



The Roadrunner

NEWSLETTER OF
EL PASO-TRANS PECOS AUDUBON SOCIETY
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Geth Osborn White, Editor

CALENDAR

Monday, January 20, Centennial Museum, UTEP campus, 7:30 P.M.

Mike Lockhart, graduate student at Sul Ross University, will be our speaker. Working on a Master's degree on the ecology and status of resident and migratory raptors in the Trans-Pecos, his study was funded by the National Audubon Society. His time-lapse studies on predatory nesting birds in order to determine food brought to their young must have required a lot of time and patience. He will bring some of these as well as a series of color slides to illustrate his talk. His work is in the wilderness of the beautiful country of the Big Bend National Park and vicinity. He is associated with the recently founded Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute headquartered at Sul Ross University, Alpine.

Saturday, January 18, 7:30 A.M. A field trip is planned to the pumping station of El Paso Natural Gas Company, entering at a gravel road off Dyer Street. Rendezvous by the blue pylon which marks the Sunrise Shopping Center on Dyer Street. There is a scrub desert to the left of the road which harbors the sage sparrow among other wintering sparrows; on the left are irrigated fields, usually with close-cropped alfalfa, which are good for killdeer, horned larks, lark buntings. Hawks are usually plentiful in this habitat and sometimes the small lake has ducks. Geth White will lead this trip.

Field trip, January 25, 7:30 A. M. Rendezvous at Denny's Restaurant, 6144 Gateway East, for a look at wintering ducks on Feather Lake (water table pond) on Loop Road north, then down to Sewage Treatment Plant via the levees. Al Gavit will lead.

Sunday, February 16, Field trip to look for raptors, led by Sean Osburn from Austin, member of the Raptor Preservation Society, and David Steinbeck, Earth Sciences teacher at Terrace Hills School, El Paso. More details will be in February newsletter. Use this to mark your calendar ahead.

Board Meeting, January 15, 7:30 P.M. at the home of Al Gavit, 1712 O'Possum Circle.

Resources in Ornithology Exhibit at the Public Library, on Oregon Street, January 13 through 31st. Featuring our gift of books in ornithology, books gathered from the various library departments, titles from the Audio-Visual Department, some of the handsome new volumes on birds, sent to Leon Metz for review and purchased by the library are featured. Watercolorist Patti Canaris is lending one of her beautiful paintings. Try to drop by sometime during the exhibit period. Linda Jones and Geth White worked with library personnel in setting it up.

CHRISTMAS COUNTS 1974

Our chosen date, December 14, for the 1974 El Paso Christmas Count for the National Audubon Society, the 75th Bird Count, was one dreamed of by the Chamber of Commerce -- bright, sunny, mild temperatures and little wind, real advertising for the Sun Country. Temperatures ranged from 39° to 44°, north to northwesterly winds at 12 m.p.h.

A new high of 1,055 counts was reached last year on Christmas censuses, with all territories represented, including Alaska and Hawaii, much of Canada including Yukon Territory, Middle America and the West Indies. Grand total was a stupendous 78 million birds. This yearly accumulation of data helps scientists spot trends as cyclical, or permanent, in bird populations. A permanent decline in a species is a danger signal that the bird is under some kind of stress from some source. The brown pelican's disappearance from the Texas and Louisiana coast is an example. Birds are early warning signals to scientists.

Rules are followed in making counts: a 15 mile circle is staked out and all species seen within that circle are reported. As many habitats as possible should be within the circle. A fee is extracted for the privilege of working hard from dawn to dusk in all kinds of weather in order to help compile the data for the publishers of American Birds. This raw data has many applications for scientific purposes.

Our total of 99 species and 6,048 birds compares favorably with last year's count of 102 species and 6,434 individuals. In actuality, it seemed that birds were scarce in almost all territories. Certainly they were harder to find. Take a look at the high Franklin Mountains with all its canyons and washes, the thorny chapparal, scarce water, encroaching and spreading residential areas -- one recognizes a challenge. Couple this with keeping track of New Mexico, Mexican and Texas boundaries, with a part of the circle lying in Mexico never explored on a count, it points up the necessity of many experienced birders needed in the field to do justice to the region.

Interesting happening on this year's count was over 50 phone calls reporting the presence of hummingbirds in neighborhoods with flowers or feeders, the result of an insert in Ann Carroll's newspaper column in the Herald Post. There were too many hummers to check out in the time period, but enough to result in a total of twelve hummingbirds of three species. We're pleased at the interest El Pasoans have in birds evidenced by their response.

Of the rarities on our list, Ruby Allen, compiler, reports that the Common Goldeneye, and the Downy Woodpecker appeared only in 1964 in ten years; the Long-billed Curlew, Golden-crowned Kinglet and the Yellowthroat not at all in ten years of Christmas Counts.

Our Hueco Tanks State Park count is new this year covering much of the open desert, foothills and rough canyons of the Hueco Mountains, and approximately half of Horizon Lake. Only a portion of the Park is within the count circle if we can include Horizon Lake, or a part of it, in the count area. Water in the mountainous desert certainly improves the habitat greatly. The food crop was good this year and flocking birds were present in good numbers. A loyal 19 people arose at dawn on the 15th of December for a successive day of birding, possibly due to the bountiful spread of the Eddie Chew's the evening before or the prepping by Charlie Jensen at the White's supper party on the 12th. Temperatures were down, ranging from 25° to 57°

with winds gusting to 30 miles per hour. We covered 129.5 miles by car and 7 on foot to total 86 species and 2,401 individuals.

This annual local mass machochism with two counts directly following each other will probably be spread a week apart next year or we will have a cyclical trend of fewer birders in the field due to fatigue, colds, sniffles and Christmas parties.

CHRISTMAS COUNTS, 1974.

Date: December 14, 1974

December 15, 1974

EL PASO

1. Horned Grebe	3
2. Eared Grebe	9
3. Pied-billed Grebe	2
4. Great Blue Heron	4
5. Green Heron	1
6. Snow Goose	26
7. Mallard	65
8. Gadwall	65
9. Pintail	5
10. Green-winged Teal	269
11. Blue-winged Teal	2
12. Cinnamon Teal	4
13. American Wigeon	255
14. Northern Shoveler	413
15. Redhead	3
16. Canvasback	26
17. Lesser Scaup	7
18. <u>Common Goldeneye</u>	<u>1</u>
19. Bufflehead	5
20. Ruddy	2
21. Red-breasted Merganser	2
22. Sharp-shinned Hawk	3
23. Cooper's Hawk	3
24. Red-tailed Hawk	5
25. Marsh	12
26. American Kestrel	56
27. Scaled Quail	32
28. Gambel Quail	67
29. Common Gallinule	10
30. American Coot	61
31. Killdeer	30
32. Common Snipe	7
33. <u>Long-billed Curlew</u>	<u>3</u>
34. Baird's Sandpiper	4
35. Least Sandpiper	93
36. Western Sandpiper	25
37. Ring-billed Gull	1

HUECO TANKS

1. Horned Grebe	1
2. Eared Grebe	47
3. Western	1
4. Pied-billed	3
5. Mallard	5
6. Green-winged teal	10
7. Northern shoveler	14
8. Red-head	2
9. Canvas back	38
10. Lesser scaup	10
11. <u>Common Goldeneye*</u>	<u>1</u>
12. Bufflehead	9
13. Ruddy	18
14. <u>Oldsquaw</u>	<u>1</u>
15. Cooper's Hawk	1
16. Red-tailed Hawk	9
17. Ferruginous	1
18. Golden Eagle	1
19. Marsh Hawk	7
20. American Kestrel	2
21. American Coot	257
22. Killdeer	11
23. Least Sandpiper	12
24. Western Sandpiper	7
25. Gull Species	1
26. Mourning Dove	10
27. Great Horned Owl	1
28. White-throated Swift	3
29. Common Flicker	1
30. Ladderbacked Woodpecker	2
31. Say's Phoebe	13
32. Horned Lark	173
33. <u>Cliff Swallow</u>	<u>1</u>
34. White-necked Raven	2
35. Verdin	4
36. Bewick's Wren	2
37. Cactus Wren	7

CHRISTMAS COUNTS, 1974December 14, 1974.December 15, 1974.EL PASOHUECO TANKS

38. Rock Dove	14
39. White-winged Dove	41
40. Mourning Dove	166
41. Inca Dove	32
42. Roadrunner	4
43. Black-chinned Hummingbird	4
44. Anna's Hummingbird	5
45. Rufous Hummingbird	3
46. Belted Kingfisher	10
47. Common Flicker	31
48. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	1
49. Downy Woodpecker	1
50. Ladderbacked Woodpecker	5
51. Black Phoebe	3
52. Say's Phoebe	5
53. Horned Lark	24
54. Verdin	18
55. House Wren	1
56. Bewick's Wren	9
57. Cactus Wren	13
58. Long-billed Marsh Wren	1
59. Rock Wren	19
60. Mockingbird	18
61. Curve-billed Thrasher	7
62. Robin	76
63. Hermit Thrush	2
64. Western Bluebird	28
65. Mountain Bluebird	1
66. Golden-Crowned Kinglet	1
67. Ruby-crowned Kinglet	41
68. Water Pipit	39
69. Cedar Waxwing	30
70. Loggerhead Shrike	15
71. Starling	72
72. Yellow-rumped Warbler (Aud.)	47
73. Yellowthroat	1
74. House Sparrow	338 est.
75. Meadowlark species	220
76. Red-winged Blackbird	22
77. Brewer's Blackbird	1,191
78. Great-tailed Grackle	110
79. Brown-headed Cowbird	18
80. Pyrrhuloxia	20
81. House Finch	258
82. American Goldfinch	44

38. Canyon Wren	2
39. Rock Wren	10
40. Mockingbird	2
41. Curved-bill Thrasher	4
42. Grissal Thrasher	1
43. Sage Thrasher	1
44. Western Bluebird	14
45. Mountain Bluebird	130
46. Black-tailed Gnatcatcher	1
47. Ruby-crowned Kinglet	6
48. Water Pipit	11
49. Loggerhead Shrike	21
50. Starling	1
51. Yellow-rumped Warbler (Aud.)	14
52. House Sparrow	7
53. Meadowlark Species	45
54. Red-winged Blackbird	8
55. Brewer's Blackbird	12
56. Great-tailed Grackle	1
57. Pyrrhuloxia	7
58. Cassin's Finch	5
59. House Finch	120
60. Green-tailed Towhee	3
61. Rufous-sided Towhee	2
62. Brown Towhee	5
63. Lark Bunting	215
64. Vesper Sparrow	2
65. Rufous-crowned Sparrow	1
66. Black-throated Sparrow	26
67. Sage Sparrow	1
68. Dark-eyed Junco (Oregon)	31
69. Grey-headed Junco	6
70. Chipping Sparrow	646
71. Clay-colored Sparrow	202
72. Brewer's Sparrow	73
73. Black-chinned Sparrow	1
74. White-crowned Sparrow	74
75. White-throated Sparrow	1
76. Song Sparrow	2

(A total of 2,401 individuals
Hueco Tanks State Park Count.)

CHRISTMAS COUNT, 1974

December 14, 1974

EL PASO

83. Lesser Goldfinch	12
84. Rufous-sided Towhee	1
85. Brown Towhee	1
86. Savannah Sparrow	9
87. Vesper Sparrow	1
88. Lark Sparrow	1
89. Rufous-crowned Sparrow	7
90. Black-throated Sparrow	129
91. Dark-eyed Junco	90
92. Grey-headed Junco	67
93. Chipping Sparrow	70
94. Clay-colored Sparrow	9
95. Brewer's Sparrow	43
96. Black-chinned Sparrow	2
97. White-crowned Sparrow	164
98. Lincoln's Sparrow	4
99. Song	18

Observers on Christmas Counts: El Paso Count: Ruby Allen, Bertha Barnhart, Berttye Barnhart, Helen Barto, Bob Bleicher, Lucretia Chew, Steve Chew, Sarah Jane Dodds, Bill Hoppes, new Environmental Specialist for El Paso Natural Gas Co., Bernice Howe, Bill Hunt, Charlie Jensen, Mary Moore, Luis and Sue Santaella from California, Jack Scott, Andrew Sigler, in service at Ft. Bliss, birder from New Jersey, Lucil, Ed White, Geth White, Dorothy Williams, Gertrude Rose, Helen Ponder, Anita Carter, Edna Lyons. Hueco Tanks Count: Ruby Allen, Bertha Barnhart, Berttye Barnhart, Bob Bleicher, Lucretia Chew, Steve Chew, Sarah Jane Dodds, Bill Hoppes, Bernice Howe, General Robert Hardaway, Lee Hardaway, Mary Moore, Luis Santaella, Sue Santaella, Jack Scott, Andrew Sigler, Ed White, Geth White, Dorothy Williams.

A total of 6,048 individual birds. (El Paso Count)

NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY WHITTELL CHALLENGE GRANT. In an effort to double our membership and consequently our voice in conservation and leadership in these troubled times when environmentalists are frequently blamed for our economic woes, National Audubon Society through a grant for the purpose challenges all chapters to double their membership in three years.

To the chapter in each region showing the largest numerical increase: FIRST PRIZE \$1,000; SECOND PRIZE \$500. To the Chapter in each region showing the largest percentage increase: First Prize \$1,000; Second Prize \$500. There's a double benefit: each chapter will receive its regular portion of new membership dues plus a chance for a prize. These extra funds will help each chapter to further

its important work for conservation. The campaign period extends from January 1st through June 30th, 1975. Important rules: Gift memberships will count in competition. Bear in mind that the recipient has the right to request membership in any Chapter he or she desires. "National Only" members transferring into Chapters are not new members. Each membership will count as one unit in this campaign irrespective of category of membership.

If every member recruits just one new member, the result is to double your membership.

DECEMBER BIRD SIGHTINGS

<u>Date</u>	<u>Bird</u>	<u>Observer</u>	<u>Locality</u>
12/5/74	Broad-tailed Hummingbird	Mrs. John Fleager (Verified by Geth White)	Mountain Park
12/7/74	Broad-tailed Hummingbird	Janet Brockmoller	Mountain Park
12/8/74	Cedar Waxwings (about 40)	Anita Carter	Upper Valley, Texas
	Robins (15)	Anita Carter	Upper Valley, Texas
		She has olive trees and feeders, water.	
12/22/74	Golden-crowned Sparrow	Andrew Sigler*	McKelligon Canyon
12/24/74	Common Goldeneye male	Bill Principe	Sunland Race Track, in New Mexico
	Snow Geese (17)	Bill Principe	Sunland Race Track
12/7/74	Groove-billed Ani	Bill Principe**	At the home of the Wm. Iselins 4 miles north of Las Cruces, New Mexico

* Andrew Sigler is a young serviceman stationed at Ft. Bliss, from Cranbury, New Jersey. His father is a birder and he grew up with birds and keeps records. He has been in El Paso 19 months and observed birdlife when he could on free time. He describes his sighting of the golden-crowned sparrow thus:

"I was up in McKelligon canyon sitting on a rock when I saw a bird which seemed very shy, diving down into a bush. This place was a red rock canyon just before the very end where there are picnic tables and much graffiti on the walls above. He squeaked and made noises and the bird came out in plain view for a few minutes about 25 feet away. There was no sun. The bird appeared to be a plain dark grey-brown bird with gold at the front of the head fading into streaks farther back on the head like an immature bird might have. It had a plain front with no lightening at the throat. His bill looked grey, not pink. It dived down again and I almost had to shake him out of the bush. He flew out in plain view and the sun shone for a minute on the brilliant gold head. This was a bright, good-sized sparrow, I think a Golden-crowned. I am familiar with immature White-crowned Sparrows. This one lacked the white throat of the White-crown. The time was 10:30 in the morning, on a day alternately cloudy and sunny.

I returned to the area again, but could not find him. Bad weather with heavy snows occurred the next few days and kept me from going back with others to try and find the bird." -- Andrew Sigler.

** Bill Principe heard about the Ani a week after it was first seen and did not see it. He said the details were good (but not what they were) and that he was sure the Iselins saw an Ani. He was about to leave for Mazatlan for Christmas birding. How about a report on tropical birds for the next newsletter, Bill?

LENA McBEE MAKES GIFT. We stopped enroute from Dallas to El Paso just after Christmas to see our friend, Lena McBee, who lives in Carlsbad. She has made a gift of her valuable records and papers, books and pamphlets to the El Paso-Trans Pecos Audubon Society. The gift includes nine volumes of Bent's Life Histories, 38 recent pamphlets, The Auk, and a number of other books on nature and birds. We thank this kind lady who was a keen bird student who derived pleasure from her hobby over the years in El Paso, and who contributed much to knowledge of birds of the region through her accurate reporting of bird sightings. In spite of her years (she is in her 90's) in searching through a closet and dragging forth books and pamphlets, we couldn't help but admire her agility -- that's what an active birding life does for you, folks.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS: The nominating committee, chaired by Welden Yerby, has prepared a slate of officers who will be elected and installed in February. The slate follows: Charlie Jensen, president; Welden Yerby, vice-president; Linda Jones, secretary-treasurer; Board members, Jack McDaniels, Berttye Barnhart, Sarah Jane Dodds, Mary Moore, Helen Ponder and Geth White. Nominations may be made from the floor.

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