

# the ROADRUNNER.....



newsletter of the  
El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society  
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Editor: John Sproul

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## CALENDAR

### PROGRAM

21 APRIL 1980, 7:30 PM, Garden Center, 3105 Grant St., in Memorial Park. ENERGY CONSERVATION IS PEOPLE. Energy conservation is the quickest, cheapest and environmentally soundest way to bring energy demands into line with energy supplies. All major studies of our energy situation conclude conservation should be a top priority of national energy policy, and Congress is now considering expanded conservation programs. But are federal programs the real answer? El Paso's Energy Conservation Office has responsibility for achieving energy conservation within our city government. They do it not by grace of federal largess, but by convincing individuals to take personal responsibility for conserving energy. A member of the Energy Conservation Office will explain this approach at our April meeting. El Paso has the resources right now to solve our energy problems. Come learn what those resources are.

### FIELD TRIPS

SAT.-SUN. 12-13 APRIL. CLAY MILLER RANCH. Meet at Gateway East and Lomaland at 8 AM. We'll travel to the ranch of one of our members near Valentine, Texas. This overnight trip is another rare opportunity to bird an area off the beaten path. We should see Tufted (Black-crested) Titmice, Clay-colored and other sparrows, Vermilion Flycatchers, Scrub Jays, Harris' Hawks and many other species. You can walk as little or as much as you desire. Bunks will be available in the barracks, but bring your own bedding. Leader: Joe Guinn (566-8438). Please call Joe or Bob Bleicher (591-7261) if you plan to attend. Let us know if you need transportation. We STRONGLY encourage car-pooling to save gas.

SUN. 27 APRIL. DURLING'S FARM. Meet at I-10 and Transmountain Rd. at 8 AM (Mountain DAYLIGHT Time). Durling's Farm, one of our better migrant traps, is near Canutillo in the upper valley. During a short, easy walk we may see Phainopeplas, Hooded Orioles, Western Tanagers and Blue Grosbeaks. It could be a good day for migrating warblers, also. Leader: John Sproul (545-5157). If you can't reach John, try Joe Guinn (566-8438).

SAT. 3 MAY. SPRING BIG DAY COUNT. Save this day. Also save the night before (Fri. 2 May) for a pre-count planning meeting. Full details next issue.

SAT.-SUN. 17-18 MAY. GUADALUPE MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

14 APRIL, 7:30 PM. The Board will meet at the home of Jane Fowler, 8212 Parkland, El Paso, Ph: 772-0296. If you have been wondering who your Board members are, wonder no longer:

President	Bob Bleicher	591-7261	Hospitality	Elza Gilboe	772-1942
Vice-Pres.	John Sproul	545-5157	Membership	Jo Ellen Warolin	533-8731
Secretary,	.....Jane Fowler	772-0296	Program	open	
Treasurer			Publicity	Josephine Nagel	566-2143
Conservation	open		Sanctuaries:	Al Gavit	852-3119
Field Trips,	..Joe Guinn	566-8438			
Education					

FROM THE PEN OF THE PRESIDENT:

It was a real joy to see the fine turnout for both the February and March meetings. Both programs were excellent, and if you didn't get there...you were the loser. It takes time and effort to have good programming, and we have tried to make your coming out worthwhile. So my thanks to John Sproul for acquiring the film "Time for Survival" and to Elza Gilboe for the film "Darwin's Finches."

Another special thanks to Peggy Heisel for the fine refreshments provided.

Again thanks to Field Trips Chairman, Joe Guinn, and to the Clay Millers, for the arrangement to visit the Clay Miller Ranch for birding. This was one of last year's highlights, and we still talk about the good time we had camping there.

Gas prices continue to climb. So while it's still possible, go with the group to the Clay Miller Ranch (approx. 120 miles) in April and to Guadalupe Mtns. Natl. Park in May. There will be no formal activity during June, July and August.

--Bob Bleicher

AUDUBON SOUTHWEST REGIONAL CONFERENCE

In February you should have received an announcement for Audubon's 1980 Southwest Regional Conference, to be held at Ghost Ranch, near Santa Fe, NM, 23-30 June. It will feature a full week of activities, with the Society's president, Russ Peterson, and AUDUBON magazine editor Les Line participating 28-29 June.

Though other lodging is still available, all camping spots are spoken for. If you want to camp at the ranch but haven't paid your deposit, do so now. You will be put on a wait list and given a camp site when and if one becomes available.

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IMPORTANT! Last month National Audubon sent us no mailing labels for people with lapsing memberships. As a result, about 30 of you did not get the March ROADRUNNER. My apologies to all thus slighted. If you did not get this issue and still want it, please let me know. --John Sproul

Deadline for the May ROADRUNNER is 23 April.

The ROADRUNNER is distributed to all members of the El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society. Nonmembers can subscribe for \$3.00 per year. Mail subscription payments to John Sproul, 601 W. Yandell #25, El Paso, TX 79902. Make checks payable to El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society.

OBSERVATIONS - 25 February to 23 March 1980

WATERBIRDS

Black-crowned Night Herons appeared in scattered locations recently. One was at Randle's Pool 9 Mar (TB, JW), 5 were roosting in a yard in Ysleta 12 Mar (AG) and 40 were at Tornillo "Lakes" 15 Mar, along with 1 Snowy Egret (KZ, JDiP). The Ysleta birds reportedly had been in the area for several weeks. The Tornillo birds could be a breeding colony. The Whistling Swan and Snow Goose left Feather Lake in early March (AG). The male Wood Duck at Surratt's Pond remained, though. It was seen 1 Mar (JDiP, KZ) and 15 Mar (AG). Sandhill Cranes were moving north, as evidenced by the flock of about 1000 that flew over the LBJ Space Center northeast of Las Cruces 3 Mar (AG).

OTHER NONPASSERINES

Many Cooper's Hawks have moved through our area recently, but we've also had a few Sharp-shinned. A thorough search of the upper valley could usually turn up 2 or 3 Sharp-shinned in early March (JD), and an immature was in Arroyo Park 8 Mar (JS). The only Prairie Falcon report comes from the upper valley 18 Mar (JD). Poor-wills were calling in canyons in the Franklin Mtns. at least as early as 20 Mar (JD). First report of a returning Black-chinned Hummingbird came 21 Mar from the upper valley (SM, fide KK).

We've had a recent influx of male Williamson's Sapsuckers: 1 in Mountain Park from 27 Feb to at least 9 Mar (GL, fide JB), 1 in Memorial Park 13 Mar (JDiP), 1 near El Paso Medical Center 15 Mar (SW) and 2 in Memorial Park 18 Mar, both in the same tree with a male Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (JDiP). The best picid sighting for this report period came 22 Mar at Ft. Bliss Sewage Ponds. A male HAIRY WOODPECKER was in a mesquite in the desert immediately east of the ponds. Very cooperative, it climbed to the most exposed branch for the assembled field-trip participants (JF, JS et al.).

PASSERINES

Last month's reported disappearance of the wintering ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER may have been premature, for 1 was in Memorial Park 18 Mar (JDiP). First reported arrival for Rough-winged Swallows was a single bird at Santa Teresa Country Club 18 Mar (JD). First Barn Swallow was 19 Mar at Ascarate L. (JF). We went the entire winter with no reports of jays from the immediate El Paso area. We did get some unusual corvids when a field near Fabens was filled with the cawing of about 120 COMMON CROWS 15 Mar (JDiP, KZ).

Red-breasted Nuthatches occurred in-- where else?--Memorial Park, with 3 on 5 Mar and 1 on 18 Mar (JDiP). Both House Wrens and Brown Thrashers keep turning up. A House Wren was in atypical habitat on the west slopes below S. Franklin Pk. 2 Mar (JD) and another was at Tornillo "Lakes" 15 Mar (KZ, JDiP). Single Brown Thrashers were in Arroyo Park (JS) and near Beaumont Hospital (JG) 8 Mar, with another in Memorial Park 13 Mar (JDiP). Cielo Vista Golf Course had a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher 9 Mar (JF). The only unusual warbler for this report period was a Common Yellowthroat at Tornillo "Lakes" 15 Mar (KZ, JDiP). A Red Crossbill was by itself in Morningside Heights 20 Mar (LS), and a FIELD SPARROW visited a yard in Horizon City 7 Mar (MG).

OBSERVERS: Tom Baker, Janet Brockmoller, Joe DiPasquale, Jeff Donaldson, Jane Fowler, Al Gavit, Madeline Gavit, Joe Guinn, Kris Kohloff, Ginny Leech, Sarah Murdoch, John Sproul, Lucille Swick, Jo Warolin, Sunny Wratten, Kevin Zimmer. (Please report your observations to John Sproul, 601 W. Yandell #25, El Paso 79902; ph. 545-5157 home, 543-6126 work.)

## FIELD TRIPS FOLLOW-UP

The 9 Mar trip to Arroyo Park turned up nothing unusual, so we spent a relaxing morning listening to Gambel's Quail and Crissal Thrashers and watching Verdins build their nests. Bob Bleicher, Jane Fowler, Joe Guinn, Peggy Heisel, Kris Kohlhoff, A. E. and Jo Nagel, John Sproul, and Jo Ellen Warolin participated. Thanks go to Edna Mae Lyons, who served us coffee and cookies at her home next to the park.

The 22 Mar trip to the Ft. Bliss Ponds started slow but grew interesting when Joe Guinn spotted a Burrowing Owl in the desert east of the ponds. While seeking a better look at the owl, we found the male Hairy Woodpecker noted in this month's Observations. The entire group--

Tom, Virginia and 3 young Bakers, Helen Barto, Jane Fowler, Joe Guinn, Virginia Hair, Peggy Heisel, Perry and Stephanie Jamieson, Joe Lykins, A. E. and Jo Nagel, John Sproul, Lucille Swick and Jo Ellen Warolin--got a good look at this bird. Actually, the young Bakers found it nothing special and preferred to play in the sand. Northern Shovelers and Ruddy Ducks were the common ducks on the ponds, but we also saw Pintail, Cinnamon Teal, Lesser Scaup and Bufflehead. Shorebirds included Lesser Yellowlegs, Least Sandpiper, Long-billed Dowitcher and American Avocet.

## HAWK-WATCH WEEKENDS

The Hawk Migration Association of North America has designated the weekends of 19-20 and 26-27 April as special hawk-watch periods in Texas. If you know a good spot for seeing raptors and want to man it for a day or two, contact Mrs. Gladys Donohue, Regional Editor, HMANA, Route 6, Box 616D, Mission, TX 78572.

## DON'T TOSS THAT JUNK!

We will have a rummage sale Sun. 25 May to raise funds for Feather Lake. Please save all your spring clean-up items for this sale. Especially needed are household items, arts-and-crafts items, small appliances, clothing and furniture. If you wish to donate items or help with the sale, please contact Peggy Heisel (821-1269).

## CONSERVATION

### SEWAGE PONDS HEARING 17 APRIL

In 1962, the El Paso Water Utilities Public Service Board (PSB) created 3 sewage-oxidation ponds across the railroad tracks from Northeast El Paso. In 1968, the ponds reached capacity and began overflowing to the adjacent low-lying desert, where an extensive freshwater marsh developed. If you have birded the Ft. Bliss Sewage Ponds, you know they are one of the most productive wildlife habitats in El Paso County. Each year, this wetland grows more valuable as similar habitat is eliminated.

Some day soon, these ponds may disappear.

The PSB wants to replace them with a treatment plant that can produce recycled water of drinking-water quality. Some of this water would go to industrial use, but most would be injected into the Hueco Bolson for municipal reuse. None would go to the existing wetland.

The PSB wants the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to help fund this project. EPA is pondering whether or not to do so and recently released a Draft Environmental Statement (DES) comparing the PSB proposal with several alternatives. One (Alternative 6A) would allocate 0.6 million gallons per day (mgd) from the average flow of 8.6 mgd to maintain a 100-acre wetland.

(cont.)

Properly managed, it could help offset loss of the existing 320 acres of ponds and marsh.

It sounds like a sensible idea, and the DES recognizes its "significant ecological benefit." Unfortunately, the PSB isn't buying. The Board maintains the citizens of El Paso would prefer the water go to urban use rather than to wildlife. Moreover, EPA seems inclined to accept this notion. The case is not closed, though. One purpose of a DES is to elicit public comment. If public comment indicates substantial support for a wetland, EPA may require one as a stipulation for funding.

In reaching a final decision, EPA should keep these points in mind:

- The PSB's rejection of a wetland is based largely on the vote of its Citizens' Advisory Committee for this project. That vote was very close, indicating a wetland does have sizeable community support.

- The DES in places overemphasizes recreational aspects of the wetland. Audubon's first concern is not with maintaining a haven for bird watchers but with protecting a unique and valuable wildlife habitat.

- Granted, the sewage ponds are man-made, but as such they are the one positive step we have taken to replace what we have lost elsewhere. Today, as the DES notes, there is no comparable habitat in El Paso County.

- The DES is generally balanced but occasionally appears to overstate the case against maintaining a wetland. Annual net cost of the PSB's proposal is given as \$1,538,400 and that of Alternative 6A as \$1,548,200. Most people would call the difference between these two figures \$9800. The DES calls it "about \$40,000."

- Proper management can maximize the wetland's value to wildlife. El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon would welcome the opportunity to work with the PSB in this regard.

- The fact that a wetland at the plant site would be fenced and/or patrolled is a benefit, given current illegal hunting and shooting of raptors at the sewage ponds.

- The PSB proposal is only a pilot project to demonstrate the feasibility of wastewater recycling. The amount of water involved is small compared to El Paso's ultimate recycling potential. In particular, the amount needed to maintain a 100-acre wetland is just 0.6% of the 120,000 acre-feet per year that could be recycled by 2030. It will not seriously disrupt our long-term water budget to dedicate this amount to maintaining a wetland.

- Wastewater reclamation has a number of drawbacks. It is expensive, uses large amounts of energy and may pose a public-health risk. On balance, though, it is probably a long-term necessity for this water-short area.

The DES, entitled WASTEWATER TREATMENT FACILITIES, NORTHEAST EL PASO, TEXAS, is available for review at El Paso Water Utilities-Public Service Board, 320 S. Campbell, and at the El Paso Public Library, 501 N. Oregon. We have 2 opportunities to comment on this document. EPA will:

- accept written comments through 28 Apr. Submit them to Mr. Clinton B. Spotts, Regional EIS Coordinator, EPA, Region 6, 1201 Elm St., Dallas, TX 75270.

- hold a public hearing on the DES, 17 Apr at 7 PM in the PSB Board Room, 320 S. Campbell. Please try to attend.

The DES stresses repeatedly that the final decision on a wetland will depend on public comment. The future of an outstanding wildlife habitat is in your hands.

## NEW MEXICO WANTS TO LOWER WHOOPER'S STATUS

One of the most exciting experiments in endangered-species management is the effort to establish a second flock of Whooping Cranes outside their historic range. Since 1975, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) biologists have taken eggs from nests in Canada and put them in Sandhill Crane nests at Grays L. Natl. Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in Idaho. The Whoopers from these eggs then migrate with the Sandhill flock to Bosque del Apache NWR, 180 miles north of us near Socorro, NM.

The New Mexico Game & Fish Dept. recently asked the USFWS to reclassify these Whooping Cranes from Endangered to "experimental." As an Endangered species, the cranes get strong protection. Too strong, says New Mexico. It hasn't happened yet, but New Mexico fears potential reductions in goose and duck hunting at the Bosque to protect the cranes.

The state also wants USFWS to change the planting pattern at the Bosque to make the refuge less attractive to Snow Geese. It hopes to lure these birds to state refuges and thus increase hunting opportunities there. The USFWS refuses, predicting the geese would go to Mexico, not to the smaller ponds with high disturbance on the state refuges. The state, though, blames the Endangered Whooping Cranes for this refusal.

National Audubon opposes lowering the status of these Whooping Cranes at this critical time, when the oldest birds are just reaching reproductive maturity. Lynn Greenwalt, USFWS Director, agrees and turned down the reclassification request. But the issue is not dead. New Mexico now seeks reclassification through an amendment to the Endangered Species Act. Congress will hold hearings on the Act soon. Let Richard White (2266 Rayburn House Office Bldg., Washington, DC 20515) know your feelings about New Mexico's position.

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