



Volume 25 (3)

June - August, 1995

# The ROADRUNNER

Newsletter of the El Paso/Trans Pecos Audubon Society

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## *Those Lazy, Hazy Days of Summer*

As the warm weather settles in we can only hope that it is not as hot as last summer, and maybe the monsoon will come on time this year. In any case, keep the sunscreen and iced tea handy.

Although there will not be any general meetings until September, there will still be plenty to do. Board meetings will still be held each month and members are always welcome. The schedule is included in the Calendar on the back page. As always, Bob Johnson has put together a great list of field trips for summer birding, including a summertime trip to Bosque Del Apache, a place we normally visit in the depths of winter. And don't forget to take your binoculars and field guide with you on vacation. If you prefer to do your birding from the comfort of your office chair, there are some ways to help you do just that on page 5.

Whether you maintain a bird feeder during the summer or not, it is always a good idea to have clean water available for the birds. The sound of moving water, like a small fountain, has an almost magical effect in attracting birds. As the summer progresses and migration begins, you may be surprised at what shows up.

However you spend the summer, we hope it is enjoyable and safe. The next issue of The Roadrunner will be coming out in early September, and we will see you then!

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# Why I Watch Birds

by Robert Winkler

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Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl [that] may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. —Genesis

A Connecticut newspaper columnist, in an attempt at humor, once complained in print that birds are noisy, flying nuisances that wake him at dawn and dirty his car. He saw no good reason for birds and suggested they be eliminated. He ridiculed birders like me as naturalistic oddballs who parade around the woods in paramilitary get-ups. A golfer, he proclaimed that birding has about as much sport as watching the grass grow. As spring's songsters herald the summer nesting season, I offer this defense of birds and birders.

Birds are important for a simple reason: they are here. Yes, they control insects, but the measure of their worth is not their benefit to humanity, no more than the pharmacy shelf is the measure of the tropical rain forest. Wildlife has a right to exist for its own sake. The height of human hubris would be to suggest that nature's profound creations must justify their presence to us. As if it were our place to grant birds permission to exist!

Birders are not frail, bookish fanatics in pith helmets and safari jackets. We dress like other people who frequent the woods, adding binoculars and perhaps a field guide. We don't do back flips at the sight of a yellow-bellied sapsucker, a bird that is not particularly unusual. When I go birding, I usually hike for miles, and I bird several times a week year-round, regardless of the weather. Watching birds, I have learned about them and about me, and I have gained admittance to the secret society of the wild.

Like the best sports, birding challenges the physique, the senses, and the intellect. To see birds in all their wondrous forms, you would have to visit the wetland, the coast, the open ocean, the mountaintop, the desert, the prairie, the jungle, the river rapids, the tundra, and the polar regions. When millions of birds migrate across North America—returning to northern breeding areas in spring and departing in fall for winter

homes as distant as South America—birders around the country go afield to witness the mysterious and awe-inspiring spectacle.

Why do people go out of their way to find birds? Birds are beautiful to look at, they make an incredible variety of sounds, and they exhibit fascinating behavior. A rare bird is as thrilling as the most precious gem. Birds come in every imaginable color, and in this country they range in size from the 3 1/4-inch calliope hummingbird to the California condor with its wingspan of nearly 10 feet. Whether a bird's song is short and sweet or long and musical, virtually all bird songs are memorable and stirring.

Birds, in short, show nature's diversity in all its glory, and watching birds is nothing less than a celebration of life. But I think the real fascination with birds is that, more than any other creatures, they embody the freedom and wildness about which we humans can only dream. These colorful, almost mythical feathered sprites defy gravity at will. They go wherever they want, whenever they choose, some at lightning speed. They are more beautiful and exotic than any extraterrestrial being Hollywood could concoct, and yet they are here, at our doorsteps, for us to enjoy.

Living in society's overpopulated, paved-over world—with all its rules, regulations, and traffic jams—I think we envy the birds' wild freedom. We want that freedom and wildness for ourselves. And so we birders watch, listen to, identify, count, list, house, feed, and photograph birds.

Admittedly, it's a vicarious experience, but it satisfies a deep natural urge within us. This is the same urge that drives people who hunt. Yet birders can possess nature's freedom and wildness without snapping the chain of life that joins us to all living things.

People who have cut themselves off from nature are, at best, indifferent to birds; at worst, they view birds, birders, and wildlife as bothersome and unnecessary. They don't really care if developers and speculators gobble up wildlife habitat, if pollution poisons the water and air, if birds decline and disappear.

After a visit to China, Roger Tory Peterson remarked that vast areas of the world's most populous country were almost devoid of birds. Tirades against birds disturb those of us who feel close to nature because we fear the rest of the world's birds may suffer

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the same fate. The morning chorus of bird song has ushered in another spring, but each year there are fewer choir members.

*Robert Winkler, a writer, lives in Weston, CT and frequently writes about nature.*

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## **A Property Owner Defends Wetlands**

*Reprinted from Audubon Activist*

**Audubon  
Activist**

*John Chaconas of St. Amant, Louisiana, gave this testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary on the impact of federal wetlands policy and the Omnibus Property Rights Act of 1995.*

I own a home and property in Ascension Parish, Louisiana. This home was built (by the previous owner) on wetlands on violation of the Clean Water Act. I have been portrayed as the victim of an unfair law and overzealous bureaucrats.

We have seen our story and others that don't pass a simple "truth test" being used to gain political momentum for the takings issue. Being conservative by nature, and by seeking out the truth, we came to believe that the thought processes that generates this legislation tends to disregard the rights of neighboring property owners. Politicians and the media expose only the tip of the iceberg. What lies below the tip is the underlying question: Do existing wetland policies work and can the public and a critical natural resource remain unprotected?

Our overwhelming, long-term fear is that if "takings" is successful, it will lead to an emasculation of the Clean Water Act and act as a domino to topple other critical protections afforded by federal law.

This would leave the public to defend themselves in endless litigation pitting neighbor against neighbor, brother against brother, and the individual against the larger interests of big business.

The fact is my family and I have been played as pawns by politicians to justify their opposition to current wetlands law. I believe wetlands regulations do work well, with over 99 percent of the permits applied for being approved. As with any other policy though, there are people who abuse it and use their land in ways that harm neighboring properties.

The fault here is not wetland policy. It is abuse of that policy. I heard a congressman describe this as government arrogance. He's wrong! The arrogance here is with those who misuse wetlands policy. It's also with those who use our situation to further their agenda. There is a need for Clean Water Act wetlands protections. They should be enforced.

Property rights are essential. Like most Americans I believe my property rights do not extend to harming the property of my neighbors. What is wrong here is not wetland policy gone awry, but the arrogant belief that some can do whatever they want with their property and all others be damned. The only remedy left for those neighbors adversely affected is for them to sue one another or take on the giants of industry and larger interests alone.

I believe the true target of pending legislation and political agendas is to torpedo a wetlands policy that has proven to be workable and flexible.

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## **Summer at Feather Lake**

*by John Sproul*

**Feather  
Lake  
News**

The crowds, both avian and human, are gone now, and our Feather Lake Wildlife Sanctuary (9500 N. Loop in El Paso) is settling into its summer

rhythms. Spring was eventful. Public visitation was good right up to the seasonal closing date, April 30. White-faced Ibis numbers reached all-time highs, peaking at close to 5,000 in mid-April. On May 13, a surprising White-throated Swift became the 165th bird species recorded at our sanctuary.

With Feather Lake now closed for the season, it's time to recognize the many good people who staffed it during visitor hours this past year: Tom and Ginny Baker, George Barnett, Craig Braginton, Jane Fowler, Sallie Homan, Hugh and Sally Jameson, Bob Johnson, Neil Keith, Gil Kellner, Kathy and John Kiscda, Clyde and Marlow Mays, Jo Nagel, Betty Pagel, Roxanne Schroeder, Charles and Helen Simpson, John Sproul, and Dennis Taylor. Hearty thanks to all!

Thanks are also due the City of El Paso's Streets Department. Even with our sanctuary closed for the summer, some folks find it so irresistible they cut through the chain-link fence to get in. Every time this happens, the Streets Department helps us by promptly making the necessary repairs.

Feather Lake will re-open October 1. Can't wait for opening day? Are you in luck! Our mid-summer workday will be Saturday, July 15. We'll start at 8:00 AM to beat the heat.



## **For Sale: Durling's Farm**

*by George Barnett*

Mr. and Mrs. Gothard, the current owners of Durling's Farm, will be placing the property up for sale in the near future. The property includes the main house, a back guest house and a storage building. The structures sit on five acres of woodland.

Any one who has been birding in the area of Durling's Farm knows that it is a paradise for birders and/or nature lovers. The Gothards would like to keep it that way by selling the property to someone who appreciates nature rather than a developer who may destroy the woodlands.

The Gothards plan to sell within a year or earlier if an offer is made. They can be reached at 505-874-3621 to set an appointment to see the property.



## **AUDUBON BIRDATHON**

Birdathon is now past and the question is: Will our chapter be among the best again? So far, the numbers look good. There were 26 counters, three less than last year, but we saw 160 species, one more than last year. Our counters had a total of 213 sponsors. The final tally of money raised is not in yet, but check the September newsletter for all the results.

Hopefully, you made it to the pot-luck dinner, even if you weren't a counter. There was good food, good conversation, camaraderie, and door prizes. The door prizes went to:

- Joan Shimerda
- Paul Bingham
- Charles Simpson
- Jo Nagel
- Carolyn Brown

All of the sponsors were eligible for prizes awarded at the pot-luck dinner. The winners were:

- Sallie Homan - Patagonia shirt
- Tara Ditlevson - birdhouse
- Norma Peticolas - elephants book
- John Sproul - nature book
- Joe Guinn - quail print
- Margaret Branan - Kolliker Owl

Our thanks go to the counters for their hard, but enjoyable, work over the Birdathon weekend. We especially want to thank the sponsors who have been critical to the success of this and past Birdathons. Well done!



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## Audubon Adventures

Participation in the Audubon Adventures program is open to all teachers in grades 4 through six. If you would like to participate in the 1995-96 school year program you are urged to contact Charles Simpson at 598-2274 as soon as possible.

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## Birding in Cyberspace

by George Barnett

As warm weather approaches, you may consider staying inside where it is cool and the computer is on. But you can still go birding by way of the Internet.

The first place to go is the newsgroup *rec.birds*. This one is very active and has postings on everything from bird feeders to bird fights. If you know anything about birds, you should check out this newsgroup.

From there go to the World Wide Web and look up the home page for the National Audubon Society at <http://www.audubon.org/audubon>. This is a nicely designed site with press releases, information about the Society including the sanctuaries maintained by NAS. If you would like to check up on some of the other environmental organizations around the country then go to Eco-Org at <http://www.rain.org/~eis>. This is a database of about 9,000 organizations dedicated to nature, the environment and related fields. There is a similar site for wildlife and conservation that may be easier to handle located at <http://metro.turnpike.net/S/sam2/index.html>. You will find links to everything from the Avian Web to the World Wildlife Fund. There is even a site for whale adoption.

Planning a weekend birding trip to Australia? Maybe Europe or Africa? You may want to look into some of the information available to you online for all of these places at a site maintained in the Netherlands at <http://www.phys.rug.nl/mk/people/wpv/birdlink.html>. Here you will find a collection of links to birding around the world. It is, after all, the *global* Internet.

Most of these sites can be accessed from a single source right here in town on the Rio Grande Free Net. Just look for George's Home Page at <http://rgfn.epcc.edu/users/ac968/george.html>. You will also find a section listing favorite birding spots in the El Paso area.

So what are you waiting for? Grab your binoculars and head for your computer. See you on the Net!

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## About the Newsletter

The chapter newsletter, THE ROADRUNNER, is published six times a year by the El Paso/Trans Pecos Audubon Society. The annual subscription rate for the newsletter only is \$5.00. The newsletter is included with your membership in the National Audubon Society.

Chapter members are encouraged to submit articles for publication in THE ROADRUNNER. The articles may be of any length and in any format, but the editor reserves the right to modify submissions to fit space available.

Articles may be submitted to the editor:

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Night: 581-1829  
Fax: 778-2808  
Internet: [labelman@aol.com](mailto:labelman@aol.com)

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## Donations

The El Paso/Tras Pecos Audubon Society gratefully acknowledges a donation from

**Mary Lou Alcorn**  
for work at Feather Lake, in memory of  
**Mary Etta Haag.**

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# On The Trail

## THE UPPER/UPPER VALLEY

The Anthony area will be the place to see something different on Sat. June 10th. The first stop will be at Helen Bigalows Wildlife Rehabilitation Ranch, then on to the river to check on a Heron Rookery, and many more good birds. Meet Bob Johnson (757-1876) at 4:04 PM, where? - Transmountain Road and I 10. Assistant Leader George Barnett (581-1829).

## FRANKLIN MOUNTAINS S W P

On Sunday June 18th we will conduct the second outing to determine the status of Breeding Birds of the Franklins, a fun and educational trip. Plan to meet John Sproul (545-5157) at the Tom Mays entrance (west side along Transmountain Road) at 7:12 AM.

## SANTA FE NEW MEXICO

See different birds, (Lazuli Bunting, Black-billed Magpie, Lewis's Woodpecker, American Dipper, and maybe GRAY JAY plus many others). The Randall Davey Sudubon Center is located up a canyon about 3 miles from the State Capitol Building, campers can roll out their sleeping bags on the premises. For those who would prefer more comfortable accommodations, many motels on Cerrillos Road. This will all take place during the July 4th (Memorial Day) week-end. For detailed itinerary and map call our fearless leader Sid Shepperd (566-2162).

## AGUIRRE SPRINGS

Sat. July 22d, get away from the heat of El Paso and into the cooler pines only 70 miles away. Located on the east slopes of the Organ Mts. above the White Sands Missile Range it is a good place to see Acorn and Hairy Woodpeckers. Bring a lunch and water. Meet Bob Johnson (757-1876), Transmountain Rd. and I 10 at 7:14 AM.

## WATER CANYON

This tour will take us from river valley to fir forests, this will occur on the weekend of Aug. 5th and 6th. Birding stops include the Bosque Del Apache NWR, Water Canyon, and the Plains of San Aqustin. Camping in Water Canyon, where we hope to see Red-faced Warbler, Motels in Socorro NM only 24 miles away. Call Bob Johnson for more details

## SHOREBIRD MIGRATION

Sun. Aug. 27th a tour of the Fort Bliss Ponds should turn up some migratory shore birds. We should get at least 6 species of ducks and 6 of waders. Maybe the elusive Sora and Red-necked Phalaropes. The tour will be over by noon, but bring water. Meet the leader at Furniture Country (4801 Fred Wilson Rd.) at 7:14 AM. For details call Bob Johnson (757-1876).

## MORE MIGRATION

Lets see if we can find some land birds coming thru. The Fall season is upon us and that could mean some good birds. So on Sat. September 9th at 7:29 AM we will meet at the Garden Center in Memorial Park. Solitary and Warbling Vireo's, Orange-crowned and Yellow Warblers could be around.

## LOOKING AHEAD

Sun. Sep. 27 a PM trip in the Country Club Area, and on the weekend of Oct. 7/8 to the Davis Mts.

The Friends of Hueco Tanks sponsor a Bird Identification tour at Hueco Tanks State Historical Park on the third Sunday of each month at 8:30 AM. Conducted by the El Paso-Trans Pecos Audubon Chapter.

# Observations

March 16, 1995 - May 15, 1995

Uncommon, RARE, and CASUAL sightings

No sightings from the BIRDATHON or the Migratory Bird Count are listed here. Due to space limitations only one or two sightings of many species are listed, although in many cases more were reported. Report your sightings to Bob

"Wildbirder" Johnson (757-1876).

(Observers: Mrs Mary Alcorn Jr, Tom Baker, George Barnett, Craig Braginton, Doug Emkalns, Harvette Green, Richard Hermsillo, Bob Johnson, Larry Jordan, John Kiseda, Bruce Neville, Gail & Terry Nickle, Al Olivas, Patricia Russell, Pam Russo(PmR), Jim Zabreski, Barry Zimmer.)

Asc-Ascarate; Can-Canutillo; Cor-Coronado; CCA-Country Club Area; D/O-Durlings/Owens; EEP-East of El Paso; FBP-Fort Bliss Ponds, FtH-Fort Hancock; HTk-Hueco Tanks; 375-Loop 375; Mem-Memorial Park; Msl-Mesilla NM; NEE-Northeast El Paso; Sun-Sunland Park Area.

## PELICANS to MERGANSERS

WHITE PELICAN (117)	3/24	(BZ)	McN
(100)	4/1	(JF/JS)	McN
<u>D C CORMORANT</u>	4/15	(PmR)	CCd
White-faced Ibis (4760)	4/16	(JS)	FLk
SNOW GOOSE	3/18	(JS)	FLk
	4/22	(RH)	FBP
CANADA GOOSE	5/5	(JK)	Asc
Wood Duck	4/1	(JS)	FLk
<u>SURF SCOTER</u>	4/16	(LJ)	McN
COMMON Merganser	4/16	(LJ)	McN

## BIRDS of PREY

OSPREY	3/24	(BZ)	McN
<u>BROAD-WINGED HAWK</u>	4/21	(RH)	FBP
Golden Eagle	3/16	(BJ)	375
MERLIN	4/29	(JK)	Sun

## PLOVERS to TERNS

SNOWY PLOVER	4/26	(AO)	FBP
SEMIPALMATED PLOVER	5/1	(LJ)	FBP
Willet	4/16	(JS)	FLk
	4/26	(RH)	FBP
Long-billed Curlew	3/24	(BZ)	McN
	4/19	(JZ)	Can
<u>STILT SANDPIPER</u>	5/1	(LJ)	FBP
<u>BONAPARTE'S GULL</u>	4/16	(LJ)	McN
FORSTER'S TERN	4/30	(GN/TN)	FLk
BLACK TERN	5/7	(LJ)	FBP

## OWLS to THRUSHES

<u>WESTERN SCREECH OWL</u>	5/13	(JF/JS)	Tor
<u>RED-HEAD WOODPKER</u>	3/19	(DE/BN)	Msl
GRAY FLYCATCHER	5/10	(JK)	Mem
VERMILLION FLYCTCHR	4/16	(AO)	EEP
Western Kingbird	4/6	(TB)	Can
SCRUB JAY	5/5	(JK/AO)	Mem
<u>GRAY-BREASTED JAY</u>	4/22	(GB)	Cor
BLUE/GRAY GNATCTCHR	4/23	(CB/JS)	WFk
<u>SWAINSON'S THRUSH</u>	5/5	(LJ)	D/O

## VIREOS to REDSTARTS

Solitary Vireo	4/15	(JK)	Mem
Warbling Vireo	5/5	(JK)	Mem
Virginia's Warbler	4/22	(AO)	HTk
Black-throated Gray Warbl	4/15	(JK)	Mem
Black & White Warbler	3/19	(BJ)	HTk
	5/5	(JK/AO)	Mem
<u>HOODED WARBLER</u>	5/4	(LJ)	Mem
<u>AMERICAN REDSTART</u>	5/5	(AO)	Mem
	5/7	(MA)	FtH

## TANAGERS to GOLDFINCHES

Summer Tanager	5/2	(AO)	Mem
Western Tanager	5/11	(GN/TN)	CCA
ROSE-BRSTD GROSBK	4/29	(JK)	Sun
Black-headed Grosbeak	4/30	(JK)	CCA
CLAY-COLORED SPROW	4/25	(LJ)	Mem
WHITE-THROATD SPROW	3/16	(HG)	CCA
Hooded Oriole	3/23	(BZ-yd)	NEE
Lesser Goldfinch	5/15	(PR-yd)	STA

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# CALENDAR

## June

- Sat., 10** - Field trip to the Upper Valley, see page 6.  
**Mon., 12** - Board Meeting at Betty Pagel's home, 6328 Osage, 772-2686; 7:30 PM.  
**Sun., 18** - Breeding Bird Atlas, West Franklins, see page 6.

## July

- Sat., - Tue., 1 - 4** - Field trip to Santa Fe, NM, see page 6.  
**Mon., 10** - Board Meeting, location to be announced.  
**Sat., 15** - Feather Lake workday.  
**Sat., 22** - Field trip to Aquirre Springs, see page 6.

## August

- Sat., - Sun., 5 - 6** - Field trip to Bosque Del Apache, see page 6.  
**Mon., 14** - Board Meeting at Craig Braginton's home, 125 Libby, Canutillo, 877-4138; 7:30 PM.  
**Sun., 27** - Field trip to the Ft. Bliss Ponds, see page 6.

## September

- Sat., 9** - Field trip to Memorial Park, see page 6.

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### El Paso/Trans Pecos Audubon Society

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