



The Roadrunner

NEWSLETTER OF

EL PASO-TRANS PECOS AUDUBON SOCIETY

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Lucretia Chew, Editor

SPECIAL ISSUE--FEATHER LAKE

The summer has been a slow, lazy time for most local Audubon activities, but one project is advancing by leaps and bounds. Feather Lake as a wildlife sanctuary is becoming a reality, thanks to the cooperation of officials and several departments of the City of El Paso. During mid-July the local chapter's proposals for development and use of the area as a multi-use sanctuary/education/recreation facility were presented to the Parks and Recreation Board where they won unanimous approval. On July 23 and 24, the same proposals went to the City Council where they also were unanimously approved. At present a lease agreement is being prepared by the City Attorney.

While these various legal matters were being taken care of, other individuals were busy at Feather Lake itself. The fencing which had been completed last April through Public Works Director George Dieter, allowed the committee to begin development of the site. We have been fortunate to have the services of several experts. John Nowak, now ecologist with Horizon City and formerly with the National Park Service, and James McDonald of the Soil Conservation Service studied the area, taking water and soil samples and examining the present vegetation. On July 17 they met with the committee on the site to make explanations and recommendations regarding the planting of native grasses and shrubs. They urged planting to provide ground cover and stabilize the slopes. Immediate planting would benefit from the late summer rains.

To implement these recommendations, Dale Tate, Director of City Parks and Recreation, arranged for the area fronting on North Loop to be mowed and the road rimming the lake to be lightly graded. The Audubon Board of Directors held a special meeting on July 23 and approved the purchase of grass seed from the Miller Seed Company in Hereford, Texas. The following Saturday, Board members Charlie Jensen, Berttye And Bertha Barnhart, Sarah Jane Dodds, Ed and Geth White, Lucretia Chew, and new arrival Thomas Wright had a work party at the site. After some additional leveling and weeding, six varieties of native grasses were broadcast with tools provided by the City Parks Department. The group considered rain dances, but by noon were too hot and tired to do more than look skyward and send positive thoughts.

At its special meeting the Board also heard reports by President Charlie Jensen from the National Audubon Society and by Carl Jones, a lawyer and local member, recommending incorporation. Following explanations and discussion, the incorporation was unanimously approved, and Carl Jones was asked to proceed with the details. As this newsletter goes to press, the papers requesting incorporation as a non-profit organization have been sent to Austin. The Board is anxious to

complete this change in legal status prior to signing any agreement with the City.

Several other goals have been established which the committee hopes to implement in the near future. Of these the most immediate is the planting of additional native shrubs and trees which would attract more bird species. Among plants currently being considered are cottonwoods, mesquite, desert willow. A small open ramada-type building is planned for one portion of the lake bank on the North Loop side, and Ed White is currently preparing a cost estimate and sequential building recommendation. It is hoped that such a facility would enable various school and civic groups to visit and study plant and animal life at the lake without unnecessary damage to the still developing habitat.

A little background for those of you who may not be familiar with Feather Lake--This small ponding area on North Loop Road near its intersection with Avenue of the Americas was constructed about eight years ago on City-owned land as a part of the Mesa Drain System to alleviate flooding problems in the Lower Valley. Since that time a habitat attractive to water birds has gradually developed. The pond was brought to the attention of local Audubon by Bill Hunt who resided nearby and frequently birded there. During the past two years it has been visited with growing enthusiasm by birders and ecologists who dreamed of making it into a sanctuary. In time it was dubbed Feather Lake because of its proximity to Featherlite Building Materials plant.

SUMMER BIRD SIGHTINGS AT FEATHER LAKE

MEXICAN DUCKS, a pair by Kevin Zimmer on 7/5 and by Geth White on 7/23.

NORTHERN SHOVELER, appears to be breeding, but no nest located. Several observations in June and July by Geth and Ed White, Charlie Jensen, Sarah Jane Dodds, Lucretia Chew.

RUDDY DUCK, nested with three young observed in late June and July by group above.

BLUE-WINGED TEAL, nested with four young observed in late June.

CINNAMON TEAL, two pairs observed through June on several visits no young seen. Presumed to have nested. Geth and Ed White.

BLUETHROAT, immature male, on June 12, by Geth and Ed White and Charlie Jensen.

AMERICAN COOT, a population explosion! From an estimated 25 birds in 1974 to approximately 1,000 on the lake in June. Grazed the emergent cattails until food supply was exhausted, whereupon 3/4 of the population left; cattails are beginning to emerge again. Muskrats also proliferated, eating tubers. 1,000 coots noted in July; approximately 100 on 8/2.

WIGEON, female with eight downy ducklings on August 6 by John Nowak.

SNOWY EGRETS, two came in to roost on the largest cottonwoods at the southwest corner on August 8, seen by Geth and Ed White.

RIVOLI'S HUMMINGBIRD, a female on tree tobacco also on 8/2 by the Whites.

RUDDY DUCKLINGS following their mother, also on 8/8.

AMERICAN COOTS in all stages from egg to grown continue to dominate the lake.

MEXICAN DUCKS at various times during the summer by several observers.

SPECIES LIST--FEATHER LAKE

Eighty different species have been seen at Feather Lake, mostly by two local members who have been birding there and keeping records for several years. We are particularly indebted to Bill Hunt and Geth White for the data which follows:

Grebe, Horned	Roadrunner
Grebe, Eared	Nighthawk, Lesser
Grebe, Western	Hummingbird, Black-chinned
*Grebe, Pied-billed	Hummingbird, Bluethroat
Egret, Cattle	Hummingbird, Rivoli's
Egret, Snowy	Flicker, Common
Heron, Black-crowned night	Woodpecker, Ladder-backed
Bittern, American	Kingbird, Western
Ibis, White-faced	Swallow, Tree
Goose, Canada	Swallow, Rough-winged
Duck, Mallard	*Swallow, Barn
Duck, Mexican	Swallow, Cliff
Duck, Gadwall	*Wren, Long-billed marsh
Duck, Pintail	Mockingbird
Teal, Green-winged	Kinglet, Ruby-crowned
*Teal, Blue-winged	Pipit, Water
*Teal, Cinnamon	Shrike, Loggerhead
*Wigeon, American	Starling
*Shoveler, Northern	Warbler, Orange-crowned
Duck, Redhead	Warbler, Yellow-rumped
Duck, Ring-necked	Warbler, McGillivray
Duck, Canvas-backed	Warbler, Yellowthroat
Scaup, Lesser	House Sparrow
*Bufflehead	Meadowlark, Western
*Duck, Ruddy	*Blackbird, Yellow-headed
Kite, Mississippi	*Blackbird, Red-winged
Hawk, Red-tailed	Oriole, Northern
Hawk, Swainson's	Blackbird, Brewer's
American Kestrel	Grackle, Great-tailed
Quail, Gambel	Cowbird, Brown-headed
*Gallinule, Common	Pyrrhuloxia
*Coot, American	Grosbeak, Blue
Killdeer	Finch, House
Yellowlegs, Greater	Sparrow, Savannah
Dowitcher, Long-billed	Sparrow, Rufous-crowned
Avocet, American	Sparrow, Cassin's
Phalarope, Wilson's	Junco, Dark-eyed
Gull, Ring-billed	Sparrow, Lincoln's
Dove, Mouring	
Dove, Inca	

*indicates nesting species

Those interested in visiting Feather Lake should contact the Ed White, the Eddie Chews, or Charlie Jensen since the area is fenced and the gates are locked.

FIELD TRIP TO SACRAMENTO MOUNTAINS TO SEE HUMMINGBIRDS

On August 16 and 17, Saturday and Sunday, the Ed Whites will be "at Home" in a tent on their seven-acre plot in the Rio Penasco Valley, and we have been invited to join them. Those interested in a one-day trip may drive up early on Sunday or perhaps make arrangements to spend Saturday night in a motel nearby in Cloudcroft. For those who wish to camp out, spring water is available by catching it, and camping in the forest will be pleasant with cool nights and warm days. The meadows are full of flowers and hummingbirds, and rainy afternoons are highly probably at this 8300-foot altitude.

DIRECTIONS: Take Highway 54 to Alamogordo and on to Cloudcroft. At Cloudcroft take the first road to the right, marked to Weed and Sunspot, and follow it past the Deerhead Campground. Take the right fork marked Sunspot. About ten miles down this road you will notice a house, the Davis Ranch. Immediately take a left and then another left onto a gravelled road marked Rio Penasco. About a mile down you will see a cemetery which is the boundary of the White's property.

NEXT REGULAR MEETING

Reserve Monday evening, September 15, for the next regular meeting of the Trans-Pecos Audubon Chapter. An early September newsletter will apprise you of additional details.

El Paso-Trans Pecos Audubon Society
4220 Wallington
El Paso, Texas 79902

First Class