

The Roadrunner



Museum
4/7/8/73

NEWSLETTER OF THE TRANS PECOS AUDUBON SOCIETY
4220 Wallington, El Paso, Texas 79902
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Geth White, Editor

CALENDAR

Saturday, Dec. 15 73rd ANNUAL NATIONAL AUDUBON CHRISTMAS COUNT. Dawn to dusk. Leaders listed below with territories. Please volunteer to work with a leader and familiarize yourself with their territory.

Ruby Allen will be compiler and Charlie Jensen, organizer. Charlie suggests we each be responsible for certain wanted birds known or suspected to be in our territory, to borrow a technique from the Freeport count.

At the end of the day, bring your records to the home of Eddie Chew, 4220 Wallington, where we can have the excitement of the tally and refreshments. Rendezvous at noon if possible at the Rio Grande Bridge, Country Club Road for a recapitulation and to have lunch.

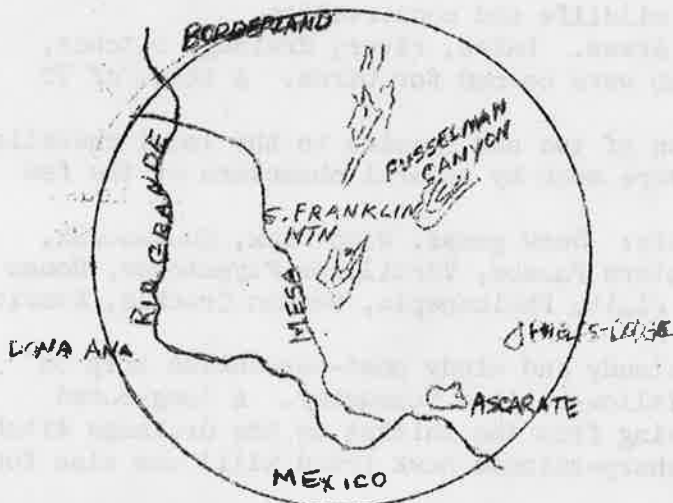
Increase in the use of Christmas count data for scientific studies makes accuracy imperative. Complete documentation of rarities with corroboration of other observers is required. Photographs to accompany are highly desirable.

Observers are asked to spend at least 8 hours in their areas if possible. Leaders are asked to estimate the percentage of time spent in desert flats, scrub desert, mountain foothills and canyons, riparian habitat, bosque and irrigated farmlands, city parks and gardens. The new fee schedule is as follows:

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| *1. <u>American Birds</u> subscribers, present or new | \$1.00 |
| *2. Non-subscribers to <u>American Birds</u> | 2.00 |
| 3. Feeder-watchers, no fee. If name listed | 1.00 |
| 4. Non-subscriber's family, each member | 1.00 |

*To receive April issue of American Birds free. Christmas count issue.

Leaders please keep account of total party hours -- on foot and by car, and notes on weather.



Count circle 31° 49' N 106° 29' W. center shifted to south end of Mt. Franklin Peak (3692-6167 ft.) to include Phelps Dodge Cooling Ponds, Ascarate, Cement and fee-fishing lakes, Rio Grande from Ascarate Lake to Borderland Road, canyons in Trans-mountain Road area, Memorial and Sunland Parks, El Paso Country Club district, desert flats 2%, scrub desert 6%, mountain foothills and canyons, 25%, riparian habitat 26%, bosque and irrigated farmlands 12%, city parks and gardens 29%.

<u>Christmas Count Leaders</u>	<u>Telephone</u>	<u>Territory</u>
Ruby Allen	751-7024	Frontera Road, Sunland Park, Diaz Lagos, Upper Valley residential area, orchards and fields, drainage ditches to Borderland Road.
Bill Hunt and Al Gavit	591-5630	Ascarate Lake, Phelps Dodge Cooling Ponds, Memorial Park, Canyons off Rim Road and Cement Lake.
Luis and Sue Santuella	755-5080	Mountain Park residential areas and canyons.
Geth and Ed White	584-7783	Fusselman Canyon and slopes.

* * *

TOS THANKSGIVING WEEKEND IN EL PASO was successful with 105 people registered from all parts of the state and one from as far away as Florida. An impressive total of 142 birds were recorded from the field trips and birding in the area which included the Organ Mountains and some high country in the Franklins.

Bill Hunt reports the Peregrine Falcon was a high point on his trip down the lower valley and out to Horizon Lake where two Sabine's gulls were sighted, one injured, for a most unusual sighting. Western Grebe were on the lake and on the surrounding desert some of the birders were pleased to see Sage Sparrows and Crissal Thrashers.

A Bald Eagle and Golden Eagles were seen over the mountains; Peggy Acord of Amarillo reported a Green Kingfisher on Zaragosa Road near the diversion channel on the Rio Grande, but no confirmation is available. This would be a new record for the county. Mexican jays were seen in the Organ Mountains as well as Acorn Woodpecker; blue-grey and black-tailed gnatcatchers, sage thrasher, Townsend's Solitaire, Phainopepla. The irrigation drainage ditches seem to be a favorable habitat for late-lingering warbler migrants. The following warbler species were recorded: Parula, yellow-rumped, black-throated grey, yellowthroat, and Palm. To the long list of sparrow species was added the swamp sparrow, and some common grackles were noted in among the Great-tailed grackles.

Geth and Ed White were able to show their group a large covey of scaled quail, pyrrhuloxia, verdin, black phoebe, Say's phoebe, house finch and even a marauding Cooper's hawk who snatched at a house finch while the aforementioned species were sunning over a stagnant pool at Hueco Tanks. Hawks put on quite a show out there with rough-legged, ferruginous, Swainson's and a prairie falcon catching the downdrafts from the rock formations or using ledges in the rocks for perches.

Panel discussion after the dinner in Juarez was stimulating. Dr. Ira Gabrielson's remarks were reported in the El Paso Times the following day in an article captioned "White House Ignores Wildlife." He said it is not a lack of money but the lack of interest of Congress which lets good conservation bills pass by without any recognition. He pointed out that we elect the Congress and should let them know of our interest and keep working until we get elected officials who will be concerned in protecting our wildlife and conservation.

Ruby Allen reports on the Upper Valley River Areas. Lakes, river, drainage ditches, bosque, woodland, irrigated fields and desert scrub were combed for birds. A total of 75 species was seen.

High spot of the two-day trek was the addition of two new species to the local checklist. These were Palm Warbler and Swamp Sparrow. Both were seen by several observers at the fee fishing lakes.

Other especially interesting birds sighted were: Snow goose, Wood Duck, Canvasback, Bufflehead, Baird's Sandpiper, Vesper Sparrow, Eastern Phoebe, Vermillion Flycatcher, House Wren, Bewick's Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Water Pipit, Phainopepla, Common Grackle, American Goldfinch, Baird's Sparrow and Lincoln's Sparrow.

Two additional species were seen on a cold, cloudy and windy post-convention trip on November 25. These were the Prairie Falcon and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. A long-eared owl was heard twice and small birds were seen fleeing from the thicket on the drainage ditch in front of the fee fishing lakes, north end. A sharp-shinned hawk (road kill) was also found.

New Mexico had a small number of people in their turnout. Ro Wauer made a big contribution on the panel discussion and leading a trip into the Franklins and Dr. Bruce Hayward made a brief talk on Saturday evening at the dinner. A letter from William Stone expresses the sentiments of most people attending the meeting:

"Mrs. Stone and I want to thank you and your associates for the wonderful time we had at the TOS meeting. We particularly enjoyed the friendliness and hospitality of your members. Will you convey our appreciation to them, especially to Bill Hunt, Al Gavit and Ed Chew, who conducted the excellent field trips we were on."

I would like to thank all of you who helped in all the many ways to get this fall meeting together and to make it a success. It's a long way to come all the way out to El Paso from east Texas, central Texas and south Texas and it is due to all your efforts that they saw many western birds and had an enjoyable time. -- Geth White.

NOVEMBER BIRD SIGHTINGS

<u>Species</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Locality</u>	<u>Observers</u>
Anna's hummingbird	23-24	3130 Mesa Verde (Mtn. Park)	Luis and Sue Santaella and TOS members
Rufous hummingbird	24	"	Santaellas and Ed Kutac, Andrew O'Neil
Black-chinned hummingbird	12/3	Camino Real	Dr. Chester Reynolds
Female hummingbird species	12/5	Park Foothills (East Franklins) feeding on geranium blooms	Mrs. George Folland
Female hummingbird species	12/2	4010 Flamingo at feeder	Mr. & Mrs. Dan Ponder
Cosprey	11/20	Upper valley	Charlie Jensen
Nighthawk species	11/24	San Elizario	Geth & Ed White, Margaret & Jack McDaniel
"	11/29	Mission Hills	Lucretia Chew

NOTICE TO BIRDERS: Please check with Mr. Van Zandt, manager at Sunland track, before crossing the track to view birds on or at edge of lake so that accidents may be prevented to race horses and riders. It is suggested that requests be made to enter only after 10:00 A. M. Birders are welcome but cooperation is necessary.

NEWS FLASH: On December 4 the House voted to create a national preserve in what is called the "biological crossroads" of the United States, the Big Thicket wilderness of East Texas. Senate passage is considered assured. The state has previously approved Big Thicket bills, but the House has refused to act on them.

BOARD MEETING OF EL PASO-TRANS PECOS AUDUBON SOCIETY is to be at 7:30 P. M. on Wednesday, December 12th at Eddie Chews.

HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS UNACCEPTABLE BILL TO REFORM PREDATOR CONTROL WHICH COULD OVERRIDE EPA AUTHORITY AND CONTINUE PREDATOR OVERKILL.

A barely acceptable bill to reform government predator control programs has become intolerable unless the House Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries, the full House, or the Senate cleans it up. As amended and prepared for reporting by the Subcommittee on Fisheries & Wildlife Conservation and the Environment, H.R. 11366 (new number) is unacceptable to National Audubon because:

1. It would allow predator killing programs to be run by state agriculture agencies instead of by game and fish departments whose personnel are trained in ecology.
2. It would remove virtually all control from the use of the M-44 set gun, the so-called "coyote-getter," whose scented bait and cyanide cartridges are deadly not only to coyotes but to domestic dogs, foxes, bears and other forms of wildlife. Widely used, the cyanide gun becomes a bio-cide, killing coyotes that are doing no damage to livestock as well as the individual animals that learn to prey on sheep.

3. It establishes a dangerous legislative precedent by over-riding the authority of the Environmental Protection Agency to define and regulate chemical toxicants. Cyanide, Compound 1080, strychnine, and thallium are now banned for predator control by EPA.

4. It would increase funds, not reduce them, for federal and state killing programs.

THE CATTLE EGRET
(*Bulbulcus ibis*)

When you see a travelogue of Africa showing a herd of elephants with graceful white birds grazing on insects stirred up at their feet, you feel that this is indeed an exotic scene of animals and birds on another continent.

Change the elephant into a cow, place the cow in a pasture belonging to the David Surratt's near Clint and the white birds following feeding on insects stirred up by the grazing domestic animals are the same species which followed the elephants in Africa.

The truly unique fact about the Cattle Egret is that it shares the distinction with only one other species, the Fieldfare, of an Old World species establishing itself in the New World without human help.

Making its own way from Africa, scientists believe it was blown over by either north-east tradewinds or by a tropical hurricane to British Guiana in South America where it was discovered late in the nineteenth century. This hypothesis is supported by the recent discovery of a banded Cattle Egret in Trinidad, wearing a band placed on the leg as a nestling in Spain. (McKean, 1960).

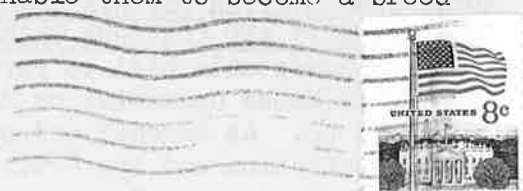
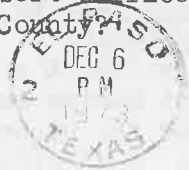
From South America the next leg of its journey brought this remarkable species to Florida in 1942 where it first spread up the Atlantic coast to Massachusetts by 1952, out west to Wisconsin by 1960, and to central Canada by 1961. El Paso County was getting a few records in 1967 when it was listed as "casual" on the checklist which was interpreted as very occasional records.

It was sighted on our Christmas Count last year and the year before. Faye Surratt first noticed four white birds grazing with the cattle in December, 1972. By January the flock had picked up to 16 birds. Perhaps they feel at home with the presence of so many cattle at their nearby feeding operation. Seeking a safe place to roost, the white forms wing their way in shortly before sunset to settle down in the tops of salt cedars crowding a small island on their man-made lake. An unforgettable sight, the sun tints their snowy white plumage a delicate pink as they jockey for positions atop the lacy-foliaged branches of the tamarisk.

A shorter, more muscular neck and a strong yellow bill separates the Cattle Egret from a look-alike, the Little Blue Heron in immature white plumage, our last-named bird having a slender black bill and darker legs. In breeding plumage it has an overlay of buffy, reddish brown feathers like it had been dipped in a good bourbon whiskey. In flight it pulls its head in like the herons and flaps along leisurely from roost to feeding grounds.

This bird has spread its range all the way across the continent to the California coast. In June 1972 this wide-ranging bird was found nesting in a heronry on the Salton Sea. True world travelers, with a little lake on the desert suffice to enable them to become a breeding bird on the Chihuahuan desert in El Paso County.

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FIRST CLASS

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