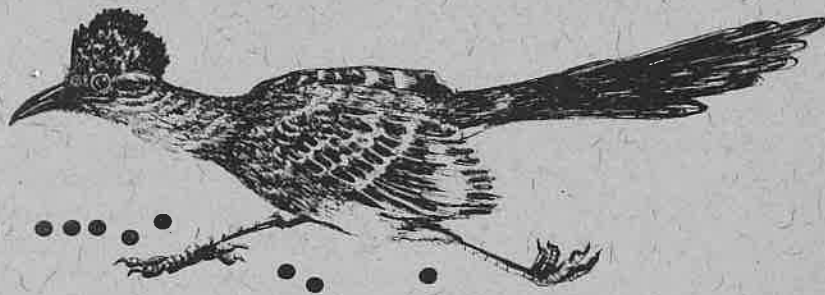


the ROADRUNNER.....



newsletter of
EL PASO-TRANS PECOS AUDUBON SOCIETY
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March, 1977 Vol. VII No. 3 Kevin Zimmer, Editor

REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING, Wednesday, March 16, 7:30 p.m., El Paso Garden Center, 3105 Grant

Dr. Arthur Harris, professor of biology at UTEP, will present what should be an extremely interesting program on paleoecology. This program (based on a paper which won him the faculty research award) will trace the evolution of southwestern wildlife over the past 35,000 years.

FIELD TRIP: Ft. Bliss Sewage Ponds, Saturday, March 19, 7 a.m.

This will be a short trip to an area which has consistently been one of the best birding spots in our area. We should hit the duck migration at its peak, and there are possibilities of hawks, shorebirds, gulls, Marsh Wrens, Crissal Thrashers, Soras, Common Gallinules, and Swamp Sparrows. The group will leave from the parking lot of the Barcelona Lumber Yard (Fred Wilson and Railroad) at 7 a.m.

FIELD TRIP: Aguirre Springs, Sunday, April 17, 5:30 a.m.

Join us for a hike up the beautiful Pine Springs Trail in the Organ Mountains. This trip has always produced a great variety of montane birds, and we should see several of the earlier spring migrants as well. Some of the birds that we should find include Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Acorn Woodpecker, Violet-green Swallow, Scrub Jay, Plain Titmouse, Bushtit, Bewick's Wren, and many others. Participants should bring their own lunch. The group will leave from the Sunrise Center parking lot (by the blue spire) at 5:30 a.m., so as to make it to Aguirre by 7:00 a.m.

APRIL MEETING: Date to be announced later.

Please join us for a very interesting program on "Birds of Panama" by Steve West. Steve (formerly from El Paso and currently living in Presidio) spent a couple of years in the Canal Zone, and has led tours there for Bird Bonanzas Tours. During the time in which he lived there, Steve accumulated quite a collection of slides of tropical birds. He may also have some specimens for us to examine. Due to the distance that Steve has to travel, we may schedule the program on a day other than our usual third Wednesday. The exact date will be confirmed in the next newsletter. This should be one of our finest programs ever.

FROM THE EDITOR'S CORNER

I used this column in last month's newsletter to urge more people to attend meetings and field trips on a regular basis. Apparently someone has been listening. We've averaged over ten people on all of our field trips this year, even though each one has involved a distant location, and all have been burdened with less than ideal weather. We still have our most exciting trips ahead of us, and I would like to raise the average number of participants still higher for each one.

Our February meeting was also gratifying in that it was very well attended. Let's keep it up. My one fear is that those people at the February meeting who were attending one of our meetings for the first time may have been turned-off by some of the things that happened. For those of you who missed the fire-works, let me fill you in.

Gayle Eads, President of the local chapter of the Sierra Club, was our guest speaker. She was speaking on the proposed channelization of the Rio Grande, a project which among other things would involve the destruction of all vegetation (primarily salt cedar) for 50 feet on either side of the proposed channel. The total area affected would amount to almost 3500 acres. The area to be channelized is the stretch of the river extending from Ft. Quitman to Presidio. This strikes very close to home, and would have a detrimental effect on several species of birds and other animals. Prime examples are the Mexican Duck (an endangered species) and the Gambel's Quail. The latter species, although quite common in some neighboring states, is found in Texas only in a restricted area between El Paso and Big Bend.

Gayle gave us an interesting and informative program on this proposed action and on some of the possible consequences. Unfortunately we never got to hear the whole story or explore some of the issues involved. Among the many visitors present at the meeting were a couple of men who own land in the area concerned, as well as a man from the Bureau of Reclamation. These three came loaded for bear, and spent much of the evening harassing Gayle and everyone else who spoke out in opposition to the channelization. In addition to this, they took frequent opportunities to expound at length on why they thought the proposed channelization was the greatest idea since the flush toilet. This drug the meeting out even longer, with the result that many people left before it was over, some in total disgust.

Now we believe that all sides of an issue should be heard. There are other interests at stake besides ours, and we certainly do not try to stifle anyone with differing opinions. However, there is a right and a wrong way of doing everything. Our visitors went about expressing their views in the wrong way. They rudely interrupted speakers and made several insulting remarks. In fact, they didn't even wait for the program to begin. They warmed up during Rill Hoppes' conservation report by taking potshots at his remarks on problems with the Elephant Butte Marsh. I would be the first to admit that there are sides to this issue about which these men are much more knowledgeable than I. These focus mainly around farming matters, and I am more than happy to listen to them on such subjects. However, I draw the line when these same people try to force-feed me their puerile (and in many cases totally inane) hypotheses on wildlife population dynamics and avian ecology; two subjects about which they apparently know very little. Yet this is what they did, and they even had the temerity to talk down to all of us in doing so, thus insulting the intelligence of everyone there.

Beyond all of this, there was a greater wrong done by these men. The purpose of our meeting was to inform people of the issue, and of Audubon's stand on it. It was never intended to be a public forum where opposing sides could battle it out. Unfortunately, this is what it was turned into. I would like to commend Gayle for handling this very difficult situation as diplomatically as possible. I know that many of us would have exploded had we been in her shoes. For those of you who were attending the meeting that night for the first time, please don't be turned-off. This was certainly not a normal occurrence, and we are taking measures to see that it doesn't happen again.

NEW BIRD BOOK:

The Forest Service has recently issued a pocket-sized booklet entitled Cavity-Nesting Birds of Arizona and New Mexico Forests. This 52-page publication is authored by Virgil E. Scott, research biologist for the Fish and Wildlife Service, and David R. Patton, wildlife biologist for the Forest Service's experiment station at Arizona State University.

The book contains a brief introduction, a table showing all of the cavity-nesting birds of the two states along with the major forest types occupied and primary tree use, a table of southwestern forest types, and appendices of all of the plants, invertebrates, and non-avian vertebrates which are listed in the main text. The meat of the booklet consists of one-page summaries for each of the 41 species of birds known to nest in cavities in Arizona and New Mexico. Included for each species is a black-and-white drawing and information on world range, range in Arizona and New Mexico, nesting habits, and food items. For the most part the drawings and the text are quite well done. There are a few flaws however. For instance, contrary to what is listed in the book, the Bridled Titmouse is not restricted to mountain forests, but is also quite common in riparian habitat in southeast Arizona and southwest New Mexico. The lack of nesting and food data for the Mexican Chickadee is also regrettable, as this is a species of great interest to birders.

Despite the minor faults listed above, the book is well worth sending for. And best of all, it's free! To obtain a copy write to: Rocky Mountain Forest and Range Experiment Station, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona 85281.

CONVENTIONS:

The Texas Ornithological Society will hold its spring convention and annual meeting in McAllen, Texas on April 21-23. Many exciting field trips are being planned, and Roger Tory Peterson will be the special guest.

The New Mexico Ornithological Society will hold its annual meeting in Albuquerque on March 19. This will be a good chance to hear several interesting papers on birds of this region.

For further information on either of these conventions, call Kevin Zimmer at 751-0552.

REMINDER: With the advent of March, it is time to fill your hummingbird feeders once again. The hummers usually arrive by the end of the second week of March, and start establishing territories shortly thereafter,

FIELD TRIP REPORT: McNary-Ft. Hancock area 2/19

Nine participants left early from the Denny's at I-10 and Geronimo for a trip to the lower valley. The sky was clear, but strong winds and cold temperatures kept us inside of our cars for much of the day. Hawks were plentiful along Hwy. 20 as we moved farther down the valley. Our first big stop was at Tornillo Lakes. We were rewarded by seeing lots of ducks and shorebirds. Most unusual was a flock of over 100 Common Mergansers. This is an extremely large number for this area. The big find was a pair of female Hooded Mergansers which kept apart from the raft of Commons. This species is very rare in the El Paso region.

The next major stop was the game preserve marsh at McNary. As usual it produced the best birding of the day. A brilliant male Vermillion Flycatcher was in his normal spot on the fence along the drainage ditch. Also along the ditch were both Say's and Black Phoebes, not unusual but still nice to see. A slightly different looking phoebe brought the caravan to a halt, and yes, it was an Eastern Phoebe, a rare winter visitor to these parts. We had just seen all three U.S. phoebes in one spot in a matter of minutes! Also unusual were about 25 Rough-winged Swallows hawking for insects over the marsh. This was a very early date for them to be migrating through. The marsh and holding reservoir were loaded with ducks (mostly Common Pintails) and several Great Blue Herons. The next rarity to come along was the Double-crested Cormorant, which obligingly circled overhead several times before leaving. On the way out we found a Rough-legged Hawk (rare) and a pair of Swamp Sparrows, one of the specialties which we had been looking for.

We ended the trip with a drive along the Fabens levee (which produced virtually nothing except a beautiful Ferruginous Hawk) and a stop at the Surratt farm in Clint, where we saw hundreds of ducks (including lots of Cinnamon Teal) at close range on their tiny stock pond. A total of 68 species were seen on the day.

FIELD TRIP REPORT: LaCueva Park 3/5

Twelve people turned out for the field trip to La Cueva Park in the Organ Mountains, but through a bizarre series of events (which would take a book to explain), the group ended up in three parties. Only two of the parties made it to La Cueva, while the third went on to Burn Lake and Aguirre Springs.

As it turned out, birding wasn't very good at any of the spots covered due to the horrible weather. Snow flurries, high winds, and freezing temperatures sent the birds (who evidently knew better) to cover, while the birders froze.

Despite this, a few good birds were seen by each of the groups. The parties covering La Cueva turned up Mountain Bluebirds, Lesser Goldfinches, and Rufous-sided Towhees among others. The Zimmer-Dukes party found 3 Olivaceous Cormorants at Burn Lake, a Rough-legged Hawk on the White Sands road, and Scrub Jays, Western Bluebirds, a Townsend's Solitaire, and a Golden Eagle at Aguirre Springs (the site of our April 17th field trip).

LEGISLATION:

State Senator Ogg has introduced a bill in the Senate which if passed, will grant ad valorem tax exemption to sanctuaries of the National Audubon Society and its chapters in Texas.

Hearings for the bill will be scheduled soon, and we urgently need lots of letters encouraging our local legislators to support this bill and its counterpart in the House (not yet introduced).

Properties owned by churches, libraries, zoos, the Little League, and others already receive ad valorem tax exemptions in Texas. Without this exemption, few institutions can afford to acquire and maintain wildlife sanctuaries.

Write your state legislators soon. Urge passage of SB-626.

CONGRATULATIONS to President Carter, who recently denied any more funding to the Garrison Diversion Project in North Dakota. This project was an economic and ecological disaster from the very start. For an outstanding review of the issue read "Dr. Strangelove Builds A Canal" in the March, 1975 issue of Audubon magazine.

President Carter is to be commended for his action. However, the Corps of Engineers will probably rear its ugly head again on this matter. Letters to the President supporting his action will help to insure that the Garrison project is laid to rest once and for all.

ATTENTION ALL MEMBERS*****

Not too long ago, the El Paso League of Women Voters received a federal E.P.A. grant to conduct a campaign urging people to save recyclable solid waste (newspapers and tin cans). They must conduct this campaign in conjunction with the city of El Paso.

Thanks to a rare stroke of good fortune, Mildred Smith (better known as the "tin can lady") became interested in what we are doing at Feather Lake through an article by Lance Murray in the Sundial. She came to us and the League with the idea of coordinating the recycling drive with Earth Day (celebrated here on April 23rd) and having the profits go to the Audubon Society for Feather Lake.

After much ironing out of details, this is what has been decided upon. The League of Women Voters, El Paso-Trans Pecos Audubon Society, and the Environmental Council will conduct a recycling campaign to coincide with Earth Day. Understand that none of the grant money awarded to the League may be used for anything other than publicizing the campaign. However, all profits from tin (not aluminum) cans turned in on April 23rd will be turned over to the Audubon Society for use at Feather Lake. Newspapers will be collected by the city with proceeds going to the city.

So please begin saving your tin cans and newspapers now. Remove any labels and flatten out the cans. Don't turn them in until April 23rd. Pick-up points will be at major shopping centers, and will be published along with other details in the April newsletter.

RECENT BIRD SIGHTINGS:

Outside of the field trips, few people have been birding lately. A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was frequenting Bob Dukes' yard on 3/4, and a flock of Cedar Waxwings has been seen by Lucretia Chew in her neighborhood recently. Joe DiPasquale was down in the lower valley on 2/12, and reports an Olivaceous Cormorant at Tornillo Lakes and an extremely early Yellow Warbler at the game preserve marsh near McNary.

MY SPECIAL THANKS to Barry, Lucretian Chew, and Roxanna Hagerman for helping with this issue of the newsletter.

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