

the ROADRUNNER



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

Editor: John Sproul

May 1981

Volume 11, Number 5

GENERAL MEETING

MON. 18 MAY 1981, 7:30 PM, Garden Center, 3105 Grant St., in Memorial Park. THE CHIHUAHUAN DESERT RESEARCH INSTITUTE. The Chihuahuan Desert region, which includes Trans-Pecos Texas, has only recently received serious scientific attention. Much of that attention is due to efforts of the Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute (CDRI). The CDRI is a nonprofit organization established in 1974 to promote understanding and appreciation of the Chihuahuan Desert through scientific research and public education. In May, Dennis Miller, the CDRI's executive director, will give us a slide-illustrated

talk on the institute's research programs, including studies of the Aplomado Falcon; its educational efforts, including field seminars in Big Bend Natl. Park and Mexico; and its visitor center and research complex, now under development between Alpine and Ft. Davis. Our Alpine members already know the institute well; in May the CDRI and El Paso can get better acquainted.

The Mt. Saint Helens program, originally scheduled for this date, has been cancelled. #

FIELD TRIPS

SAT. 2 MAY. SPRING BIG DAY COUNT/BIRDATHON. The pre-count planning meeting is Fri. 1 May at 7 PM at Earle and Paula King's, 3801 Waymore (532-1107). The count-day pot-luck dinner is in the Fiesta Room of the Hillmark Apartments (5000 Alabama, 566-8438); doors open at 6 PM. In between, there is a lot of birding. Collectively, we'll be out to break the 1975 Big Day record of 150 species seen in the El Paso area. Each individual will try to top the 100-species total that Kevin Zimmer logged last year. Anyone can take part.

learn the winner. Counters will vie for other prizes, too. Call Jane Fowler (772-0296) if you have last-minute questions.

WED. 6, 13, 20 and 27 MAY. MEMORABLE MORNINGS. Meet at 7 AM (6 AM on 20 May) at the Garden Center, 3105 Grant St., in Memorial Park. Memorial Park, 1 of our better migrant stops, is at its peak in May. Warblers are its specialty, with 11 species last spring, including Black-and-white, Nashville, "Myrtle," Grace's and Palm. To encourage better coverage of the park during spring migration and give you an excuse for some midweek birding, we'll have field trips there every Wednesday throughout May. There will be a different leader each Wednesday. Coordinator: Jeff Donaldson (755-2455).

It's all for a good cause, our Birdathon fund-raiser for Feather Lake Wildlife Sanctuary and Audubon's national and regional programs. All counters or sponsors of counters for the Birdathon are eligible for the drawing for Lois Carson's sketching of a Peregrine Falcon, our Birdathon Grand Prize. Saturday night, we'll

SUN. 17 MAY. TORNILLO. Meet at 6 AM at Feather L. (9500 N. Loop Rd., 0.3 miles

n.w. of Ave. of the Americas). We will drive directly to Tornillo and concentrate our birding in the area of the Tornillo "lake" and bosque. Two years ago this trip yielded Vermilion Flycatcher, Yellow-breasted Chat, Summer Tanager and Painted Bunting. And those were the dull species. Leader: Al Gavit (852-3119).

SAT.-SUN. 30-31 MAY. CHIRICAHUA MTNS., AZ. If you can, go to the Chiricahuas Fri. 29 May and get a jump on the rest of us. Otherwise, meet at 5 AM at I-10 and Transmountain Rd. on Sat. 30 May. The

"sky islands" of s.e. Arizona are spectacular; you'll enjoy them even if you see no birds. You will see birds, though. Area specialties include: Flammulated Owl, Rivoli's and Blue-throated hummingbirds, Coppery-tailed Trogon, Arizona Woodpecker, Olivaceous Flycatcher, Mexican Jay, Mexican Chickadee, Red-faced Warbler and Yellow-eyed Junco. This will be a camping trip, though 2 housekeeping motels are available in Portal, AZ, if you make reservations well in advance: Cave Creek Ranch (602/558-2334) and Cathedral Rock Lodge (602/558-2312). Leader: John Sproul (545-5157 h, 543-6126 w). Reservations REQUIRED. Between 4 and 15 May, leave a message at 543-6126. #

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

MON. 11 MAY, 7:30 PM. The Board will meet at the home of Tony Worth, 2024 Amy Sue Dr., Apt. C, El Paso (592-4926). All members are welcome. #

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

In this month's column I will deal with flycatchers, probably everyone's favorite group. Let's start with the genus Myiarchus. The only member of this genus regularly found in El Paso is the Ash-throated Flycatcher. When no other congeners are present, this bird presents no problem in identification. However, by traveling just 200 miles west to the Chiricahua Mtns., one finds 2 additional species, the Wied's Crested and Olivaceous flycatchers. Separating the 3 now becomes a problem.

The biggest mistake is to identify birds on the basis of color alone. Wied's Crested do tend to be dusker on the throat and upper breast, as well as deeper yellow below, with more distinct separation than the Ash-throated. This does not hold with all birds. Ash-throateds in fresh nuptial plumage can be surprisingly yellow below, while many Wied's can look washed out from normal wear. The Olivaceous is similar to the Wied's in underpart plumage, but lacks the bright rusty tail.

Size is helpful. The Olivaceous is decidedly smaller than the other 2 (closer

to pewee size), with a short, slender bill. The Ash-throated is intermediate, and Wied's is the largest, but judging body size between these 2 is tricky. A far better mark is the bill, which is distinctly larger in Wied's. The bill is also completely black in Wied's, while the Ash-throated often shows a hint of orange on the basal third of the lower mandible. Young Ash-throateds may exhibit an all-black bill.

Voice is possibly the best all-around character. The call of the Wied's is much louder and more strident in quality than that of the Ash-throated. The Olivaceous gives a mournful PEEER (similar to Say's Phoebe) which is usually repeated at about 15-second intervals. This call is completely unlike anything the other 2 species do. The Olivaceous does have a call consisting of several harsh, up-slurred whistles which is similar to the calls of the other 2 species. This call is usually heard only during territorial disputes between 2 birds.

Habitat is also a key during the breeding season. All 3 species show overlap, but there are some general rules. Ash-

throated is the only species likely to be seen in the desert. The Wied's is more of a riparian bird, but note that Ash-throated is also found commonly in riparian habitat. The Olivaceous prefers higher-elevation canyons and slopes, preferably with pine trees present. It too ventures into riparian habitats.

OBSERVATIONS - 27 March to 24 April 1981

LOONS THROUGH SHOREBIRDS

A COMMON LOON visited Burn L. in Las Cruces, NM, 4/11 (KZ), and El Paso's Feather L. held a cormorant 4/6 (AG). Three Cattle Egrets were near La Mesa, NM, 4/11 (KZ), with 45 in the lower valley near Clint 4/18 (SJD,MMcD). Black-crowned Night Herons found Feather L. to their liking; 5 were there on 4/5 (m.ob.), followed by 2 on 4/17 (EN,JN,JS). An AMERICAN BITTERN was hiding at the Ft. Bliss Sewage Ponds 4/16 (DD,DT).

The immature Snow Goose on a pond at Santa Teresa Country Club in NM 4/20 (JD) was late. First Turkey Vulture of the spring floated over the upper valley 3/31 (BJ). First Swainson's Hawk came even earlier; 1 was about 20 miles s. of Juarez off Hwy. 45 on 3/28 (KZ). North of the border, 1 was off I-10 near Tornillo 4/4 (JD,JS). On 4/11 an adult Sharp-shinned Hawk roosted along the Rio Grande near Randel's Pool (JD).

The only other nonpasserine of note was a Long-billed Curlew that some Henderson Jr. HS students found shot at Ascarate L. 4/14 (RH, fide JF). Rushed to a vet, it died 2 days later.

FLYCATCHERS THROUGH VIREOS

The w. side of the Organ Mtns. near Las Cruces held the year's 1st reported Western Kingbird 4/7 and 1st Ash-throated Flycatcher 4/11 (both KZ). Closer to El Paso, a surprising WIED'S CRESTED FLYCATCHER perched on a mesquite near Santa Teresa 4/20 (JD). Following our mild winter, nesting activity began early in 1981, as evidenced by the 2 fledgling

When all is said and done, the best way to become adept at identifying these birds is through experience. When Ash-throateds are found around home, take some extra time to study the bird. Pay special attention to bill/head proportions and calls. This will better enable you to pick out the other species accurately when birding away from home. /Kevin Zimmer/

Say's Phoebes at Santa Teresa 4/16 (JD).

El Paso's 1st reported Steller's Jay in over 2 years was chased from a Cielo Vista yard by a Red-winged Blackbird 4/6 (EG). A Crissal Thrasher nestling found 4/7 in a nest on the w. side of the Organ Mtns. fledged before 4/16 (KZ). First Solitary Vireo this spring appeared in Horizon City 4/24 (MG).

WARBLERS THROUGH SPARROWS

A Horizon City yard hosted 1981's 1st Orange-crowned Warbler 4/3 (MG) and Yellow Warbler 4/21 (MG,AG,CG). It held a "Myrtle" Warbler 3/28, 4/1 and 4/24 (AG, MG). A Mountain Park yard held as many as 3 Hooded and 3 "Bullock's" Orioles during mid-April, with both species reported as early as 4/11 (JB). An even earlier Hooded was the male in the Cielo Vista area 4/5 (RMcG) and 4/9 (EG); another male visited a hummingbird feeder in Mission Hills 4/22 (MD,FB). First Scott's Oriole was singing in White Rock Canyon 4/18 (m.ob.).

A male Cardinal visited a yard near Memorial Park 4/16 (JN,EN), and a male American Goldfinch was in Mountain Park 4/23 (KB,JB). A Black-throated Sparrow nest on the w. side of the Organ Mtns. was completed by 4/11 (KZ). Single White-throated Sparrows turned up at Hueco Tanks 4/6 and the Ft. Bliss Ponds 4/17 (both DD,DT).

OBSERVERS: Flora Bittick, Janet Brockmoller, Kristi Brockmoller, Marge Derrick, Sarah Jane Dodds, Jeff Donaldson, Diane Dutton, Jane Fowler, Al Gavit, Chris Gavit, Madeline Gavit, Ed Gilboe, Ron

Hyde, Bob Johnson, many observers (m.ob.), Margaret McDaniel, Richard McGinty, Evan Nagel, Jo Nagel, John Sproul, Dorothy

Tobkin, Kevin Zimmer. (Report observations to Kevin Zimmer, 5115 N. Mesa #A-226, El Paso 79912; 581-0665.) #

FIELD TRIPS FOLLOW-UP

On Sat. 4 April on a breezy day, we met at Feather L. and proceeded directly to the Clay Miller Ranch, nestled at the base of the Sierra Vieja Mtns., just west of Valentine. The 10 participants on this overnight trip found 50 bird species, including a surprising pair of Philadelphia Vireos. Birds weren't the whole trip: we also found a ringtail, some

collared peccary or javelina, a pronghorn, and 2 good hosts. Thank you, Millers.

On a cloudy Sat. 18 April, 10 Auduboners ventured into White Rock Canyon. There we saw 20 species, among them a pair of early-returning Ash-throated Flycatchers and a singing male Scott's Oriole.
/Jeff Donaldson/

CHAPTER PRIORITIES

The Board of Directors and other interested members gave some thought to priorities recently. They decided that in 1981-82 we need to:

1. improve wildlife habitat at Feather L.;
2. start a raptor-protection program in the El Paso area;
3. work for a wildlife sanctuary at Rio Bosque Park;
4. increase fund-raising efforts;
5. get greater membership participation;
6. achieve higher visibility through publicity;
- 7(tie). increase membership 20%;

- 7(tie). start field-identification classes;
9. support the Franklin Mtns. St. Park;
10. acquire necessary equipment; and
11. build up our chapter library.

Every item on this list is important, and the Board hopes to achieve something with all of them. But particular attention in the coming year will go to the top 3. They rated consistently high and were clearly our top priorities. Want to help in any of these 11 areas? Call any Board member (see back page). #

CONSERVATION RESOURCES

Are you disturbed by the Reagan administration's lack of interest in maintaining a healthy natural environment? Appalled at the way conservation and environmental programs are being asked to bear a disproportionate share of the proposed budget cuts? What can you do about it?

Start by staying informed. And, once informed, express your views to your elected representatives. Audubon offers a number of ways to keep you current on conservation issues and let you know the best time to act:

* AUDUBON LEADER, published 24 times a year by the national office, reports on conservation developments in Washington and across the nation. It also gives

latest details on Audubon's programs in education, research, habitat protection and conservation action. Subscriptions are \$10 per year. Make checks payable to National Audubon Society and send to: AUDUBON LEADER, National Audubon Society, 950 Third Ave., New York, NY 10022.

* NATIONAL OUTLOOK is published as needed by Audubon's National Capital Office to alert Audubon members when conservation issues are coming to a head and citizen pressure on Congress is needed. It's FREE. Write: National Audubon Society, 645 Pennsylvania Ave., SE, Washington, DC 20003. Indicate that Richard White of the 16th District is your Representative.

(Continued on p. 7)

RARA AVES

People often use the term "endangered species" loosely. ("You can't shoot that Starling. It's an endangered species.") To encourage proper usage, the ROADRUNNER staff has compiled a list of all bird species found in either New Mexico or Texas that appear on:

- * the federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife;
- * the list of Endangered Species and Subspecies of New Mexico;
- * the Texas endangered species and protected nongame species lists; or
- * the TOES Watch-list of Endangered, Threatened and Peripheral Vertebrates of Texas.

Birds on the first 3 lists get legal protection, with presence on the federal list conferring the strongest protection. The TOES list is maintained by a private group, the Texas Organization for Endangered Species. It is informational and has no legal standing. Next time, before you call a species endangered, check this table first:

Species	Fed"	Status		TOES ^{*,+}	Species	Fed	Status		
		NM ^{**}	TX [#]				NM	TX	TOES
Brown Pelican	E		E	E	Sharp-tailed Grouse		1		
* Olivaceous Cormorant		2			Sage Grouse		1		
Reddish Egret			PNS		Montezuma Quail				E
Wood Stork			PNS		Mexican Turkey		2		
* White-faced Ibis			PNS	T	Whooping Crane	E	2	E	E
Fulvous Whistling-Duck				T	Jacana				T
Wallow-tailed Kite			PNS	T	Eskimo Curlew	E		E	E
* Mississippi Kite		2			Inland Least Tern		2	E	E
Zone-tailed Hawk			PNS	P	Coastal Least Tern			PNS	T
Gray Hawk		1	PNS	P	Black Skimmer				T
h White-tailed Hawk			PNS	P	Red-billed Pigeon				T
h Black Hawk		2	PNS	P	h Ferruginous Owl			PNS	P
* Golden Eagle				T	Ridgway's Whip-poor-will		2		
h Bald Eagle	E	2	E	E	Violet-crowned Hummingbird		2		
* Osprey			PNS		White-eared Hummingbird		2		
Caracara		1			Broad-billed Hummingbird		2		
* Prairie Falcon				T	Coppery-tailed Trogon		1		
* American Peregrine Falcon	E	1	E	E	Ivory-billed Woodpecker	E		E	E
* Arctic Peregrine Falcon	E		E	E	Gila Woodpecker		2		
Aplomado Falcon		1	PNS		Red-headed Woodpecker		2		
* Merlin				T	Red-speckled Woodpecker	E		E	E
White-tailed Ptarmigan		1							
Attwater's Greater Prairie Chicken	E		E	E					
Lesser Prairie Chicken				T					

(over)

RARA AVES (Continued)

Species	Fed	Status		TOES	Species	Fed	Status		TOES
		NM	TX				NM	TX	
Thick-billed Kingbird		2			Golden-cheeked Warbler			PNS	T
Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher		1			* Painted Redstart				T
Buff-breasted Flycatcher		1			Varied Bunting		2		
Beardless Flycatcher		2		P	h Baird's Sparrow		2		
* Bell's Vireo		2			Botteri's Sparrow				T
					Yellow-eyed Junco		2		
					McCown's Longspur		2		

" - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1980. Federal Register 45:33767.
E = Endangered (in danger of extinction)

** - New Mexico State Game Commission. 1979. Regulation No. 599.
1 = Prospects of survival or recruitment in New Mexico are in jeopardy.
2 = Prospects of survival or recruitment in New Mexico are likely to be in jeopardy within the foreseeable future.

- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. 1978. PWD Leaflets 7000-21 and 7000-22.
E = Endangered
PNS = Protected Nongame Species

= - Texas Organization for Endangered Species. 1979. Publication No. 2.
E = Endangered
T = Threatened (likely to become endangered)
P = Peripheral ("endangered or threatened in the United States, especially Texas, although not in its range as a whole")

+ - Also on the TOES list as "Peripheral" but not appearing on the other lists are:

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| * Masked Duck | Rose-throated Becard | Yellow-green Vireo |
| Sooty Tern | * Steller's Jay | * Virginia's Warbler |
| * Flammulated Owl | Mexican Jay | Colima Warbler |
| Spotted Owl | Brown Jay | h Lucy's Warbler |
| * Lucifer Hummingbird | * Mountain Chickadee | Tropical Parula |
| * Rivoli's Hummingbird | Plain Titmouse | * Grace's Warbler |
| * Blue-throated Hummingbird | * Pygmy Nuthatch | Lichtenstein's Oriole |
| Ringed Kingfisher | | |

* - Listed on 1980 edition of "Field Checklist: Birds of El Paso County, Texas, and Adjacent Areas"

h - On "Hypotheticals" list on 1980 edition of field checklist

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 RR Editor, P.O. Box 9655, El Paso, TX 79986. Make checks payable to El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society.

Deadline for the June ROADRUNNER is 20 May.

CONSERVATION RESOURCES (from p. 4)

* Audubon's Southwest Regional Office has a Hotline similar to NATIONAL OUTLOOK. It focuses on regional rather than national conservation issues. Published as necessary to let you know when citizen action is needed, you can get on the mailing list by writing Dr. Dede Armentrout, National Audubon Society, P.O. Box 416, Brownwood, TX 76801. The Hotline goes to people who are willing to write their elected representatives; you

shouldn't be on the mailing list if you plan to use it only as an information source.

* The National Capital Office also has a telephone hotline. Call 202/547-9017 to get the latest on key conservation issues being considered by Congress. The tape is updated at least weekly, more often when events demand it.

"What can I do to help?" These conservation resources will give you an answer to that question. #

LOOSE FEATHERS

SIERRANS TO PICNIC AT FEATHER LAKE

The El Paso Regional Group of the Sierra Club will hold its annual picnic on 27 May at a place you may have heard of: Feather Lake (9500 N. Loop Rd.). George Mader, the Sierra Club's chairman, invites all Audubon members to attend. The Sierra Club will provide hamburgers, hot dogs, buns and accomplished chefs. You bring cups, eating utensils and a food item to share with the group. It all starts at 7 PM. Questions? Call Joy Owen (598-9332) or John Sproul (545-5157 h, 543-6126 w). #

NEW ADDITIONS TO THE FIRMAMENT

The El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Gallery of Stars is growing. The latest inductees:

* Mr. and Mrs. D. E. Baker, who donated to the chapter Numbers 16-32 (Nov 1945-Nov 1949) of the original ROADRUNNER, along with educational materials from the old Junior Audubon Club.

* Virginia Baker, who will be introducing a class of gifted and talented students at Surratt Elementary School in Clint to birdwatching 7 May.

* Gloria Basden, who prepared the Audubon display that was at the UTEP Bookstore 20 April-1 May.

* The El Paso Parks & Recreation Dept., who gave us a free booth at the department's Spring Festival 25-26 April.

* Evan Nagel, who built an American Kestrel nest box for Feather Lake.

* Fran Sweeney, who donated ROADRUNNERS from 1971-73 to the chapter. #

El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Yes, I want to join the National Audubon Society and its El Paso/Trans-Pecos chapter.

name

address

city state zip

phone

Membership category desired:

- Individual/\$20 Family/\$25
Sr. Citizen, Individual/\$13.50
Sr. Citizen, Family/\$15
Student/\$13.50

This is a new renewal membership.

Checks payable to National Audubon Society. Mail to: Jo Ellen Warolin, 1406 N. St. Vrain, El Paso, TX 79902.

SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY FOR SPRING CLEANERS

Audubon needs junk for its next rummage sale. Call our rummage collectors--Peggy Heisel (821-0989), Joe Guinn (566-8438) or Jane Fowler (772-0296)--and talk to someone who would love to have your spring-cleaning discards. #

RECYCLE

The next pick-up dates for recyclables in El Paso are Wed. 6 May and Wed. 20 May. #

COLOR SLIDE CONTEST

Winner of the April contest in the Habitat category is Sunny Wratten for her slide of Rustler (aka E. Cottonwood) Spring after a heavy rain. She elected to have a shrub planted in her honor at Feather Lake rather than lead an owling trip. There was no winner in the Bird category.

This month's prize is a no-expenses-paid vacation at Feather Lake. The categories are 1) El Paso birds and 2) their habitats. Bring slides to the May meeting or mail them to Kris Kohlhoff (6945 La Cadena, El Paso 79912; 581-3565). Identify each with: date taken, your name, species and/or habitat, and location. Slides received after 20 May will be entered in next month's contest. All slides become property of EP/TPAS. #

MEMBERS' SLIDE SHOW

YOU will put on our November general meeting. Be thinking about 5-10 slides you would like to show. Good slides, bad slides, bird slides, mud slides--we'll show 'em all. #

El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society
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