

# the ROADRUNNER

newsletter of

EL PASO-TRANS PECOS AUDUBON SOCIETY

published at

4220 Wallington El Paso, Texas 79902



March, 1976

Lucretia Chew, Editor

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Wednesday, March 17

7:30 p. m.

REGULAR MEETING

El Paso Garden Center

3105 Grant

The program on the building of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline will be presented by Bill Hoppes, one of our local board members and an environmental specialist with El Paso Natural Gas Company.

Saturday, March 20

7 a. m.

FIELD TRIP

Percha Dam

Field trip to Percha Dam. Recent sightings there include redheaded woodpecker, purple finch, Eastern phoebe, bridal titmice, white-throated and Fox sparrows. Participants will probably want to bring lunch. Meet at Stuckey's I-10 West, at 7 a. m.

Saturday/Sunday

March 27-28

SIERRA CLUB FIELD TRIP

Big Hatchet Mountains

The Sierra Club will be going on an overnight trip to the Big Hatchet Mountains in Southwestern New Mexico. This spectacular area is under investigation as a primitive area. Anyone interested in participating in this outing should contact Wesley Leonar, 584-7730, for details.

Saturday, April 3

7 a. m.

FIELD TRIP

La Cueva Park

Field trip to a new location, La Cueva Park, on the west side of the Organ Mountains. This will be an excellent opportunity to get your second quarter list off to a fast start. Meet at Stuckey's, I-10 West at 7 a. m. Bring a lunch and water. At Stuckey's we will consolidate into fewer cars.

Wednesday, April 21

7:30 p. m.

REGULAR MEETING

El Paso Garden Center

3105 Grant

Regular Audubon meeting. No program is yet definitely confirmed, but an out-of-town speaker is anticipated. Put this date on your calendar now.

## NOTES FROM NATIONAL

Eagle Refuge. A 1000-acre tract 100 miles north of Seattle that is a wintering site for between 100 and 300 bald eagles has been dedicated as a refuge by the Nature Conservancy and the State of Washington, working with two timber companies, Scott Paper and Simpson, and Fred Martin, a Washington rancher; Tahoma Audubon Society and other chapters in the state contributed \$2000.

And From Colorado. Record numbers of eagles are reported wintering in the southern part of the state; about 280 gold eagles and between 200 and 250 bald eagles were estimated after an aerial survey by a team of biologists, who attribute the increase to a combination of factors including the ban on predator poisons on federal lands, decline in illegal shooting, and possibly the prohibition of DDT.

## BIRD LISTING CONTEST

The first quarter of the bird listing contest will end on March 31. Participants are reminded of the following rules:

The list is to be submitted on an official El Paso County checklist which is available at meetings or from Kevin Zimmer. All sightings which are listed as rare or accidental or which are not listed on the county checklist must be substantiated on a separate sheet using such details as when and where seen, plumage, optical equipment used. Additional species which require substantiation are common crow, American goldfinch, Eastern meadowlark, Baird's sparrow.

The list with substantiating details should be mailed to Kevin Zimmer, 8911 Galena, El Paso, Texas 79904, by April 10. Contestants should keep a copy of their first quarter lists for the year-long contest. The dates of the second quarter competition are April 1 through June 30.

## RARE BIRD ALERT

Through the cooperation of the ham radio operators there is now a system for a Rare Bird Alert available throughout the state of Texas. Anyone in our area sighting a rare bird should contact Geth White, 566-2328, or if Geth can not be reached, the alternate Kevin Zimmer, 751-0552, who are able to make the necessary ham operator contact.

In a reverse version of the process Geth receives notification of rare birds which have been sighted in other parts of the state.

## FIELD TRIPS

Both recent field trips were victims of uncooperative weather. The mineralogy field trip to Trans Mountain Road on Saturday, February 21, drew about ten people. Because of cold, windy conditions, the group confined itself to three cuts along the main road. Leader Ed White pointed out minerals, including hornblende, garnets, and dendrites. Charlie Jensen discussed and explained the interesting geological features.

Those interested in learning more about the geology and mineralogy of our area are directed to a booklet put out by the El Paso Public Schools: Guide for Collecting Rocks, Minerals, and Fossils in El Paso and Vicinity by Carl Cotton, Jr. and James E. Richardson, August, 1970.

The field trip to the Hueco Mountains on Saturday, March 6, led by Geth White, was literally blown away. The five faithful ones who showed up early on a very dusty, windy morning were forced to give up after only a brief time. Hopefully Geth will agree to take us again when the weather is feeling better.

## FEATHER LAKE

Work at Feather Lake is progressing slowly. A few trees and small shrubs were planted during February. We are indebted to Mrs. Jeanette Cole and her neighbor, Mrs. Marie Hail, who brought about twenty-five plants and stayed to help plant them; and also to Ed White, who has provided a pump which will enable us to water this new planting.

Volunteers and money are being requested at this time. Plants and weekend workers are needed, as is money for such improvements as a ramada-type shelter, restrooms, tables, etc. Offers of help should be directed to Bill Hunt, project chairman, at 591-5630.

## THE HARRIS HAWK IN EL PASO

It took a young falconer with eyes for hawks to introduce to the birders of El Paso, the Harris hawk, a raptor species which is extending its south Texas range into the creosote-mesquite-yucca desert of far west Texas.

Robert Williams, who has lived for several years in the Lower Valley, told me at a recent Audubon meeting about raising a nestling Harris hawk which he trained and ultimately released into the wild. Immediately curious about the possibility of Harris hawks in the area, about a dozen local members accepted his invitation to show us Harris hawks and nests. Priding ourselves on knowing the birds in our area, we were skeptical to say the least.

But the Harris hawk we rose before dawn to see was there and so was the nest with a pair of mature birds and three juveniles warming themselves in the sun on a low mesquite which also held the nest.

The Harris is a parabuteo, slightly slimmer and with a longer tail, resembling more the marsh hawk for they both have a conspicuous white rump patch. Their hunting patterns are different, however, with the marsh hawk sailing low over the mesquite grasslands and about the drainage ditches, tipping with the wind. The Harris may get off to a slow spiral and mount high in a convective current to look over his territory, something the marsh hawk does not do.

The Harris wears a handsome mantle of sepia brown accented with bright chestnut shoulder patches and thighs and a contrasting black tail having the conspicuous white rump band and narrow edge of white rump and a white band at the tip of the tail. Immatures have light, streaked underparts and rusty shoulders, but the conspicuous white rump at the base of the tail is diagnostic.

The nest Bob showed us was a deep platform used year after year in a low salt cedar. A very old nest nearby was used as a plucking platform, for this hawk is known to fastidiously pluck bird prey before eating it. Bob pointed out other nest sites, some of which were in small cottonwood, with one in a yucca. He also keeps a color scrapbook in which he showed us good pictures of young in the nest and of training young birds.

Bob told of returning to nests after a two-week absence, only to find the fledglings starved to death, and parent birds killed and left below the nest in a sadistic manner. In spite of our protective laws for these beneficial birds, too often ranchers and farmers kill them. Bob is a champion of all raptors; he knows the people in the area and talks protection to them and to hunters who sometimes shoot hawks when they are out for doves or ducks or other seasonal prey. In the five-year period that he has been keeping up with raptors in the vicinity, he has witnessed their moving farther and farther out into wilder parts to nest. The odds are stacked against nesting hawks when the predator is man.

In its native habitat of South Texas, the Harris hawk is a diminishing species because of the clearing of thousands of acres of brushland for agriculture and ranching. Only a few of these hawks have been reported in the Trans-Pecos region, but a number of pairs of nesting birds are present in the flat mesquite lands above the Edwards Plateau, and they are regularly reported in the Midland area.

Let's protect this newly discovered avian treasure in our region. If you see a big, friendly dark hawk on a low shrub, don't shoot, salute him!

Geth White