and aren't found around El Paso. You can find them, though, in Colorado, Indiana, New Jersey, New York, and Massachusetts. I think the Peregrine Falcons are neat. I enjoyed writing this, and I hope you enjoyed reading this.

House Finch Color and Avian Pox

Reproduced from the BWD SKIMMER volume 7, No. 2

Many bird watchers have noticed the high variability in the color of male house finches, ranging from fairly deep red to orange to yellow. A number of theories have been proposed to account for this variation, including genetic structure of populations and diet. Red plumage of house and other finches is enhanced by carotenoids in the diet and the availability of various carotenoids may affect plumage in some birds. A new study of the variation in house finches strongly points to another cause, however, and both population density and the availability of bird feeders may play a role.

The authors, aware of recent reports of high variation in plumage color in birds in California and Hawaii, examined specimens and banding observations for those areas and for populations of house finches in various locations in the East and on San Nicholas Island off the coast of southern California. In Hawaii, where avian pox is common, they found the highest degree of variation. Recent studies show that on the University of Hawaii, where avian pox is common, they found the highest degree of variation. Recent studies show that on the University of Hawaii campus on Oahu only 5% of males are red. By contrast, 43% of males at high elevations in Hawaii are red. Mosquitoes, the primary transmission source for avian pox are rare at high elevations in the islands. On San Nicholas Island, where avian pox is rare, recent examination showed that 95.5% of males were red. In southern California it was possible to examine specimens taken from a long period of time, as well as data from recent banding studies. The information was broken down into pre-1950's and post-1960's because there were no specimens available for the 1950. The division worked in part because avian pox was not discovered in southern California until 1972, although it was probably present for a few years before that. In the pre-1950 specimens, 76.5% of males were red and after 1960 only 51.3 percent were. there was also a shift from orange to yellow. Before 1950, only one of 23 males was yellow, with the rest orange. After 1960, 26.3 percent were yellow. Banding studies from before 1950 confirm the high percentage of red males, with totals ranging from 76%-92.5%. Banding studies in southern California in the 1990s showed percentages of red males ranging from 12.2 to 52.8. A variety of banding studies and specimens was used to determine the extent of variation in eastern populations. The number of males classified as red in these studies ranged from 84.5-100%.

The authors conclude that there is strong evidence to link the presence of avian pox to the reduced color intensity in house finches. While the pox is common in parts of the West, it has been rarely reported in most of the east, where color is more stable. The theory is that the

disease causes stress, and various studies have shown that birds under stress are less able to absorb and use carotenoid pigments. The intensity of the red plumage may serve as a signal to females in search of mates, suggesting that the birds are better fit and will be more successful. While avian pox is sometimes fatal, no one knows what percentage of infected birds die. The high percentage of birds with yellow and orange pigments, and the absence of a serious decline in population suggests that the pox is not seriously limiting populations.

One question is why avian pox, which is present in the East, has had a much similar impact there. One reason, the authors suggest, is that in southern California house finch populations are largely and fairly sedentary as they are in Hawaii. Very large numbers of birds concentrate at bird feeders, where disease transmission is facilitated between birds. In the east, where many bird watchers are learning to complain about house finches taking over their feeders, the numbers are smaller, the population more mobile, and the concentrations not as great. All those factors may serve to limit the transmission of the disease. As east coast populations grow, especially in the southern part of the region where birds are likely to be resident, it will be worth watching to see if the percentage of non-red birds grows.

Why Birds Fly

a story by Josh

A long time ago, there was a very pretty bird. The only problem was that the pretty part of it was on its tummy, so no one could see. On his back, his feathers were just grey and brown, but on his stomach he had soft golden feathers that glistened in the sun. Every morning he'd wish there was some way everyone could see how nice he was. No one knows how, but one day something amazing happened. It may have been because someone nice felt sorry for the bird or just an answered prayer, but it's a mystery. When he woke up, he was pushed from his branch, but was relieved when he flapped his wings and realized he could fly. He was so happy he sang a beautiful song, and everyone heard him and looked up to see his beautiful golden belly. They realized how great he really was and from then on called him king of the birds, or kingbird.

ON THE TRAIL

Friends of Hueco Tanks

Admission: Hueco Tanks State Historical Park is \$4. \$2 for Seniors 65 and over, children under 12 free.

- June 19 Bird ID Tour - 7:15 AM
June 19 Slide Show - 8:15 PM
"Birds of Hueco Tanks"
June 20 Bird ID Tour - 7:15 AM
July 18 Bird ID Tour - 7:15 AM
Aug 21 Slide Show - 8:00 PM
"Birds of Hueco Tanks"
Aug 22 Bird ID Tour - 7:15 AM
Rock Art Tours - Every Sat & Sun at 9AM & 11AM.

RESERVATIONS ARE RECOMENDED

Telephone 857-1135

Rio Bosque Park

On **Sat. June 26** meet at Feather Lake 7:11 AM. The *Egret Rookery* is very active and its quite possible that you will also see *Painted Buntings* and *Summer Tanagers*. The tour will then continue further down El Paso County to Tornillo. This tour will be in conjunction with a Birding Class from the Center for Lifelong Learning at UTEP.

PLAN AHEAD

Sunday August 29. Fort Bliss Ponds. Meet Bob at the BIG 8 parking lot at 7:27 AM. Its possible for 6 Sandpiper species and a couple tern species.

Weekend of **October 2 and 3** for the Hawkwatch in the Monzano Mts.

Our annual picnic at Feather Lake. **Oct 16.**

Glenwood - Luna

This will be a great weekend in a part of the Gila NF that many of you have not birded. In the Luna/Reserve area we should get *Lewis' Woodpecker* and *Pinyon Jay*, in Glenwood *Yellow-breasted Chat*, *Yellow Warbler* and at the Catwalk, the *American Dipper*. In Pueblo Park Campground *Mountain Chickadee's*, *Purple Martins* and *Stellar's Jays*. At Mangus Springs on the return trip a look for *Lincoln Sparrow* and *Common Blackhawk* is scheduled. If your not for camping, motels are in Glenwood or Reserve. This great trip will take place during the weekend of **July 10/11**. Contact **Bob "Wildbirder" Johnson (757-1876)** for details.

Hudspeth County

Another trip with the Birding Class from the Center for Lifelong Learning, this time to the McNary and Fort Hancock Reservoirs. *Clark's Grebes*, *Neotropical* and *Double-crested Cormorants* have nested here in the last few years. Again meet at Feather Lake on **Saturday July 24, Time - 7:23 AM.**

Cloudcroft

Spend **Sat. & Sun. Aug. 14 & 15** in the cool pines. You will tour some of the birding hot spots along James Canyon and Sixteen Springs roads. Looks at *Cassin's Kingbird*, *Townsend's Solitaire*, *Mountain Bluebird* and *Band-tailed Pigeon* along with *Caliope Hummingbird* are expected. But the bird of the trip will be *Evening Grosbeak*. Contact **Mary Lou Alcorn (584-8768)** for details.

OBSERVATIONS

March 16, 1999 to May 15, 1999

Uncommon, Rare, and Very Rare 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 the date and/or location will be **bold** and **underlined**. The listing of birds is determined using the checklist "Birds of El Paso County, Texas and Adjacent Areas" 7th Edition, October 1987. Leave sightings at (757-1876) Bob "Wildbirder" Johnson.

Observers: Mary Lou Alcorn; Jane Fowler; Al Gavit; Madaline Gavit; Jewel Hewit; Sallie Homan; Bob Johnson; Larry Jordan; John Kiseda; Flora Pitard; Patricia Russell; John Sproul; Barry Zimmer. Var.-Various; -yd in their yard.

Locations; Asc-Ascarate Park; Dur-Durlings; FBP-Fort Bliss Ponds; FLk-Feather Lake; Hor-Horizon City; Lov-Love Road; NEP-Northeast El Paso; RBq-Rio Bosque Park; STA-Santa Teresa Area.

EGRETS THRU HAWKS

Great Egret	5/10	JS	RBq
Snow Goose	<u>3/26</u>	JK	Asc
Ross's Goose	<u>3/26</u>	JK	Asc
Wood Duck	4/19	JS	FLk
Blue-winged Teal	4/11	AG	Hor
Osprey	4/11	JS	FLk
Harris' Hawk	4/21	MLA-yd	Emy
	Var	JS	RBq
Ferruginous Hawk	<u>4/31</u>	JS	RBq

SORA to DOWITCHER

Sora	4/17	JS	FLk
Semipalmated Plover	4/29	LJ	FBP
Willet	5/3	BZ	FBP
	5/5	BJ	FBP
<u>Whimbrel</u>	<u>4/29</u>	<u>LJ</u>	<u>FBP</u>
Long-billed Curlew	4/29	LJ	FBP
	4/29	FP	Hor
	5/8	JF	RBq
Marbled Godwit	4/11	LJ	FBP
Baird's Sandpiper	4/11	LJ	FBP
<u>Short-billed Dowitcher</u>	<u>4/27</u>	<u>LJ</u>	<u>FBP</u>

GULLS and TERNS

<u>California Gull</u>	<u>5/4</u>	<u>BZ</u>	<u>FBP</u>
	<u>5/5</u>	<u>BJ</u>	<u>FBP</u>
Least Tern	5/6	JS	RBq

FLYCATCHERS thru THRUSHES

Olive-sided Flycatcher	5/6	BJ	FBP
	5/10	SH-yd	Lov
<u>Least Flycatcher</u>	<u>5/10</u>	<u>SH-yd</u>	<u>Lov</u>
Cordilleran Flycatcher	4/26	LJ	Mem
Cassin's Kingbird	4/27	LJ	FBP
Cave Swallow	4/19	JS	<u>FLk</u>
<u>Veery</u>	<u>5/8</u>	<u>SH</u>	<u>Dur</u>
Hermit Thrush	<u>4/5</u>	PR-yd	STA
	<u>4/11</u>	LJ	FBP

THRASHER to GROSBEAK

Brown Thrasher	<u>5/4</u>	BZ	FBP
Cassin's Vireo	4/21	LJ	Mem
Warbling Vireo	<u>4/22</u>	LJ	Mem
Orange-crowned Wbtr	Var	PR	STA
Nashville Warbler	<u>4/12</u>	LJ	Mem
Townsend's Warbler	<u>4/21</u>	MLA-yd	Emy
	<u>4/22</u>	LJ	Mem
American Redstart	<u>5/14</u>	<u>SH-yd</u>	<u>Lov</u>
<u>Red-faced Warbler</u>	<u>5/12</u>	<u>SH-yd</u>	<u>Lov</u>
Summer Tanager	4/13	LJ	Mem
Western Tanager	5/13	SH-yd	Lov
Black-headed Grosbeak	4/25	LJ	FBP

BUNTINGS and MEADOWLARKS

Lazuli Bunting	5/11	MG-yd	Hor
Indigo Bunting	4/28	LJ	Mem
	5/4	BZ	FBP
Western Meadowlark	4/8	JH-yd	NEP

WEB SITE UPDATED

Thanks to the wizardry of Bill Howe, our chapter's Home Page on the World Wide Web is now updated and sports a bright new look.

Check it out at:

<http://www.whc.net/cdwr/tpashome.htm>

There is information on our chapter on upcoming events, on Feather Lake, on local birding, and links to other web sites of interest, especially ornithological interest, in Texas and New Mexico. There are many other possible improvements; e-mail us your ideas through the web site. Thanks, Bill!

Dates to Remember

See page 6 for details

June

Sat. June 26 to Feather Lake
June 19 & 20, Bird ID tour & slide show

July

July 10/11 to Gila National Forest
July 18 Bird ID tour
July 24 McNary & Ft Hancock

August

Sat & Sun August 14/15 Cloudcroft
August 21/22 slide show & Bird ID tour
Sun, Aug 29 to Fort Bliss Ponds

October

Sat & Sun Oct 2/3 to Hawkwatch
Oct 16 Annual Picnic

Friends of Hueco Tanks (see p.6)

Rock Art Tours

Every Sat & Sun 9:00am & 11:00am

Birding Activities at Hueco Tanks

Bird Identification Tours & Slide Show Presentations

National Audubon Society

Chapter Membership Application

Yes, I'd like to join.

Please enroll me as a member of the National Audubon Society and of my local chapter. Please send AUDUBON magazine and my membership card to the address below.

My check for \$20 is enclosed.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

Please make all checks payable to the National Audubon Society

National Audubon Society

Chapter Membership Data Center

P.O. Box 51001

Boulder, Colorado 80322-1001

EL PASO/TRANS-PECOS AUDUBON SOCIETY

W10

Local Chapter Code

7XCHA

The Roadrunner is published six times a year. Contributions are welcome. Please e-mail to echase@socorro.k12.tx.us or mail to 10744 Sunstone St. El Paso, Texas 79924. Publication is assisted by Eastwood Heights Elementary Junior Audubon Society Club students.
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