

# the ROADRUNNER.....



newsletter of

El Paso-Trans Pecos Audubon Society

published at

2809 Hector Dr., El Paso, Texas 79935

(by: President Robert P. Bleicher)

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## CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS - 1979

This month we'll have no field trips and no regular meeting. Instead, we'll focus all efforts on the 80th annual Christmas Bird Count. Members and nonmembers alike are urged to participate. Our chapter will sponsor two counts, the Hueco Tanks Count on Sunday 23 Dec and the El Paso Count on Saturday 29 Dec. We hope you'll take part in both.

The planning meeting for both counts will be Saturday 15 Dec at 7 P.M. at Bob and Gretchen Bleicher's, 2809 Hector Dr., EPT, Ph: 591-7261. At the meeting we will decide which teams will cover which areas. Please be there. If you want to participate in a count, but can't attend the meeting, contact one of the compilers: Bill Hoppes (533-1593 home, 543-3092 work) for the Hueco Tanks Count or John Sproul (545-5157 home, 543-6126 work) for the El Paso Count.

Even if you can't be afield with us 29 Dec, you can still contribute to the El Paso Count 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, if even for a few minutes, please contact John Sproul. On Count Day, you can call in feeder observations to Gretchen Bleicher (591-7261).

After the Hueco Tanks Count we will meet for a "species countdown" at Ed and Elza Gilboe's (1305 Oakdale, EPT, Ph: 772-1942). Joe and Elizabeth Guinn will host a pot-luck dinner after the El Paso Count (Fiesta Room, Hillmark Apartments, 5000 Alabama, EPT, Ph: 566-8438). Both gatherings will begin at 5 P.M. The Ringed Turtle Dove that frequents the Gilboe's yard has promised to put in an appearance.

Between now and the count days, the best thing you can do is get out in the field. Scout an area where you would like to work. Take a trip to Hueco Tanks. If you spot any rare birds in advance of the counts, let the compilers know. If you have a feeder, keep it full and get to know the birds that visit it.

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

## WHAT IS A CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT?

A popular turn-of-the-century activity in rural America was a hunt on Christmas Day. Communities would vie with one another to see which could record the largest collective kill of birds. In 1899, Frank M. Chapman decided to offer a nonlethal alternative: a Christmas Day spent observing birds and recording their abundance. There were just 27 participants on the first "Christmas Census," and 25 reports were submitted.

Last year, 1269 Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs) attracted 31,140 participants. The tradition of the Christmas Hunt is barely remembered, but CBCs are still growing. El Paso has had a count since at least 1940. Our all-time highs (1977 data not available) are: 104 species in 1976, a blackbird-inflated 60,200 individual birds counted in 1953, and 25 participants in 1974 and 1975. In 1978 our 20 observers saw 14,423 individuals of 101 species. We led the nation in Black-chinned Hummingbirds (4) and equaled the national high for Broad-tailed Hummingbirds (1).

In 1974 we began a second count in the vicinity of Hueco Tanks. Last year, the 13 observers on this count tallied (unofficially) 58 species. All-time highs are: 75 species in 1974, 3018 individual birds counted in 1976, and 24 participants in 1976.

As the CBCs have grown, an elaborate set of rules has evolved. Counts can only be conducted within a designated count period (this year, 15 Dec to 1 Jan, inclusive). They must be made during a single calendar day and must be greater than 8 hours duration. A count area must be within a 15-mile diameter circle, and there can be no overlapping of count circles. (The center of the El Paso count circle is the south end of Mt. Franklin; center for the Hueco Tanks Count is a peak in the Hueso Mtns. 1.9 mi. south of US Hwy 62-187). Full documentation of rarities is strongly encouraged, and on our counts it will be required.

All these rules have a purpose. They increase the scientific value of the counts. The CBC is the greatest cooperative ornithological exercise in North America. Used carefully and conservatively, CBC data provide valuable descriptions of winter abundance patterns for North American birds. The ideal is a complete census of all birds within a count circle on count day. It can't be done, of course, but we get closer to the ideal the more competent observers we have in the field. CBC participants not only have an enjoyable day of birding, they contribute to useful scientific endeavors.

If you don't live in the immediate El Paso area, you may want to join a count closer to home:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Compiler/Contact</u>	<u>Phone</u>
15 Dec	Davis Mtns., TX	Pansy Espy	915-426-3999
15 Dec	Las Cruces, NM	Thom Marr	505-523-6443
16 Dec	Lake Balmorhea, TX	Francis Williams	915-694-6908
18 Dec	Alpine, TX	John Schmidt	915-837-2983
28 Dec	Chisos Mtns., TX	C. C. Wiedenfeld	915-653-7918
29 Dec	Rio Grande Village, TX	"	"
31 Dec	Presidio, TX	Steve West	505-392-7092
1 Jan	Ruidosa, TX	"	"

The Board of Directors of the El Paso-Trans Pecos  
Audubon Society  
wish you all a  
MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Thank you to:

John Sproul - for agreeing to become the new Roadrunner Editor. As President of the Chapter, and Editor for over a year, and as Vice President of the El Paso Color Camera Club, I certainly appreciate some help. I hope others will find a bit of time to help make the Chapter continue to operate.

Keven Von Finger - for a real fine program in November. The program: The Ecology of the El Paso area and its early history, was well attended and enjoyed by all. We appreciate his the insights and education you gave us.

Sid Sheppard, Janet Cole, and Berytte Barnhart - for agreeing to be on the Nominations Committee to help choose a Secretary, (Secretary-Treasurer), and a Vice President (President-Elect), to be presented to the Chapter membership at the January meeting, when elections for new year shall take place.

Ed and Elza Gilboe for volunteering to have the HELICO TANKS bird counters over to their place after the bird count so we can tally up the count.

Joe and Elizabeth Guinn - for sponsoring the get-to-gather after the El Paso bird count.

Follow-up on the HELICO Tanks State Park Field Trip: 4 November 1979.

Attending the field trip were: Bob Bleicher, Joe Guinn, Perry D. Jamieson, Jo Ellen Warolin, and A.E. and Josephine Nagel. The following birds were seen: Red-tailed Hawk, Loggerhead Shrike, Rufus-crowned Sparrows, Cactus Wren, Meadowlarks, Paruloxia, White-crowned Sparrows, Common Flicker, Audubon's Warbler Brown Towee, Marsh Hawk, Chipping Sparrows, House Finch, Horned Lark, Scrub Jays, Curved-bill Thrasher, Oregon Junco, Grey-headed Junco, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Bewick's Wren, Black-throated Sparrow, and Ruby-crowned Kinglets. With good weather and great birding - this was a real fine trip.

Follow-up on the field trip to Bosque Del Apache, National Wildlife Refuge, on 17-18 November 1979:

Only five people made this trip: Bob Bleicher, Joe Guinn, and Sid Sheppard, and A.E. and Josephine Nagel. The trip to this National Wildlife Refuge is normally a highlight of our year's activity. It is a "Spectacular" event. Just imagine 25,000 Snow Geese, 12,000+ Sandhill Cranes, 7 Whooping Cranes, and hundreds of various ducks, as well as Bald Eagles, Golden Eagles, etc., all gathered in one concentrated area. The thousands of Yellow-headed and Red-winged Blackbirds flying from spot to spot was itself quite a sight. Here is a listing of the birds we saw: Whooping Cranes, Sandhill Cranes, Bald and Golden Eagles, Blue Heron, Pintail Ducks, Coots, Shovelers, Flickers, A Woodpecker (most likely Ladderback), Mourning Dove, White-necked Raven, Kestrel, Meadowlarks, Brewer's Blackbird, Marsh Hawk, Ringed-billed Gulls, Red-winged and Yellow-headed Blackbirds, Eared Grebe, Snow Geese, Red-tailed Hawks, Shrike, Mallards, Blue Goose, Ruddy Duck, Least Sandpiper, Canada Geese, Blue-winged and Cinnamon Teal, Buffle-head Duck, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Swainson's Hawk, Scrub Jay, and Roadrunner. Also Kildeer, House Sparrow, Rufus-crowned and White-crowned Sparrows, Song Sparrows, Horned Lark, Dark-eyed Junco, Say's Pheobe, House Finch, Vesper Sparrows, Audubon's Warbler, Starling, Robin, Sharp-shinned Hawk, and Green-winged Teal. It was a great day, clear and fairly warm, and the birding was SUPER; wish you had been there!

## OBSERVATIONS - 24 October to 23 November 1979

The Snowy Egret at the Cielo Vista Golf Course has departed, after a stay of over a month. It was last seen 6 Nov (EG). Many of our less common migrants and winter residents appeared in recent weeks, including: a female Common (Yellow-shafted) Flicker in Arroyo Park 28 Oct (JS), a Lewis' Woodpecker in the Cielo Vista area 10 Nov (RMcG), a Brown Thrasher in Horizon City 21 Nov (AG) and a Hermit Thrush in East El Paso (BR).

## RIVOLI'S HUMMINGBIRD

The Rivoli's Hummingbird reported last month was first seen at dusk on 22 Oct in the Gilboe's backyard in the Cielo Vista area (ElG). Plumage features were not clear in the failing light, but it was obviously a large hummingbird, as large as the House Finches that frequent the yard. Fortunately, the bird stayed for 3 days, allowing positive identification and a photograph. It was last seen at dusk on 25 Oct. (EG).

The plumage of the immature male Rivoli's is supposedly intermediate between that of the adult male and female. This bird fit the bill: metallic green throat, no evident violet crown, green back and tail, slight white line behind the eye, tips of tail feathers grayish. Some observers reported flecks of dark color on the breast.

The bird also had the slow wingbeats characteristic of Rivoli's and occasionally would glide on set wings. From its favorite perch on an overhead wire, it frequently flew out to capture insects. It would visit a feeder only every 30 minutes or so but would take a long drink at each visit. Mornings, it became active at sunup; evenings, it continued feeding well after sundown (EG).

Rivoli's Hummingbird is a rare summer resident in the Chisos, Davis and Guadalupe Mtns. There appears to be only one previous record of the species in El Paso: a female seen by Ed and Geth White at Feather Lake on 2 Aug 1975. There is also one record for Las Cruces, NM, where a female and an immature male were photographed 18 Jan 1974.

OBSERVERS: Al Gavit, Ed Gilboe, Elza Gilboe (ElG), Richard McGinty, Betty Roberts, John Sproul. (Please report your observations to John Sproul, 601 W. Yandell #25, El Paso 79902; ph. 545-5157 home, 543-6126 work.)

## MEMBERSHIP

Audubon is escalating its campaign for new members. Now, new members signed up through our chapter will receive a 3x4-ft wall map entitled "Audubon's America." The map lists and locates all National Audubon chapters, sanctuaries, centers, camps and regional offices. It also locates national parks, national forests, and national seashores and lakeshores, and lists the endangered and threatened species. If you haven't joined, here is a new benefit you can now receive. If you are recruiting other members, here is an added inducement you can offer them.

## COMING ATTRACTIONS

The January general meeting will feature a program by John Caraway on raptors. Details will be in the next Roadrunner.

## CONSERVATION

### WEAK ALASKA BILL: LETTERS NEEDED

The time has come again for conservationists to start writing Alaska letters to their senators. The Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources has produced an Alaska public lands bill that is even worse than last years. The committee bill would mandate, not merely permit as last years bill, oil exploration in the calving grounds of Alaska's largest caribou herd in the existing Arctic National Wildlife Range. The bill would also leave half of Admiralty Island National Monument open to clear cutting, against recommendations of both the Forest Service and the residents of the island. Mining would be permitted in the Gates of the Arctic and Wrangell-St. Elias National Monuments. Wrangell-St. Elias would also be open to trophy hunting of Dall sheep. The bill would cut 40 million acres of wildlife refuges that are included in the bill the House passed in May. The bill guarantees a specified number of board feet of timber per year from the Tongass National Forest. There is no word yet when the bill will reach the floor, but letters are needed to Senators Bentsen and Tower, U.S. Senate, Washington, DC 20510, urging them to support the Tsongas-Roth Substitute (S. Amendment #626), which is based on the House-passed Udall-Anderson bill, and oppose the Senate Energy Committee bill.

### ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT REAUTHORIZED

The Endangered Species Act received its share of blows this year but is still standing. The Senate voted in June to extend it for 3 years. The House was not so accomodating. Talk of severe weakening amendments was in the wind much of the year, the threat not dissipating until late October when President Carter agreed to exempt the Tellico Dam project from provisions of the Act. The exemption set a bad precedent, but in exchange House foes of the Act agreed to call off the dogs. The House voted a 3-year extension on 24 Oct. It also approved several amendments, including one shifting the Endangered Species Scientific Authority, previously independent, into the Interior Department. Conservationists are divided on the wisdom of this move.

The joint bill to reconcile the House bill with the Senate version will occur in early December, and no significant changes are expected. It appears the Act has new life. The challenge now is to prove that it does work, that when endangered species are considered early in project planning, irresolvable conflicts can be avoided.

### ROADRUNNER DEADLINE

Remember, we welcome contributions to the ROADRUNNER from interested members. Deadline for the next issue is 27 Dec.

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