



The Roadrunner

NEWSLETTER OF

EL PASO-TRANS PECOS AUDUBON SOCIETY

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April, 1975 Vol. V. No. 4

Lucretia Chew, Editor

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- Wednesday, April 16
7:30 p. m.
BOARD MEETING
Monthly meeting of officers and board members at the home of Charlie Jensen, 5816 Vista Clara.
- Sunday, April 20
3:00 p. m.
FIELD TRIP
Trip into Franklin Mountains led by Dr. Barton Warnock, who will present the program at the regular meeting the following night. Meet in the parking lot beside the UTEP Student Union Building.
- Monday, April 21
7:30 p. m.
REGULAR MEETING
Featured will be a color slide show of wildflowers presented by Dr. Barton H. Warnock, botanist from the Department of Biology at Sul Ross University, Alpine. Dr. Warnock is the author of WILD-FLOWERS OF THE BIG BEND and of a second volume which should be in print by meeting time.
- Thursday, May 1
7 p. m.
KICK-OFF PARTY
The Charlie Jensens will host a kick-off party to get ready for the Big Day Count. Their address is 5816 Vista Clara. Please let them know in advance if you plan to attend--584-7626.
- Saturday, May 3
All Day
BIG DAY COUNT
Join us for a day of exciting birding. Migration will be in progress, and there should be opportunities to see many birds not seen at Christmas Count time. Meet afterwards at the Chews, 4220 Wallington, to eat and discuss findings. Additional details in the story on page two of this newsletter.
- Wednesday, May 14
7:30 p. m.
BOARD MEETING
Monthly meeting of officers and board members at the home of Charlie Jensen, 5816 Vista Clara.
- Sunday, May 18
7:30 a. m.
FIELD TRIP
Trip to Hueco Tanks State Park. Meet at the Bordertown Drive In Theater. There should be excellent possibilities for seeing spring migrants. Bill Hoppes is leader.
- Monday, May 19
7:30 p. m.
REGULAR MEETING
Featured will be a very short color film entitled, "Panhandle on Parade," and a presentation by Kevin Zimmer on the birds of the Trans Pecos area.

GET A FRIEND TO JOIN AUDUBON

An important reminder that the Whittell Challenge Grant announced in the January newsletter is still in effect. Those chapters of National Audubon in each region which show the largest numerical membership increase and/or largest percentage membership increase in the period January to June, 1975, will be awarded a \$1000 cash prize. Second prize is \$500 Just think what all those new members would do for the Trans Pecos chapter and what a nice addition one of those case prizes would be to our treasury. Make it your goal to bring in a new member this month!

Audubon Big Day Counts differ somewhat from Christmas Counts. First, the local group is permitted to select its own date, and here we need to be lucky, that is hit a day when waves of migrants are passing through. Our records for the past five years indicate the best time is between April 30 and May 7; however, with El Paso's weather this year, it's anybody's guess!

Second, we are not confined to the Christmas count circle, and thus can include additional territory, especially water habitats. We are never sure what brings birds down during long migratory flights, but El Paso certainly has several possible attractions--the Rio Grande plus small lakes, reservoirs, drainage ditches, the canyons of the Franklin Mountains, residential lawns with trees and shrubs, and desert washes.

These counts are competitive and challenging. The name of the game is to find, in one day, as many birds as possible in as many habitats as possible. To accomplish this, a planning meeting will be held on Thursday, May 1. At that time we will decide on the specific areas to be visited and divide into groups for the Saturday count. It is very important to have enough birders in the field to cover the likely spots. Please come to the planning session, participate in the count, and in the post-count get-together on Saturday evening. (See the Calendar of Events on the first page of this newsletter for the details of times and places.)

One of the secrets of success is to have some idea in advance of where the birds are. You can help us with this by keeping records of bird sightings during April and the locations and dates of these sightings. Phone this information if you wish to the newsletter editor, Maereta Chew, at 532-6410 (evenings only) or bring it with you to the planning session.

FIELD TRIP NOTES

A small group led by Dave Steinbach birded in the southern end of the Tularosa Basin on March 16. They traveled along the War Highway eventually stopping at a beautiful little green area with a stream near the White Sands Missile Range Girl Scout Camp. Here they had a good look at a black phoebe, some pyrrhuloxia, and a cactus wren. Their search for raptors was disappointing--only American kestrels, marsh hawks, and red tail hawks were seen.

FEATHER LAKE PROJECT

For about a year or more now some members of the local society have been interested in a ponding area located near the intersection of the Avenue of the Americas and North Loop Road. The man-made pond has gradually developed a natural habitat which attracts water birds; it has been dubbed Feather Lake because of its proximity to the Featherlite Building Materials plant.

Bill Hunt, Geth White, and others have been birding the area and noting the species seen. Bob Nowak, ecologist at Horizon Lake, and formerly with the National Park Service, has visited the site several times determining the exact composition of the habitat and making recommendations for development of the area. Recently Eddie Chew was appointed chairman of a committee for the project.

The lake has now been partially fenced by the City and "No Trespassing" signs put up. The fencing was done primarily for safety reasons under a contract for fencing a number of ponding areas around the city. However, the fence was a necessary first step before any planting could be done or improvements made. The Public Works Director, George Dieter, has been receptive to our plans to develop the area into a multi-use sanctuary-recreation-education facility.

FIELD TRIP NOTES

A group of 16 met early on April 5 for a field trip to Aguirre Springs in the Organ Mountains. The weather was excellent for a walk up the Pine Springs trail, and the wild flowers were lovely. At one point the group left the trail and walked and climbed along the stream where the birds seemed more numerous. Thirty-one species were seen, including pyrrhuloxia, blue-gray gnatcatcher, plain titmouse, the rock, canyon, cactus, and Bewick's wrens, rufous and broad-tailed hummingbirds, acorn woodpeckers, ruby-crowned kinglet, scrub jay, violet-green swallow, crissal thrasher, brown towhee, robin, mountain bluebird, Say's phoebe, and Townsend's solitaire.

TEXAS ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY SPRING MEETING--ROCKPORT
Kevin Zimmer

The following is a daily account of the T. O. S. spring meeting attended by Geth White, Barry and Kevin Zimmer.

Wednesday, March 12 At about five a. m. the three of us boarded a plane for Houston. After resting for a while at the home of Mrs. White's sister in Houston, we spend the afternoon birding the marshes around Galveston. Among the birds seen were the laughing gull, gull-billed tern, sandwich tern, Louisiana heron, royal tern, roseate spoonbill, boat-tailed grackle, and little blue heron. The big thrill of the day was watching at extremely close range, a beautiful reddish egret fishing, and being able to photograph it.

Thursday, March 13 We left for Rockport in the morning, having borrow a car from Mrs. White's sister. The weather was bad when we left Houston, but cleared up beautifully as we moved on down the coast, and we saw a fish crow and a black vulture. Then, when we stopped for lunch at a rest area, we saw a noisy band of blue-gray gnatcatchers. We soon saw mottled ducks, and when we stopped for a black-chinned hummingbird along the road, the Carolina chickadee and anhinga came along with a few minutes. The anhings was magnificent as it soared over us with its neck stretched way out. Then a peregrine falcon flew right over our car, and Barry spotted a pair of red-necked grebes in a large pond; they are extremely rare in that area. That night we got in on the tail end of a film on the Aransas Refuge.

Friday, March 14 We got up early and went with a small group led by Ray Little for a field trip around Rockport. Birds seen included the olivaceous cormorant, clapper rail, black skimmer, black-necked stilt, American oystercatcher, Wilson's plover, ground dove, black-crested titmouse, yellow-throated warbler, common gallinule, white-faced ibis, and the least grebe. The bird of the day for us was the scissor-tail flycatcher which put on a beautiful show while I photographed it. We saw a great slide program that night on heron display behavior and a wonderful film on the golden-cheeked warbler.

Saturday, March 15 Today we were up before dawn to see the rare Attwater's prairie chicken on its booming grounds. We saw 22 of them booming and dancing in pursuit of a mate. While en route to Aransas Refuge we saw a bald eagle and a white-tailed hawk. At the refuge itself we saw the white-eyed vireo. Other interesting observations included seeing two whooping cranes from the observation tower, a couple of alligators, and photographing a javelina at about twenty feet. Barry added unnecessary excitement by almost stepping on a large water snake. The banquet that night included an excellent program on ecological areas of Texas.

Sunday, March 16 We woke up to find that a dense fog had covered the entire area. Figuring that the boat trip to Aransas for which we had tickets had been cancelled, we went back to sleep. However, we found out at the last minute that it had merely been postponed an hour. As we hurried across the Ramada Inn grounds for breakfast, we saw tufted titmice. The fog gradually lifted as our boat headed for the refuge. On the way we saw a red-throated loon. The best part of the trip was seeing 16 stately whooping cranes, some at very close range which I photographed.

The whole convention was a wonderful experience which I would highly recommend to any birder or naturalist.

EDITOR'S ERROR

In the listing of officers and committee chairmen of the El Paso-Trans Pecos Audubon Society in last month's newsletter, Dave Steinbach's telephone number was incorrect. It should be 821-6729. If you kept this list for future reference, please make the necessary correction. (It will be to your advantage; the lady whose number it is doesn't speak any English!)

HAWAIIAN TRIP
Geth White

The apanani is a pain in the ohia--a pain which is located in the back of the neck as one strains upward to find the small red bird feeding in the bright red blossoms at the top of one of Hawaii's most abundant forest trees.

It was an exciting discovery for Lee Hardaway, Helen and Mary Barto, my husband Ed, and me, as we searched for those protectively colored birds flitting nervously about from the blossoms they fed on. The apanani are members of the Drepanid group which feed on nectar and insects in the blossoms of the native ohia in Volcanoes National Park.

On a geology-oriented trip with a class from UT El Paso led by Dr. Jerry Hoffer, we spent a few days exploring the craters and lava flows on the big island. Some are as recent as 1974--haloed with steam--escaping steam jetting from vents close at hand, and some so old they had collapsed back long ago and a luxuriant pocket of trees and foliage was growing abundantly.

One of the most exciting bird finds of the trip was a few minutes' glimpse of three white-tailed tropic birds riding a wind current--a vivid contrast against the black lava. We did not see the native neni goose (They were nesting and very secretive.), but on the coast we did see three wandering tattlers among some ruddy turnstones. Golden plovers patrolled the lawns and parkways, some coming into the beautiful black billed spring plumages.

Everywhere there were Indian myna birds, much more handsome than the caged ones people keep--a warm brown color with yellow about the head and large white wing patches. They strolled the lawns, perched on wires, ever-present.

Many introduced species have done well on the islands in contrast to the extirpation of large numbers of the endemic species which succumbed to the mosquito virus brought by man, to land clearing, and to other disturbances of growing populations.

Little-visited Molokai was a pleasure to us with its mountainous high windward side with surf crashing into rocky shores and a gorgeous sea, and a dry side devoted to pineapple cultivation, abundant mesquite and grasses, and easily seen birds. Brazilian cardinals and the Chinese francolins were especially abundant.

The other native Hawaiian birds we saw were the elepaii, an elusive bird of the forests; the one native hawk; a crow; the little white-eye, and an introduced rice bird, a tiny creature of the grasses.

Much of the time we tried to stay away from the intriguing shops with their native wares, and we accustomed ourselves to the duets of dove cooings which we heard at dawn. The spotted and barred doves are abundant at lower elevations.

Garden-looking was another favorite pastime--shell ginger, red ginger, orchids, and anthurium growing as petunias do in our area.

To top it off, the night before we left Honolulu, the Sheraton Waikiki must have arranged to have a full moon break through the clouds over Diamond Head as we watched the lights wink on from our twentieth floor balcony and the surf crashed below on the beach.

RECENT BIRD SIGHTINGS

A pair of GOLDEN EAGLES in early March near Kilburn Hole by Dave Steinbach.

On Silver Street on March 2 a RUFOUS-SIDED TOWHEE by Geth White.

A roost of LONG-EARED OWLS in a tamarisk thicket near San Miguel in Dona Ana County by Bill Principe on March 4.

ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOWS at the Old Refuge near Mesilla on March 6 by Bill Principe, and a MERLIN near the same place on March 13.

On March 20, a POORWILL; two POORWILLS on March 28, all in the Zimmer's yard in Mountain Park, seen by Kevin and Barry Zimmer.

Two WHITE-THROATED SWIFTS in a Franklin Mountains canyon on March 21; three seen on March 22, by Kevin and Barry Zimmer.

COSTA'S HUMMINGBIRD in a canyon of the Franklin Mountains on March 21, 22, 23, by Kevin and Barry Zimmer. This is the same rare bird first reported by a field trip group on March 8.

Just north of Tornillo Lake on the Rio Grande on March 23, two GREATER YELLOWLEGS, and a CATTLE EGRET by Bill Principe.

At Hueco Tanks on March 26, three CINNAMON TEAL and a HOODED Merganser by Barry and Kevin Zimmer.

At the Fort Bliss Sewage Ponds on March 30, a GOLDEN-CROWNED SPARROW, two GREAT BLUE HERONS, and a RED-TAIL HAWK by Bob Bleicher.

Three LONG-BILLED CURLEWS on March 31 in a field near Anthony by Kevin and Barry Zimmer.

At Cherry Creek Campground in the Gila Wilderness on March 31, MEXICAN JUNCO, STELLER'S JAY, six PYGMY NUTHATCHES, by Kevin and Barry Zimmer.

In the Silver City area also on March 31, 35 ACORN WOODPECKERS, 20 MEXICAN JAYS, 30 MOUNTAIN CHICKADEES, 50-60 COMMON RAVENS by Kevin and Barry Zimmer.

A GOLDEN EAGLE at Aguirre Springs by Dave Steinbach on March 31.

The RUFOUS HUMMINGBIRD which arrived at Mrs. Fleager's on July 6 is still present on April 1 and is turning into a male first nuptial plumage.

A pair of BOBWHITE QUAIL in her yard in Mountain Park on April 2 by Janet Brockmoller.

At Tom Mays Park on April 2 a RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET, SAY'S PHOEBE, SCALED QUAIL by Bob Bleicher.

At Rice Camp #1 near Fort Hancock on April 3, SNOW GOOSE, BARN OWL, and RED-TAIL HAWK by Bob Bleicher.

A TURKEY VULTURE west of Trans-Mountain on Casner Range on April 5 by Dave Steinbach.

A ROBIN, a regular in the Chews' back yard throughout March and still present on April 8.

Bob Reed, a Raytheon executive who often has business at White Sands Missile Range, and who birds with our field group when he can, called Geth White to say that he was among the lucky throngs who viewed the now-famous Ross's gull which visited the coast of Massachusetts on March 2. This was the first time it had been seen south of Alaska and northern Canada, and the news made the front page of the New York Times and Time magazine.

Bob reports that the gull really showed off for all the telephoto lenses, preening, flying around to show his wedged tail, and turning to right and left for the ornithology greats and the birding fraternity which flew in from all points for a glimpse of this rare first record in the United States.

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First Class