



The Roadrunner

Newsletter of the El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society

El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society

No General Meetings for June, July & August

“Lights Out Texas” in El Paso

One billion birds are estimated to die every year in the U.S. due to collisions with buildings and structures. Migrating birds are most at risk, and with one out of every three migrant birds passing through Texas each spring the state is key for understanding and confronting the bird collision problem. Most birds migrate at night and are easily confused by artificial light in building windows, leading to collisions. Starting in fall 2020, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology teamed up with various Texas organizations to develop “Lights Out Texas”, an effort to identify the buildings and cities that are most problematic and convince businesses and local leaders to make an effort to turn out lights. This spring, El Paso fielded a team of volunteers from Audubon and UTEP to contribute data from our city. Led by Dr. Mike Harvey of UTEP, with assistance from Dr. Kevin Floyd of Audubon, Lois Balin, Scott Cutler, John Groves, William Medina, Amy Starkowicz, Diane Tatem, and Vanessa Washington all helped with the surveys.

For 19 days in late April and early May, volunteers scoured the areas around ten towers in downtown El Paso to determine whether any bird collisions were taking place. The volunteers braved cold mornings, suspicious security guards, and pigeon poop, but persevered to complete all of the surveys. In the end, we were surprised (and relieved!) to find very little evidence of bird collisions in downtown El Paso. In fact, only five potential collision events were detected. The low collision rates in El Paso relative to cities like Houston and Dallas may be related to the smaller size of our downtown, smaller numbers of migrants passing through, or atmospheric conditions here in the desert. Of course we still should be vigilant – it is still unknown whether buildings outside of downtown are problematic, and its possible fall migration is riskier than spring.

If you know of any buildings that are major sources of collisions or if you find dead birds (killed by buildings or otherwise) that you would like to donate to the research and teaching collections at UTEP, please contact:

Mike Harvey
 Assistant Professor and Curator of Birds
 The University of Texas at El Paso
mgharvey@utep.edu

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The e-Roadrunner

The Roadrunner is now also available electronically as a PDF file. If you would like to receive our newsletter in this way via e-mail, just send a note to John Sproul at jsproul@utep.edu.

El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Website!

Updated information about upcoming field trips, calendar of upcoming events, and recent bird sightings.

www.trans-pecos-audubon.com



El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society

Officers

President: Scott Cutler, 494- 2193
Vice President: Jane Fowler, 598-2448
Secretary/Treasurer: Eddie Chew, 587-9589

Committees

Conservation: Kevin Floyd, 613-6354
Education: Kathleen Whelen, 820-1895
Field Trips: Star Posada, 407-6442
Hospitality: vacant
Membership: vacant
Newsletter Editor: Kathleen Whelen, 820-1895
Programs: Susie Schneider, 542-3041
Publications: Jane Fowler, 598-2448
Publicity: Heather Rivera, 212-2825
Sanctuary: John Sproul, 545-5157
Website: vacant
Facebook: Kevin Floyd, 613-6354

The Audubon Foundation of Texas



represents Texas
 Audubon chapters in the Earth Share of Texas
 payroll deduction plan for charitable giving.

Great Texas Birding Classic 2021



The 25th Annual Birding Classic had a record-breaking year with teams birding all over the state from April 15-May 15, 2021. Across the state, **191 teams** registered – a tournament record! **More than 1,000** participants statewide – a 58% increase over last year!

El Paso Trans-Pecos Audubon Society was well represented in the Great Texas Birding Classic 2021. Congratulations to all participants and thank you for supporting this program.

Roughwings – Far West Texas

- 1st Place: 21 species
- TOS Mockingbirders, Texas Ornithological Society

Texas Ornithological Society sponsored TOS Mockingbirders, Kenya, Sonnie, Audri & Adalyn.

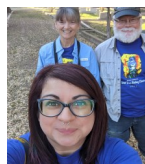
Big Sit! – Far West Texas

- 3rd Place: 28 species
- **The Fly-namic Duo**
Sit: Private residence
- 2nd Place: 39 species



Congrats! Craig & Darby Braginton!

One member of the El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society alongside two great birders from Alpine and Comfort Texas participated in the 25th Annual Great Texas Birding Classic for the Noon to Sunrise Category under the name "A Morning in Crockett County". They placed 11th place with a total of 60 different species seen in Crockett County on April 24th.



Conservation Organizations

Chihuahuan Desert Education Coalition
<http://www.chihuahuandesert.org>

Second Chance Wildlife Rescue
<https://www.secondchancewildliferescue.org>
 Josie Karam (915) 920-7867

El Paso Zoo (915) 212-0966
www.elpasozoo.org

Stick House Sanctuary
<https://www.facebook.com/epwildliferescue>
 (915) 219-2365

Keystone Heritage Park 581-7920
www.keystoneheritagepark.com

Asombro Institute
 (Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park)
 (575) 524-3334 www.asombro.org

Friends of Rio Bosque 747-8663
www.riobosque.org

Southwest Environmental Center
 (575) 522-5552
www.wildmesquite.org

Franklin Mt. Wilderness Coalition
www.franklinmountains.org/

Celebration of Our Mountains
www.celebmtns.org

CRITICAL HABITAT FINALIZED FOR WESTERN YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOOS

In 2014 and again in 2020, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) published draft proposals for critical habitat for the western population of the Yellow-billed Cuckoo, which the USFWS listed in 2014 as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). On April 21, 2021, the USFWS published in the Federal Register its [final rule designating critical habitat for the cuckoo](#). The rule took effect May 21, 2021.

Under the ESA, “critical habitat” is defined as geographic areas that contain the physical or biological features essential to the conservation of a listed species and that may need special management or protection. Critical habitat designations affect only federal agency actions or federally funded or permitted activities.

In its [analysis of the final rule](#), the National Audubon Society said, “Audubon applauds this final rule—first proposed in 2014 and seven years in the making—for the careful consideration of the habitat needed for continued successful reproduction of this threatened species.”

In the final rule, the USFWS designated 298,845 acres across 7 western states—Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, New Mexico, Texas, and Utah—as critical habitat for the cuckoo. In Texas, the final rule is unchanged from the 2020 draft proposal: The only critical-habitat unit established is the Terlingua Creek/Rio Grande unit, consisting of 7,913 acres along 45 miles of lower Terlingua Creek and the Rio Grande in Big Bend National Park.

In New Mexico, compared to the 2020 draft proposal, the number of critical-habitat units was reduced from 10 to 6 and the total acreage from 84,261 to 57,459 acres. By far the largest unit designated as critical habitat in New Mexico is the Middle Rio Grande unit, consisting of 46,595 acres along the Rio Grande upstream of Elephant Butte Reservoir in Socorro and Valencia counties. In the final rule, the USFWS states, “This unit is considered to have been occupied at the time of listing and is consistently occupied by the largest number of western yellow-billed cuckoos during the breeding season north of Mexico.”

Previously proposed critical-habitat units excluded from the final designation included 3 in southern New Mexico: Caballo Delta (north area, 190 acres; south area, 155 acres), Animas (608 acres along 6 miles of Las Animas Creek) and Selden Canyon/Radium Springs (237 acres along 12.5 miles of the Rio Grande in Doña Ana County).

In each case, the USFWS concluded that conservation efforts already being implemented or planned for the future would provide greater benefits for the cuckoo than critical-habitat designation. For Selden Canyon/Radium Springs, those conservation efforts include a collaborative partnership along the Rio Grande involving the U.S. Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission, the Elephant Butte Irrigation District and the National Audubon Society.



Join us on Facebook!

There is now an El Paso Audubon Society group on Facebook. Our aim is to provide a space for people around El Paso to share pictures, sightings, and other information about birds and conservation.

All levels of pictures are welcome. If you are looking for help with identification, please include the location and date of the picture, as both are important with narrowing the possibilities.

The Yellow-billed Loon of Ascarate Park

John Kiseda, EPTP Audubon Past President

Approximately a month ago on May 8th, it turned out that a few of the local birders were out at Ascarate Park birding, myself included, as it was World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD). Vikki Milne and Kevin Floyd had been going around the main lake, when they spotted an unusual bird for El Paso waters, a loon, and their sighting became even more unusual, and I dare say exciting, as they identified it as a quite large **yellow-billed loon**, whose normal range is usually limited to the High Arctic. John Groves and I very quickly wrapped up birding the part of the park where we had been and hustled over to the boat ramp area, where we also got to see this rare bird! The sighting and the excitement of this extremely rare Texas find quickly spread through the birder community here and in the region, with many people in the following week being able to spot the bird in-between its many dives for fish.



But then, after the bird had been at Ascarate for about a week, reports and then photos began to come in that the loon appeared to be entangled in some fishing line. This bird's being here was so remarkable and special, that when I discovered what was now going on, I began to contact others in our community to see if a rescue could be attempted.

Soon after that, on a warm, calm, May evening, Lois Balin, Scott Cutler, me, and Ray Spears, the Region's Captain of the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department's Game Wardens, found ourselves out on a boat with some life vests, long-handled nets, and a determination to persevere and succeed in capturing the loon. After we had been on the water for around an hour, and after a few fairly close runs with nets out, we were actually able to capture the bird, as Scott made an agile and athletic stretch from the bow with a net, and the bird was 'landed'! Amazing and almost magical!



We quickly brought the boat around and arrived back at the boat ramp area. As we took the bird out of the net and towel it had been wrapped-up in and placed it in an air kennel, we realized how big and heavy the loon actually was, and we began to make our way to the El Paso Zoo, where we had planned to meet with Vikki Milne the zoo's Chief Veterinarian. Once the loon was at the zoo it was carefully taken out of the air kennel and placed on an exam table, with the fishing line then being cut away

from its bill, head and throat, and examined further for fishing hooks and other possible injuries, while also receiving injectable fluids. Luckily, the bird appeared to not have suffered any serious visible injuries, and other than having missed some meals and being a bit dehydrated because of the fishing-line tangle, the bird seemed to be in pretty good shape. The loon was then placed in a holding kennel for the overnight, so it could be x-rayed in the morning...at around this time, the bird took great exception to all of us and its situation, and this ultimately resulted in it taking me a good while to finally being able to wrestle my gloved fingers from the vise-like grip of its powerful bill.

Over the next week or so, the bird had some pieces of metal removed from its gastrointestinal tract via the use of an endoscopic procedure. The lab work came back clear for high levels of toxic lead in its system, it was moved to our sea lion's quarantine pool area where it could swim and dive, it was able to loaf on a soft mesh structure that rehabilitators use to keep loons happy & healthy, it ate up well, especially herring, and it received a bath in Dawn to help its feather condition, in preparation for a release back to the wild.

On Sunday, June 6th, the loon was taken to an undisclosed body of water in Texas that has plenty of fish and a large enough water surface so that when the time comes and it wants to move on, it can successfully take off and fly away. It's very satisfying to have been part of the solution to get this 'unusual for us' bird back into wild, working along with the other caring and knowledgeable people that had been involved in getting it done. Kudos to One and All!

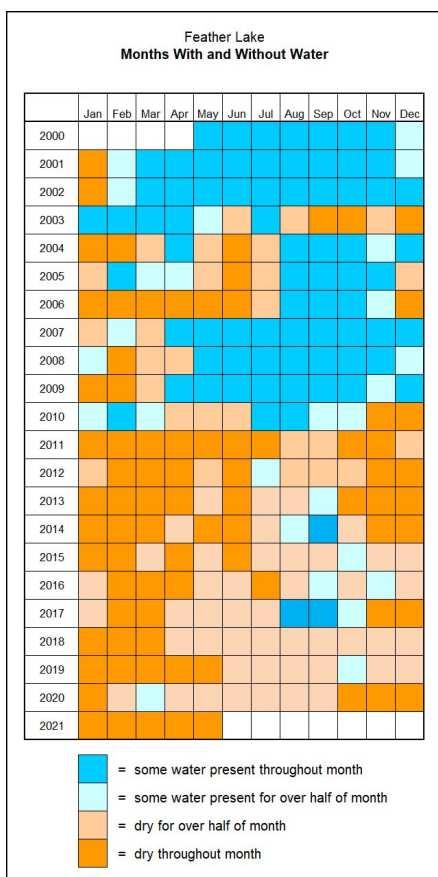
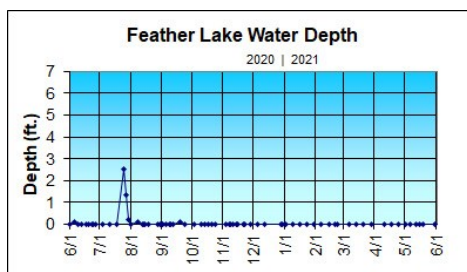
Ultimately, this event may enable our Audubon chapter to make worthwhile in-roads in working cooperatively with the El Paso County Parks system, the Ascarate Fishing Club, and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, to take some actions that can help decrease some of the dangers that impact wildlife because of discarded or tangled-up fishing line at Ascarate Park.

AT FEATHER LAKE

Through 2010, Feather Lake held water for significant periods in most years. Since then, though, the lake has been mostly dry. Starting in 2011, the basin has experienced 8 different dry periods lasting 8-10 months. It has been a difficult decade. The current dry spell, now 10 months long, could soon become the longest yet.

The dry conditions don't preclude service work at Feather Lake. Our next workday will be **Sat., June 12**, starting at **8 a.m.** Looking for an opportunity to help dig out a large saltcedar stump? We've got you covered.

Feather Lake is located at 9500 North Loop at Bordeaux in El Paso, 0.3 miles west of Americas Ave.



Audubon at

Rio Bosque Wetlands Park



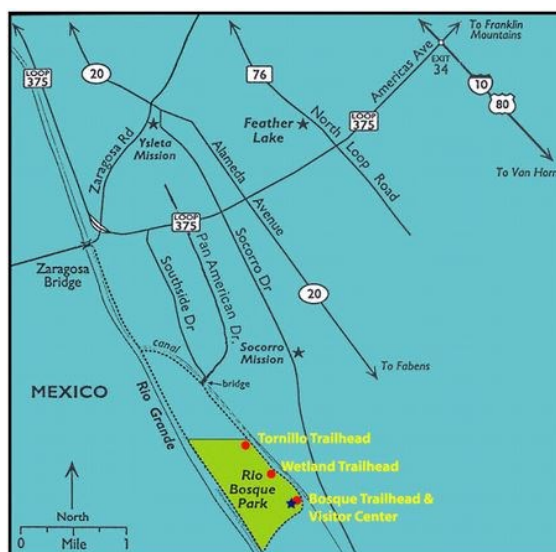
A nice mix of summer-resident breeding birds is now present, including Bell's Vireo, Yellow-breasted Chat, Summer Tanager, Blue Grosbeak and Painted Bunting. Expect Yellow-billed Cuckoos to join them in early-to-mid June. We'll be looking and listening for cuckoos on the next 2 birding tours.

For up-to-date information on tours, birds and water conditions at the park, check www.riobosque.org. Upcoming tours:

8 a.m., Sat., June 5 (Introductory tour)
6:30 a.m., Sat., June 26 (Bird tour)

7 a.m., Sat., July 10 (Bird tour)
8 a.m., Sun., July 18 (Introductory tour)

The meeting place is a bridge crossing the Riverside Canal. To get there from I-10, take Americas Ave. (Loop 375) to Pan American Drive, turn left onto Pan American and travel 1.5 miles. Information: 747-8663.



www.trans-pecos-audubon.com

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**National Audubon Society
Chapter Membership Application.**

Yes, I'd like to join. Please enroll me as a member of the National Audubon Society and the El Paso/Trans-Pecos Chapter.

Send AUDUBON magazine and my membership card to address below.

Check for \$20.00 enclosed payable to National Audubon Society

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State ____ Zip _____

**National Audubon Society
Chapter Membership Data Center
PO Box 97194
Washington, DC 20090-7194**

Local Chapter Code **C1ZW100Z**

Dates to Remember

<u>June</u>	<u>July</u>	<u>August</u>
Sat 12: Feather Lake workday 5 & 26 : Rio Bosque Mon 14: Board Meeting No General Meeting	No Board Meeting 10 & 18: Rio Bosque Mon 19: No General Meeting	Mon 9: Board Meeting Mon 16: No General Meeting Meeting

El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society
<http://www.trans-pecos-audubon.com>

El Paso/Trans-Pecos Local **Chapter Only Membership** Your \$15.00 will help support chapter activities & you'll receive *The Roadrunner* delivered to your mailbox. Make checks payable to the El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society
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