

THE ROADRUNNER

NEWSLETTER OF
EL PASO-TRANS PECOS AUDUBON SOCIETY
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COMING EVENTS

Saturday, March 17 Field trip to Aguirre Springs in the Organ Mountains. Meet on the Mesa St. side of the parking lot at Coronado Shopping Center at 10:30 a. m. Take a lunch to eat at Aguirre Springs. We may be working on a checklist of birds of the area. Stay as late as you like.

Monday, March 19 REGULAR MEETING at Centennial Museum, UTEP campus. Bob Jacobsen, Area Manager for the Bureau of Land Management (Las Cruces Office) will present information on the proposed protective withdrawal of the Organ Mountains public land. Clay Bridges, a wildlife biologist with the BLM will also be at the meeting to talk on wildlife (especially birds) of the region. This should be an interesting meeting--please come!

Sunday, April 1 Field trip to the bosque in the lower valley and perhaps other areas farther east. Meet in the parking lot at K-Mart on Interstate 10 and McRae at 8 a. m.

A WILDERNESS AREA proposed by Rep. Luther Jones lies south of the Carlsbad Highway and west of the Hudspeth County line. The land is currently state owned and is proposed to be transferred to the Department of Parks and Wildlife. Representatives of the State Land Office met March 11 with members of the El Paso Sierra Club to discuss a study of the proposed area. The Audubon Society may be able to assist in the study. Previously, state land has been used only for grazing and mineral leasing. Conversion to wilderness of state land would set a precedent in Texas.

OFF-ROAD VEHICLES A public meeting was held at the Bureau of Land Management District Office in Las Cruces on March 5 to comment on proposed regulations governing off-road vehicles (ORV) on public lands. Four-wheel and motorcycle drivers appeared to be well-represented with some ranchers and conservationists present. The main effect of the regulations will depend on individual BLM actions (after public hearings) and on enforcement.

SUGGESTION Ask the candidates for city office what their views are on the proposed Franklin Mountains Wilderness Park, and more important, if they will work to establish it.

BIG THICKET Senator Lloyd Bentsen proposed (S.314) establishment of the Big Thicket National Park to be comprised of 100,000 acres in seven counties. Senator Bentsen also introduced S.313 which would establish the Amistad National Recreation Area of 65,000 acres.

HIGHWAY BILL BEFORE CONGRESS The Senate is expected to vote the week of March 12 on a Federal Aid to Highways Bill (S.502). The House Public Works Committee will study the highways bill beginning March 20. Letters are needed to urge Congressmen to 1. Care for our environment by supporting EPA and Section 4F of the Department of Transportation Act and by deleting the San Antonio and I-66 of Virginia provisions 2. Provide highway trust funds for mass transit (This is supported by the Administration.) 3. Provide for local control over highway funds.

WINTER POPULATION STUDY YIELDS SURPRISES

Bill Hunt

Twenty-five species of wintering birds in a quarter-section of desert scrub land? That number was higher than I expected when I began my Winter Bird Population Study last fall. ~~Nor did I expect the total numbers to be so high: an average of over 200 birds per 100 acres.~~

Winter Bird Population Studies make up a part of the winter issue of American Birds. They are designed to be systematic studies of measured plots of land during the period of December 1-March 31. Both species and numbers are counted on regular visits, and are reported as birds per 100 acres.

My interest began in 1968 when I read in American Birds that relatively few studies were being made in areas near cities. I tested my own interest in 1969-70 in the oak-hackberry washes east of Las Cruces at the foot of the Organ Mountains. I found that I enjoyed the discipline and the sense of accomplishment involved in such a study. Then I moved to El Paso and began to look for a new area.

I chose a plot near my home in the Lower Valley, one with natural desert cover. The plot is an isolated remnant of desert land, surrounded on all sides by the "marks of civilization": the Interstate highway, a row of houses, cultivated farmlands and horse stalls, and a dump. The mesquite, salt-bush, and Christmas cactus area is regularly traveled by horseback groups from a nearby stable.

Three of the bird species frequented the borders of the houses and farms more than the desert itself: house sparrow, starling, and Brewer's blackbird. Three others were recorded only once and seemed out of place: Audubon's warbler, Steller's jay, and water pipit. The other species were seen repeatedly and seemed to be attracted to the desert habitat itself.

Most numerous was the lark bunting, averaging 202 per visit. Next were house finch, 61; white-crowned sparrow, 32; Brewer's sparrow, 26; mourning dove, 23; and white-necked raven, 15. Others seen in small numbers but regularly: roadrunner, mockingbird, sage thrasher, shrike, meadowlark, pyrrhuloxia, green-tailed towhee, verdin. Seen less frequently: sparrow hawk, crissal thrasher, scrub jay, cactus wren, and blacktailed gnatcatcher.

Besides the student's personal interest and satisfaction, the values of such Winter Population Studies lie in the field of information. Repeated year after year, they could tell us of bird habits, and suggest the effects of weather on population distribution. When compared to other studies in the area, they could give clues to habitat preferences.

Thus far, the study has been a rewarding hobby for me, and I commend the plan to other bird students.

LAW AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The United States Department of the Agriculture has announced the expansion of the Water Bank Program which has as its purpose the preservation of waterfowl habitat in areas where it is disappearing. Participating farmers are compensated for maintaining wetlands and for providing needed additional habitat for nesting and brooding places for migratory fowl. Participation in the program has increased from 56 counties in 13 states in 1972 to 82 counties in 15 states in 1973.

The President recently signed into law HR11091 which increases the Federal Aid to Wildlife Restoration Fund by extending existing firearms taxes to cover archery equipment used in hunting, and HR12186 which substantially increases penalties for violations of the Bald Eagle Protection Act.

Bills have been introduced in the current sessions of the Texas and New Mexico legislatures which would permit individual citizens and groups to bring suit against violators of environmental laws and regulations without having to demonstrate that the citizen or group has suffered personal damage.

A recent federal court decision has permanently enjoined mineral rights owners from any mineral prospecting on lands in a federally designated wilderness in northern Minnesota. The decision conflicts with the federal mining laws, but the court ruled that preservation of a wilderness area would be impossible if mineral development of lands within it is allowed. The decision will be appealed if for no other reason than to determine what compensation is due individuals and corporations which hold rights to explore for minerals in areas which subsequently have been designated wilderness.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS Your notices for renewal of membership will come from National Audubon directly. Please renew through the national office. Your dues to National Audubon include dues to our local chapter and a refund is sent back to us, as is a listing of all new members. Only renewals of subscription to this newsletter will be handled through the local society.

BIG CYPRESS PURCHASE POSTPONED Pleading lack of funds, the Administration has decided not to finance purchase of the Big Cypress Swamp, major water supplier to the Everglades National Park, in the 1973-74 budget. Purchase of the Swamp had been promised in the President's 1973 Environmental message. At a press conference held to protest the decision, Dr. Elvis J. Stahr, National Audubon President, warned that "delays in funding the Big Cypress acquisition can only result in unnecessary damage to the whole fragile area. Delay will also increase considerably the cost of acquisition at a later date."

PREDATOR HEARINGS The Senate Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Environment has postponed its hearings on predator control legislation to March 27,29. There will be an additional hearing in the spring so the ranchers can present data after lambing when coyote predation is claimed a major cause of losses. The House hearings have been set for March 15.

RECOLLECTIONS OF A DAY IN ALASKA
Carl Jones

For almost two hours Linda and I hiked around the edge of the hillside which sits beside the right face of Mendenhall Glacier. Melt water from the thawing ice-fields on top of the mountain formed a waterfall that leaped over the edge of a cliff and crashed downward through the ferns and undergrowth into the lake at the toe of the glacier. Icebergs, calved by the glacier the day before, cruised through the water while small schools of salmon swam listlessly in shallow pools on the edge of the lake. High above timberline, a group of mountain goats skipped from ledge to ledge and sent splintered rocks sailing into the trees below.

Later that afternoon we returned to the cabin on the edge of the sea. Behind the cabin a forest of spruce trees creaked in the breeze. Through the front window we could see devils club, forget-me-nots and Tibetan poppies growing at the edge of the rocky beach which was sprinkled with eagle and gull feathers, clam shells and ore-bearing nuggets. Golden eye ducks flew in single file just above the waves. Several pods of sperm whales lumbered by, gently breaking the surface of the water just long enough to spray clouds of mist into the air through their blow holes. Transfixed, we watched these happenings in the sea until the sun finally set at midnight.



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